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"Public Participation Is Crucial To Progressing Sa's Electricity Plan" - Safcei

Yesterday, South Africans got their first glimpse at the Department of Energy's (DoE) proposed electricity plans. The proposals suggested in the plan came as no surprise to the Southern African Faith Communities' Environmental Institute (SAFCEI) and Earthlife Africa Johannesburg (ELA-JHB), who eagerly await their day in court (13 and 14 December) to oppose the SA government's unconstitutional approach to the country's energy planning.

SAFCEI spokesperson, Liz McDaid says that while she has a number of issues with the 'weak and unambitious' plan itself, the most urgent matter is government's proposed timeframe and plans for public input. The DoE proposes to hold consultative workshops with South Africans in major cities over a short seven days (7 – 15 December), in which time they would be expected to review and consider the plan and all related information.

"This move clearly demonstrates government's attempt to deliberately limit public input. It hardly seems fair that the DoE expects the public to fully review all the facts and formulate informed responses in a rush at the end of the year, especially since it took government about 5 years to come up with the plan in the first place," she adds.

Another major concern from yesterday's announcement was Eskom's apparent determination to go outside the proposed DoE's electricity plan and focus on nuclear, which (if they get the go-ahead) they aim to roll-out in the relatively near future. This is particularly disturbing, since the Public Protector's *State Capture* report clearly implicates the parastatal (with board members resigning in the wake of this damning report).

"This is why comprehensive and meaningful public participation must be sought. Citizens need to know and fully understand what they are signing themselves (and their legacies) up for. It is equally important that citizens are educated on renewable energy resources that would work much better for SA than nuclear," says McDaid.

"We urge members of the public to actively get involved in planning SA's energy future. It is our right to be involved, especially when biased (and corrupt) decision-making could detrimentally affect SA for many generations to come," she adds.

McDaid encourages the public to attend the Energy Portfolio Committee meeting on 29 November, which initially was planned as a closed meeting

This meeting coincides with a *Civil Society Speak Out* hearing, to be hosted by SAFCEI and ELA-JHB, and with the support of the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBS). After hearing from experts and affected parties about the desirability of nuclear and other energy, a number of concerned citizens will work together to formulate the People's Statement of the key points of discontent regarding the SA energy plan and the nuclear deal. The People's Statement will then be handed over to Parliament at 12h00 on Wednesday, 30 November.

In another attempt to mobilise the public, SAFCEI holds weekly Wednesday vigils from 7-9am in front of Parliament in Cape Town to create widespread awareness of the significance of the nuclear deal, and its implications for the SA citizen and to encourage public participation.

Further to this and to publicly oppose government's energy planning process, a special event will be held outside Parliament on 30 November (from 12h00 – 13h15) to hand over the People's Statement on nuclear energy. Other solidarity events will be held in Durban outside Eskom, and in Pretoria outside the Dept of Energy.

"With our court case against government, we fight for the freedom and the right to discuss SA's energy future together as citizens of this country. What we are fighting against are secret meetings about high-stakes nuclear deals and energy plans that reek of corruption. South Africans need to make their voices heard and their presence felt. It is our business, and we should be free to poke our noses in" says McDaid.

"It doesn't matter who you are, as a citizen you have a right to have your needs considered. This is why we call upon all citizens to *Speak Out On The Nuclear Deal* and to show your support for our ongoing court action (scheduled for 13 and 14 December at the Cape High Court) against the government." McDaid said.

Many economists have forecast that the proposed nuclear deal (which could cost upwards of R1 trillion) will bankrupt the country, putting SA way over its head in international debt. There will also be many associated costs to the country - for the mining damage and destruction of water and air and livelihoods in the Karoo, the cost of contingency funds that will be needed for any nuclear problems or accidents, and the enormous costs of nuclear decommissioning, which have yet to be quantified. More broadly, there are the costs related to government's responsibility to provide for the citizens, such as infrastructure, and education and healthcare for all, all of which would play second fiddle to the burden of debt. None of these costs have been accounted for in deciding to take the nuclear road.

Should members of the public wish to attend the Energy committee meeting which is scheduled for 29 November, come with your SA identity document and plan to arrive at least an hour before the meeting (to make time for processing at Parliament's secure entrance).

SAFCEI and ELA-JHB also need public support to raise the funds to continue to pursue this case. To donate toward this very valuable and public interest cause, go to www.safcei.org.

For more information, please contact SAFCEI on 021-701-8145 or email via info@safcei.org.za.

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