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THE GREEN CONNECTION

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Dear President Ramaphosa,

Open Letter - Call To Ban Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration

As the Chairperson of the Presidential Climate Change Commission, you should be aware that oil and gas are climate change-causing fossil fuels that release carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (80 times more potent than CO₂) and other greenhouse gases. If we continue to use fossil fuels for energy, it will lead to an increase of extreme climate change impacts such as; floods, heatwaves, droughts and storms. Which in turn negatively impacts food and land security. Fossil fuel pollution (of air, land, and the ocean) also affects human health.

While the ocean may, for many of us, have mostly a recreational and religious or cultural value, we must also consider that a healthy ocean is critical to life, as most of our oxygen (50% to 85%) is produced by ocean plants/and plankton). The ocean also helps us cope with climate change – it is our main buffer, absorbing heat from global warming.

“Oil and gas developments” continue to be promoted despite the economic risks. The World Bank studied 12 Sub-Saharan countries that discovered considerable oil and gas resources between 2002 and 2020 – in each of these countries the oil and gas finds were overvalued, the timeline from discovery to production took much longer than promised, and that government revenues were lower than predicted.

We cannot accept that for generations of fishers and coastal communities to risk losing their livelihoods is an acceptable part of the just transition from coal to renewables. Thousands of small-scale fishers rely on the ocean to feed their families and develop economically viable livelihoods. Existing jobs must be protected.

We note that the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment has embarked on a study to assess the environmental impacts of offshore oil and gas exploration projects. The precautionary principle which is part of our law in South Africa would assert that we should not embark on a course of action without knowing the risks, yet offshore oil and gas exploration continues.

These decisions have already been made, undermining our constitutional rights to be consulted about decisions that affect us. Public participation is often overlooked, with government opting to allow oil and gas exploration for “development”. As a result, the oil companies are the ones benefiting, bear the risk of severe social and economic consequences. This often leaves the people directly affected with no other recourse but to go to court to claim back their constitutional rights.

South Africa does not need to be stuck in a fossil fuel past. A just transition can create new jobs and economic opportunities through sustainable renewable energy.

As president of South Africa, we call on you to ban offshore oil and gas exploration.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely,

The Green Connection