



1st November 2015

**TALKING POINTS FOR THE CLIMATE CHANGE BREAKFAST SESSION
2ND NOVEMBER 2015**

1. Parliamentary Support

1.1 Parliament has always supported our Government's negotiating position on climate change, going as far back as the 15th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Copenhagen in December 2009. *Fifty days* prior to COP15, the Global Legislators Organisation (GLOBE) convened a meeting of Senior Legislators, bringing together legislators from **G8+5 countries** in the Danish Parliament, the Folketing, where South Africa showed a strong presence. **Plus five** countries consisted of major developing countries, including Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa. It was during this occasion that the Speaker of the National Assembly, Hon Mr Max Sisulu gave a keynote address at the Climate Change Legislators Forum, highlighting South Africa's negotiating position in the lead to COP15. Hon Sisulu's keynote address broadly reiterated South Africa's negotiating position, which the President of the Republic, Mr Jacob Zuma had also articulated in his speech at the United Nations in New York at the time just before the legislators meeting in Copenhagen. The Speaker's keynote address also reflected what the South African negotiators were saying at the Bangkok climate negotiations prior to COP15. Since then, Parliament has seen the need for it (as an institution of public representations) and the executive, as represented by the Department of Environmental Affairs to speak with one voice at international forums on all matters that pertain to the environmental sector that the Department champions and we oversee, as Parliament.



1.2 This was followed by the Parliamentarians Forum on Valuing Natural Capital in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010 where the South African Parliament sent a delegation at the invitation of the International Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). That GLOBE Forum ran parallel to the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP10) on Biological Diversity that gave birth to the Nagoya Protocol widely considered a successful outcome for Africa. It is worth noting that we supported our Government's negotiating position at the Nagoya negotiations and hence ratified the Protocol later on in Parliament (on 10th January 2013).

1.3 We also held two public hearings in Parliament during the formulation and at the adoption of our *National Climate Change Response Policy White Paper*, which the Committee agreed that there was a broad consensus in our country on the principles underpinning this Climate Change policy framework. The White Paper published in October 2011 spells out the distribution of responsibilities for the alignment of the South African economy with the low-carbon targets, and further underlines our official negotiating position, as it contains our international commitment to a greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions target that was announced in Copenhagen by President Jacob Zuma. Subsequent to its adoption by Cabinet, we held public hearings in Parliament on the implementation of the White Paper by all the concerned Government Departments.

1.4 It suffices to mention that Parliament held public hearings upon the adoption of the White Paper on Climate Change to hear public sentiments prior to the convening of the 17th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP17/CMP7) that South Africa was preparing to host. It was the need for South Africans to have a shared understanding of the country's response policy to Climate Change and hence the need to speak with one voice at the COP17/CMP7 that made the Committee move quickly in organising the public hearings on the White Paper.



1.5 Parliament also exerted much effort in scrutinising the proposals made for attaining the Vision 2030 during the formative stages of the National Development Plan (NDP) that was published and adopted by Cabinet in August 2012, and has become our blue print for development. *Chapter 5* of the document, which focusses on the transition of the South African economy to a low-carbon economy has been and remains an important area of legislation and oversight work for the Portfolio Committee on Environmental Affairs in Parliament.

1.6 Parliament held public hearings in several localities across three provinces on Climate Change, Rhino Poaching and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in late August and September 2014 to hear the views of local communities on these crucial issues. The hearings on Climate Change were to sensitise South African negotiators to what the grassroots were saying and would like to see in any outcome from the COP20 in Lima, Peru, and also to inform the masses of our people about our Government's climate change negotiating position. The idea was to seek their perspectives and inputs in order to give an unequivocal mandate to our negotiators at the Lima Climate Change Talks.

1.7 We held public hearings in Parliament on our Government's negotiating position towards COP21 in Paris, France, this past September. The two-day public hearings drew together South Africans of all walks of life, where there was a general consensus on South Africa's negotiating position. As Parliament, that is, an institution of public representatives, we are confident that there is a shared understanding of the challenges of climate change and also of the domestic and international interventions needed to overturn them.

Accordingly, we support the Government's negotiating position on climate change under the auspices of the Department of Environmental Affairs. Our parliamentary processes that we institute, such as public hearings are basically to derive the inputs of the people that we



represent in order to enhance the sense of ownership of our negotiating position and also to increase the confidence of our negotiators that the masses of our people are firmly behind them and hence see the urgency of concluding deals that serve our needs. We are an *Activist Parliament*, not Westminster. Ours is to ensure that executive decisions and functions serve the people who have elected us, and whom we represent. Where the executive arm of Government encounters challenges, we as the legislative arm of Government recommend solutions. After all, we need an “all hands-on-deck” approach in tackling our developmental challenges.

2. What Parliament would like to see in a worst case scenario

Parliament sees the need for us, as South Africans, to make a fair contribution towards the global effort to limit the average global temperature increase below 2°C (Celsius) over the pre-industrial average to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system, and hence avoid catastrophic climate change impacts. It is in this respect that we, as Parliamentarians, support the South African Government’s position articulated via the Department of Environmental Affairs in respect to the kind of agreement that we would like to see arising from Paris; mitigation and adaptation commitment; support from developed countries to the developing countries; capacity-building mechanism; and response measures which are being undertaken by developed country Parties. We support South Africa’s view that the 2015 Agreement to be adopted at COP21/CMP11 in Paris, France, should be under the Convention, and in accordance with its principles and provisions, particularly the principles of *common but differentiated responsibilities* and *respective capabilities* and *equity*. The South African Government is essentially calling for an agreement, which must, of course, be consistent with science and equity, and further enhance a multilateral rules-based system in a balanced and ambitious manner, which we earnestly support.

However, in a worst case scenario where nations are polls apart, seeking or protecting their interests and fail to arrive at a comprehensive, win-win climate change agreement, it



would be appropriate for South Africa to profile certain parameters in which it expects to gain most. Irrespective of what our Government might have in mind in such a situation, we need to be utterly decisive about one thing, *ADAPTATION*, taking into account the plight of our people, especially the poor who are the most vulnerable.

Climate change is rapidly pushing communities, particularly the poor and the marginalised, beyond their capacity to respond effectively to their ever-changing circumstances. For us, as a country the triple of challenge of poverty, unemployment and inequality, which affects a vast number of our people, is identified more than any other factor as the determinate of people's vulnerability to climate change and limits adaptive capacity. Climate change is expected to exacerbate the intensity and frequency of extreme weather conditions such as rainfall intensity, storm surges, flooding and drought, which have become more regular and rapid in their occurrence than before. These extreme weather events have a high impact on human security and people's livelihood, with serious social and economic consequences¹ for poor South Africans, considering that South Africa has experienced a number of adverse climatic hazards in the last two decades or so. The most serious ones have been dry spells, seasonal droughts, intense rainfall, riverine floods and flash floods. In fact, droughts and floods have increased in frequency, intensity and magnitude over the past two or three decades in the whole of the southern African region. They have adversely impacted the food and water security, water quality, energy and sustainable livelihoods of the most rural communities. Currently, the majority of rural communities are experiencing chronic food deficits in many parts of the region on a year-round basis owing to the effects of floods and droughts.² This increasing prevalence of recurrent floods and droughts has had far-reaching consequences for poor people in terms of food, water, health and energy in South Africa both in rural and urban areas. The plight of the poor who dwell in informal settlements on the Cape Flats in the proximity of Parliament is indeed a stark reminder of the fact that the world's poorest people are the most vulnerable to the

¹ Loster, T. (2010) Preface. In *Michelle Leighton, M., Shen, X. and Warner, K. (Eds), Climate Change and Migration: Rethinking Policies for Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction*, p.11, Hohenkammer, Germany.

² Nangoma (2008).



increasingly frequent natural disasters, such as flooding and droughts attributed to climate change. Thus, climate change poses a serious threat to sustainable development in South Africa, largely due to the lack of financial capacity to manage the impacts of global climate change on the most vulnerable that sadly appear to constitute the vast majority of the South African population.³

The risks resulting from changed climate are increasing.⁴ It is in this respect that the *National Climate Change Response Policy* states that South Africa would develop climate change adaptation strategies based on risk and vulnerability reduction. Objectives for adaptation must therefore be able to adjust to changing circumstances and time-frames, taking into account the fact that future climate trends are uncertain and the uncertainty rises steeply over the longer-term. Consequently, we need to plan flexibly for a wide range of possible responses over the medium- to long-term, and embrace climate change adaptation, as one of the key responses as adaptation has a much stronger local context and its benefits may appear much faster and is often more tangible, such as an improvement in local environmental quality, relative to mitigation. Effective adaptation responses can also potentially create many jobs, particularly “green jobs” and could contribute significantly to sustainable development goals. Well-planned adaptation responses can thus be effectively integrated with sustainable development policies.⁵ We need to protect local livelihoods in a changing climate, taking into the acute realisation that climate change damages would certainly threaten and even reverse many development gains made in South Africa, in the absence of effective adaptation responses.⁶

It is precisely for the potential great danger of exposure of our people to the threats of climate change that the National Development Plan (NDP), which is the nation’s

³ Watts S. (2010) South African climate change legislation. *Paper for the Climate Change Legislators Forum* held in Tianjin, China, 6th–8th November 2010. Research Unit, Parliament of the RSA, Cape Town.

⁴ Hurlbert, M.A. (2009) Integrating Climate Change Adaptation into the Law. *Retfærd Årgang*, 32(3/126): 24-40.

⁵ Department of Environmental Affairs (2011) *National Climate Change Response Policy White Paper*. Department of Environmental Affairs, Pretoria.

⁶ *Ibid.*



development vision up to 2030, states that South Africa's primary approach to adapting to climate change is to strengthen the nation's economic and societal resilience. This includes ensuring that all sectors of society are more resilient to the future impacts of climate-change by:

- Decreasing poverty and inequality;
- Creating employment;
- Increasing levels of education and promoting skills development;
- Improving health care; and
- Maintaining the integrity of ecosystems and the many services that they provide.

3. On our side as legislators

Adaptation to climate change is a *cause* for which we, as legislators would unite and speak with one voice, considering that the negative impacts of climate change are felt most by our constituencies throughout the world. As South African legislators, we would prioritise capacitating of the poor to withstand the threats of climate change, in order to make adaptation central, at *any* and *all* parliamentary forums, including GLOBE and Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which will be convened on the occasion of COP21, in Paris, France. We envisage developing an effective domestic climate legislation as a possible and commendable route to shape multilateral processes, as a bottom-up strategy. It is in this regard that the Portfolio Committee on Environmental Affairs in Parliament has been proposing to the Department to introduce Climate Change Bill in Parliament. This is particularly relevant, as South Africa's Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC), which we have recently submitted to the United Nations would fall under domestic legislation.

As we approach COP21, there is a need for us to reflect on African Union's *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*, which states that "Africa shall address the global challenge of climate change by prioritising **adaptation** in all our actions, drawing upon skills of diverse



disciplines and with adequate support (affordable technology development and transfer, capacity building, financial and technical resources) to ensure implementation of actions for the survival of the most vulnerable populations, including island States, and for sustainable development and shared prosperity.”⁷ There is, in fact, a great deal of solidarity and unity of purpose in the development of Africa’s common position on climate change that enables Africa to speak with one voice is unprecedented. This unity of purpose could form the platform for managing Africa’s cross-boundary natural resources for the benefit of her citizens.⁸

Finally, we intend using our parliamentary diplomacy to push our Government’s negotiating position forward on any forum and at whatever level.

I thank you!

⁷ African Union (2014) Agenda 2063 The Africa We Want. African Union Headquarters, Addis Ababa.

⁸ Ibid.
