

TODAY: LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL HEROES AWARDED THE GOLDMAN PRIZE IN SAN FRANCISCO, USA

Today – almost exactly a year to the day since winning the nuclear court case – the two women who were the driving force behind the victory, were awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Foundation’s Prize in San Francisco, USA. Just a few hours ago, Earthlife Africa-Johannesburg’s (ELA-JHB) Makoma Lekalakala and Liziwe McDaid from the Southern African Faith Communities’ Environment Institute (SAFCEI) joined the winners from five other continents as they were applauded for their efforts to successfully mobilise South Africans against the government’s secret R1-trillion nuclear deal.

Through their passion for justice, the environment and for the country, these grassroots activists courageously led a broad coalition of likeminded citizens and NGOs, to successfully expose government’s unlawful and unconstitutional nuclear deal with Russia. At a time when high-level government corruption was at its peak – with the nuclear deal taking centre stage – this landmark legal victory not only served to protect South Africa from lifetimes of nuclear waste, but also restored some faith that justice was still possible in South Africa.

Says Lekalakala, Director at ELA-JHB, “The nuclear deal was (and potentially still is) a major threat to the livelihood of South African citizens and our quality of life. There are other ways of generating energy, ways that are clean and affordable, and puts the power in the hands of the people. It is important, for our sustainability, that we start thinking differently about how we satisfy our energy needs. It is not sensible to think that used to work in the past, cannot apply now, particularly since the evidence is overwhelming against nuclear technology and fossil fuels.”

Says McDaid, Eco-Justice Lead at SAFCEI, “The risks with nuclear are just too high. I believe that if people have the facts, they will choose differently. This is what we are doing through our campaigning. For example, there is so much we don’t know about the future impacts of nuclear waste, which continues to grow every year. Koeberg alone generates approximately thirty (30) tons of high level waste per year – all stored at the plant. Furthermore, the Chernobyl disaster, which happened 39 years ago this week, and Fukushima still continue to provide evidence of the enormous risks of nuclear.”

Both women agree that it was through the partnerships forged with other NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) – which resulted in mass grassroots mobilisation – that was pivotal to the court case win. The court case in turn, brought the nuclear deal out into the open and more and more citizens began connecting the dots.

For both Lekalakala and McDaid, the anti-nuclear campaign only forms part of their work. Lekalakala also works on the *Life After Coal* campaign, which discourages the use of coal for energy generation, but rather advocates for the just transition to renewable energy systems for the people. McDaid, on the other hand also co-founded *The Green Connection*, an NGO working to empower people to participate in their environment to promote truly sustainable development.

SAFCEI’s Executive Director, Francesca de Gasparis says, “SAFCEI is immensely proud of Liz and Makoma, and the recognition they are receiving for their work on the nuclear deal, with the Goldman Environmental Prize. It was their tenacity and commitment to blowing the lid off the secret, and corrupt, nuclear energy deal – which would have bankrupted South Africa and set us back generations in terms of development.”

“SAFCEI and ELA-JHB are small environmental organisations, which through the knowledge and experience of Makoma and Liz, realised the threat and depth of corruption of the nuclear deal, and took the South African government to court, and won, against all odds. It was a victory of Dave and Goliath proportions. Makoma and Liz’s personal commitment and actions went the extra mile to promote the constitutional rights of South African citizens, and we are thrilled they are being honoured in this way. The message we want to share to the world is that Africa does not need nuclear energy,” adds de Gasparis.

Kumi Naidoo, the founding chair of Africans Rising for Justice, Peace and Dignity and who has long worked with both McDaid and Lekalakala says, “This is wonderful news. Both Makoma and Liz played such courageous and visionary roles when they challenged then-President Zuma’s intention to build new nuclear power plants with the Russian state. I want to thank both Liz and Makoma for their leadership, persistence and perseverance in taking on, what many wrote off as a done deal and pushed it right off the table. They both deserve this award, most generously.”

According to Susie Gelman, President of the Foundation, “Liz and Makoma epitomize what the Goldman Environmental Foundation stands for: Courage, compassion, vision, collaboration, and hard work in the name of environmental justice. Their significant achievements in South Africa, inspire people all over the world and we’re proud to recognize the efforts of these dynamic environmental leaders.”

Last year’s Africa winner, Rodrigue Katembo from the Democratic Republic of Congo, was awarded the prize for putting his life on the line by going undercover to document and release information about bribery and corruption in the quest to drill for oil in Virunga National Park. The resulting public outrage forced the company to withdraw from the project.

The Goldman Environmental Prize is the world's largest award honouring grassroots environmental activists. The Prize was established in 1989 by late civic leaders and philanthropists Richard and Rhoda Goldman. Prize winners – from 6 continents – are selected by an international jury from confidential nominations submitted by a worldwide network of environmental organizations and individuals. Learn more at www.goldmanprize.org

Issued by Natasha Adonis, on behalf of the Goldman Environmental Foundation. For more information, please contact Natasha on 0797-999-654 or adonisnatasha@yahoo.co.uk.

- **Makoma Lekalakala**, was raised in Soweto and is the director for Earthlife Africa-Johannesburg, a largely volunteer-driven organization that mobilizes South Africans around environmental issues (<http://earthlife.org.za/>). She divides her time between her home in Johannesburg and the Earthlife satellite office in the Limpopo province, where pollution from power stations and coal mines has contaminated local communities to such an extent that farmers can no longer safely grow crops. Lekalakala got her start as a youth activist through her church, moving to trade unions, then women’s rights, social and economic justice, and finally environmental justice. Lekalakala also works with the Life After Coal/Impilo Ngaphandle Kwamalahle campaign – a joint campaign by Earthlife Africa Johannesburg, groundWork, and the Centre for Environmental Rights – which discourages investment in new coal-fired power stations and mines; wants to accelerate the retirement of South Africa’s coal infrastructure; and enable a just transition to renewable energy systems for the people (<https://lifeaftercoal.org.za/>).
- **Liz McDaid**, grew up in Cape Town and is the Ethical Governance Lead for the Southern African Faith Communities’ Environment Institute (SAFCEI), an interfaith environmental organization dedicated to confronting environmental injustice (<http://safcei.org/>). An independent

environmentalist, Liz trained as a scientist and has a Masters in Climate Change and Development from the University of Cape Town. McDaid started out as a teacher-turned educational advocate and activist against apartheid before turning to faith-based environmental justice. She has campaigned against nuclear energy for decades, thwarting previous attempts by South Africa to develop a nuclear industry. She also teaches a course on eco-justice. She has worked at the energy/ poverty/ community nexus with a focus on participative governance for over 25 years. McDaid is also a founder member of the Green Connection – an NGO which believes that empowering people to participate in their environment is the only way that truly sustainable development can take place (<http://thegreenconnection.org.za>).

The rest of this year's winners from around the globe for 2018, include:

- **FRANCIA MÁRQUEZ, Colombia** A formidable leader of the Afro-Colombian community, Francia Márquez pressured the Colombian government and organized the women of La Toma, in the Cauca region, to stop illegal gold mining on their ancestral land.
- **CLAIRE NOUVIAN, France** A tireless defender of the oceans and marine life, Claire Nouvian led a focused, data-driven advocacy campaign against the destructive fishing practice of deep-sea bottom trawling. Her work yielded French support for a ban on the practice, securing an EU-wide ban.
- **MANNY CALONZO, the Philippines** Manny Calonzo spearheaded an advocacy campaign that persuaded the Philippine government to enact a national ban on the production, use, and sale of lead paint. His efforts have protected millions of Filipino kids from lead poisoning.
- **LEEANNE WALTERS, United States** LeeAnne Walters led a citizens' movement that tested the tap water in Flint, Michigan, and exposed the Flint water crisis, compelling the local, state, and federal governments to take action to ensure access to clean drinking water.
- **KHANH NGUY THI, Vietnam** Khanh Nguy Thi used scientific research and engaged Vietnamese state agencies to advocate for sustainable long-term energy projections and reduction in coal power dependency in Vietnam. Her efforts helped eliminate 115 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions from Vietnam annually.