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**THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF
THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**Union Buildings
Private Bag X1000,
Pretoria.**

SUBJECT: YOUTH AGAINST ECOLOGICAL APARTHEID

Dear President, we are writing this letter to you to address the issue of ecological apartheid and climate change, a crucial issue that is starting to seriously suffocate our environment. Our environment is not enjoying the democracy that we have been enjoying for twenty-five years, and for over twenty-five years since South Africa, along with other countries in the international community, realised that the environment is at risk of climate change, there has not been enough response to this issue. We are now at a tipping point, people are dying, the biodiversity is facing extinction, and we have seen with our own eyes the devastating impacts of worsening climate change.

The youth of 1976 fought against apartheid educational system, and today we stand with pride to say we are benefiting from their struggle. The fight against ecological apartheid and climate change is the current generation's struggle. We and the unborn generation deserve a better future.

Mr President, climate change is a threshold, it is an urgent crisis; if you do not address it now, our country's economic growth, social development, safety and security will become meaningless because the global losses will be extreme.

South Africa has a very bad history of violation of human rights, and it is so bad even in our days that the Rights of Mother Earth is constantly being violated. We must not address one unfairness over another. Humans are fully protected by the constitution and law, but our environment is not; we are an interrelated and interdependent beings as humans and environment with all that lives in it as biodiversity, and we all must be protected equitably and equally. We need a holistic approach to tackling climate change: the climate change response must be for the benefit of human beings, biological diversity and mother earth. The Mother Earth has the right to regenerate its bio-capacity and to continue its vital cycles and processes free from human disruptions.

Mr President, please stop coal and fossil fuel companies; please stop Eskom with coal-fired power stations including Medupi that is being built, we need to have an urgent plan to shift to renewable energies. The environmental challenges from coal burn and oil exploration including accidents, land subsidence, damage to the water environment and air pollution, have dire consequences with possible irreversible impacts. We believe that the shift from coal, gas and fossil fuel use will not really create more unemployment, as many would suggest, but more jobs may be created in restoration of our green lands and clean oceans. One of the activities that may be considered is replenishing and rehabilitation of coal mine sites, which will protect the mine's impact on and benefit the environment and people living nearby and ultimately our nation. Simple solutions like these, rehabilitating the native soils and grasses, replanting trees and natural forestry can rejuvenate a long-term ecosystem repair and sustain the environment for years. This solution is an addition to clean energy that also would have a good impact in our economy.

The fossil fuel sector is the biggest problem. South Africa is the world's 14th largest emitter of carbon dioxide. Companies such as Sasol Africa Limited is the second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases in South Africa, and has been identified as one of the top 100 fossil fuel companies linked to 71% of global industrial greenhouse gas emissions since 1988. Yet Sasol has failed to set any GHG emission reduction targets.

There are billions of barrels of oil and gas that have been discovered in our oceans offshore. That oil and gas is fine where it is. Our environment will be better without it extracted and burned. Shell, Sasol, and Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI), as we understand, have applied to extract this oil and gas from our ocean, they must be stopped.

The Sasol Africa Limited, Shell, Total, OK Energy, and (ENI) are violating our constitution, section 24 which guarantees every one of us a healthy environment, and mandates the State to ensure compliance from every person to this section of the constitution. The State is therefore required to provide protection against any harmful conduct towards the environment, and the gas and oil exploration is really a harmful conduct that risks extreme ecological unsustainability. Sasol, Shell and ENI have ambitious plans to continue the illegal gas and oil exploration in our land and ocean, they have no plans to safe guard our environment; they have no ambitions for a sustainable future: they remain impervious to the droughts, floods, and all climate change impacts that impact our society, that kill our people, destroy our infrastructure and when our biodiversity is facing extinction.

The offshore oil and gas may only see production in eight to ten years' time, and we are seriously questioning the logic of 'transitioning' to gas after this lengthy year delay? Do you know what that mean? It means South Africa does not care about the Agenda 2030, because it is only in 2030 that this transition to oil and gas from companies can take place. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that nations around the world, including RSA, must stop burning fossil fuels by around 2030 to avoid catastrophic warming and worsened climate effects. By 2027 climate change will be a fully-fledged reality. Further development of gas and oil infrastructure is incompatible with the Paris Agreement targets. So the question remains: is South Africa genuinely committed to a carbon free future or are we paying lip service to it?

The stock-market value of fossil fuel companies is based on the obsolete assumption that fossil fuel extraction and use can continue without limit. If they are allowed to do this, the global

effects will be catastrophic and the environmental risk is unquantifiable. The energy sources of the future need to be compatible with a stable climate.

The seismic reconnaissance phase of this project saw the coincidence of the highest ever stranding figures for marine mammals, including unusual deep-water mammals, a dolphin with two broken jaws and the first ever recorded mass stranding on the Kwa-Zulu Natal coastline in 2016. We will hear about the “dilution of effects in seawater” of the severity of the impacts of the hydrocarbons, drilling wastes and cuttings, their toxicity, radioactivity and contamination in relation to the exploration activities, plus the negation of effects of the continual leaks in pipelines. These are toxic substances that cannot be broken down by environmental processes, are mostly water-insoluble and can bio-accumulate up the food-chain. They create the potential harms to health and environmental ‘well-being’ in the sense that this word is used in the environmental right contained in section 24 of the Constitution.

We, the South African youth, did not and do not give our Free, Prior and informed consent to Sasol Africa Limited’s application for exploration drilling within OFFSHORE BLOCK ER236, ERM Ref: 0414229 on our coastline. We specifically object to Sasol exploring and drilling.

Sasol’s total GHG emissions were over 67 megatons in 2018, more than the combined GHG emissions of the next 30 biggest emitters on the JSE that publicly disclose their carbon emissions. Sasol is therefore significantly exposed to climate transition and liability risks. Sasol has a history of high emissions of toxic pollutants in South Africa, at both Sasolburg, Free State, and Secunda, Mpumalanga.

We have learnt that Sasol has lobbied to introduce more lenient emission standards for sulphur dioxide emissions. Sulphur dioxide from Sasol’s coal boilers is harmful to human health and well-being and causes severe environmental damage, including acid rain. Studies have linked SO₂ to low birth weight in infants and an increased risk for gestational diabetes mellitus, stillbirths, and pre-term births. Sasol have brought multiple applications to delay compliance with the country’s Minimum Emission Standards.

Sasol has excreted type zero waste, which is not allowed to be landfilled at all, into the Vaal River from its Secunda plant: vanadium which may affect the central nervous system, with symptoms including headaches, abdominal cramps, diarrhoea and a green colour to the tongue. Another chemical Sasol unlawfully discharges is potassium carbonate, which can cause severe irritation of the gastro-intestinal tract and result in nausea, vomiting and burns. This contamination has posed both environmental risks and infringed on basic human rights.

A large percentage of these emissions come from Sasol’s coal-to-liquid fuel plant at Secunda. According to data from the Energy Research Centre at the University of Cape Town, for us to meet our very lenient carbon budget of 14-gigatons of carbon dioxide until 2050, the Secunda plant needs to drastically reduce output and close by 2040, therefore Secunda is at serious risk of becoming a stranded asset.

We recognise the significance of the carbon tax, and we also recognise that there is still much more that needs to be done to lower greenhouse gas emissions with a purpose of urgently reaching zero carbonisation.

Mr President, we still have many companies that have business models which poses a threat to the Paris Agreement climate goals of limiting global warming to well below 1.5°C, to prevent a catastrophic and irreversible climate change. Yet they have a social duty of care to take climate action, but recklessly continue with carbon development in South Africa, putting not only international climate goals at risk but also South Africans. We are concerned about losses to biodiversity and weather extremes increasing in both frequency and intensity. Drought, extreme heat and flooding are occurring more often and it is expected that hurricanes and various other climate onset events will worsen. These impacts pose a substantial risk to the vulnerable and poor. The coal, oil and gas cooperates knowingly violate their legal duty of care and are endangering human rights, lives and livelihoods, by choosing short-term corporate profits over protection against global damage.

Lastly, we are already suffering from climate change, we ask you to integrate precautionary principles in all sectors: precautionary principles according to IPCC is to take and be able to justify decisions to avoid possible harm, without having final scientific certainty about the likeliness and magnitude of the harm expected, from global warming or climate change effects. That refers to a constitutional mandate for the State to ensure environmental protection and compliance.

We are the first generation to really suffer the consequences of climate change, and we are the last that can make enough of a difference before the impacts are irreversible.

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On behalf of the South African Youth Climate Change Coalition and South African future generation,



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