

Statement opposing the development of two giant data centres in Cape Town

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Multifaith organisation, SAFCEI (Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute) joins environmental and social justice organisations in opposing the development of two giant data centres near Cape Town International Airport. This would threaten scarce resources like energy, water and land needed for social housing near the city.

SAFCEI's Executive Director, Francesca de Gasparis said, *"Cape Town was the first city in the world to experience a Day Zero event The city had days left before it ran out of water; that experience should have been enough of a warning about the dangers of overusing water in a changing climate. Climate change has significantly increased the likelihood and severity of this kind of weather event. That the city is considering a major AI centre is prioritising big tech expansion over urgent social and environmental justice issues including adequate housing, sanitation and climate proofing. This plan is morally and environmentally wrong."*

The justice advocacy groups Foxglove and The Housing Assembly, advised by the Legal Resource Centre, have objected to the plans to build resource-intensive server farms on land which could be used to develop affordable housing.

SAFCEI supports their stand, including that meaningful public participation is critical to a development like this. Residents were excluded from the planning process and only learned of the development through media reports.

The land-use application lacks critical details on proposed cooling technologies, carbon emissions, noise levels, and the environmental impact of large-scale backup diesel generators and fuel storage, a media report noted.

Moreover, the server farms' high demand for electricity - an estimated 170MW which could power 130 000 homes - and water (potentially 4,4 billion litres a year if using evaporative cooling) would put pressure on a city.

The US company Equinix told media, however, it planned to use a "dry, air-based cooling system" instead of water for the cooling of the data halls.

Environmental scientists also raise concerns about noise pollution on nearby communities and the ecological impact, for example on bee populations in the nearby Winelands.