

SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTH STATEMENT ON A JUST TRANSITION AND GREEN RECOVERY

We, the youth of South Africa, acknowledge that addressing climate change requires more than a reduction in carbon emissions or mitigating the environmental impacts on our society;

We affirm the need to rebuild our economic, social and energy systems to create sustainable prosperity. As the youth will carry the burden of climate change, we recognize the significance of a Just Transition and Green Recovery.

We envision a post Covid-19 society that is just, green and intersectional. To manifest our vision, we have come up with the following recommendations:

Intersectionality:

Cognisant of the many historical and present socio-economic stresses affecting communities, we reaffirm a just transition to a green economy, where vulnerable populations are not be left behind, and job losses are not caused.

In recognising the contribution of colonialism to present day socio-economic inequalities, we insist on the decolonisation and decapitalisation of systems, such as the education system, so that green recovery and just transition create upward social mobility for previously disadvantaged people.

We urge governments, the diplomatic and scientific communities, and other relevant stakeholders to support platforms that amplify the voices of marginalized and climate vulnerable communities in the climate change discourse.

Sustainable Industries:

We insist that our current economic model shift towards a low and zero emission, circular economy that promotes sustainable consumption and production. A special emphasis needs to be placed on green solutions that improve energy, transport and waste management practices.

In order to prepare all people for the just transition, workers across all economic sectors need to be re-skilled and up-skilled with particular emphasis on creating transferable skills for sustainable industries. Additionally, these sustainable industries offer a unique opportunity to increase employment opportunities and boost economic productivity.

We are deeply concerned by the impacts climate change will have on food security, thus we call for the establishment and support of existing community food gardens and small-scale farmers

that make food accessible, affordable and available for local distribution. Additionally, we support the sale of blemished foods at reduced prices to curb food wastage and hunger simultaneously.

We appreciate the ongoing innovations in waste management that allow for waste to be converted into green energy and fertilizers among other circular economy activities. Importantly, these innovations can provide entrepreneurial and employment opportunities.

We urge the government and private sector to enhance public-private partnerships that can foster innovation and drive climate action. Enviro-preneurship should be at the forefront of climate action, to increase community empowerment and sustainable employment in the green economy.

Supporting Infrastructure:

We insist that climate education be reformed and integrated so that it creates climate-conscious and community-minded individuals that can further the sustainable development agenda. Furthermore, we support the use of informal learning tools such as posters, advertisements and discussion forums to support out-of-school climate education and awareness raising initiatives.

We request support for youth and community awareness and training programmes from government, academia and the private sector to bridge the green skills gap. We call for a post Covid digital transformation to assist in the responses to climate change that will improve resource usage efficiency.

We urge the South African government to lobby the African Union to create an AU Green Deal. Furthermore, we urge the continued and increased funding to be directed to grass roots African youth organisations working on climate adaptation and mitigation initiatives.

We note the increase in unemployment during Covid-19 with great concern, and thus support driving entrepreneurship and support for Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs).

Youth Participation:

We applaud the establishment of the United Nations Secretary General's new Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change and encourage the establishment of similar national and local youth climate ambassadors that can provide a meaningful platform for youth to shape climate action. Additionally, existing Youth Parliaments should better foster cooperation between youth and parliamentary structures.

Young people are key stakeholders in the just transition and green recovery. As such, we request continued and increased support for youth-lead projects, awareness raising activities and policy engagements. This will enable young people to take advantage of the digital age we are in and make information on climate change accessible and relevant further inspiring action from society.

We envision strategic partnerships between relevant stakeholders that ensure implementation of climate policies and strategies. We insist that youth organisations are included as active partners in each step of the process.

This statement was created by the youth participants of the 2020 #Team Europe Climate Diplomacy Week and Youth Dialogue. It was presented at the virtual High-Level Closing on 23 September 2020 by young leaders from the youth programmes at the South African Institute of International Affairs (Youth@SAIIA) and WESSA Young Reporters for the Environment.

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