



## CIVIL SOCIETY UNMUTED

### OPEN LETTER

FROM #UNMUTED! CSO COALITION<sup>1</sup> TO MINISTER OF MINERAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY, GWEDE MANTASHE ON RECENT ACCUSATIONS AGAINST NGOS

Friday, 22 September 2023

Dear Minister Mantashe,

We write to you as a collective of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and peoples of South Africa. Our work is to grow and protect democratic values, human and environmental rights. We are deeply concerned regarding comments attributed to yourself by various media outlets.

In a recent [article](#) published in the Mail and Guardian, you are quoted in your capacity as the Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy as having said that “...when a non-governmental organisation is funded by a Ford Foundation, or by a number of those entities in the United States, you can't rule out the fact that some of it comes from the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and [is] a deliberate programme to block development in a poor country like South Africa”

Firstly, in a climate of closing civic space where many environmental rights defenders often face blatant reprisals, intimidation, harassment, and killings - it is unconscionable that a privileged public servant should make such dangerous and baseless claims. We need not remind you of the killings of environmental activists including Bazooka Radebe and Fikile Ntshangase. Recalling further the traumatic assassinations of Nokuthula Mabaso, Ayanda Ngila, Siyabonga Manqele in March and April 2022, that raised concerns for the safety of human rights defenders in our country.

Secondly, as a member of this nation's public service, your prime duty remains to uphold and protect the Constitution of the land. Your outburst undermines the spirit and purport of public participation safeguarded in the Constitution. It behoves us to remind you to fulfil your constitutional duties in a fair, accountable manner, and

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<sup>1</sup> In November 2022 more than two hundred civil society organisations convened in Johannesburg under the banner Civil Society #Unmuted and reflected on two things: the regressive socio-political direction South Africa is taking and the moral obligation of the non-profit sector to intervene in this trajectory. At this conference, a decision was taken to form a national, democratic and broadly representative coalition of NGOs, CSOs and NPOs. The Coalition is open to all who align with these broad principles and is committed to sector-wide solidarity.

remain open to citizen participation. Your personal views on fossil fuel reliance have no bearing in your role as a public servant. Rather, decisions about extractive and other natural resource exploitation should serve the best interests of the peoples and the nation and promote sustainable development. In this respect, we remind you that South Africa is obliged to implement Article 21 (5) of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights to ensure all forms of foreign economic exploitation is eliminated, particularly as practised by international monopolies with a view to enabling citizens the full benefits derived from their national resources.

Thirdly, your remark that NGOs are blocking development is disingenuous at best. What NGOs and community groupings are opposed to is the flawed mindset that says fossil fuels are the silver bullet to our nation's development and economic growth needs. Such fundamental choices must be unbiased and guided by credible research and expertise. The National Development Plan 2030 (NDP) emphasises amongst others that *“Government will lead the transition to a low-carbon economy. An aspect of this role is creating an enabling environment for the private sector and civil society to contribute to the transition by creating policy frameworks and economic signals that promote appropriate changes in business practice and behaviour.”*

Your recent inflammatory remarks stand in stark contrast to the aspirations contained in the NDP.

We call on you to acknowledge the impending climate crisis fuelled by fossil fuel reliance and to lead the way to a just transition to green and renewable energy. That will bring us as a nation longer lasting economic growth. We endorse statements made by [Green Connection](#) and [Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute](#), (SAFCEI) amongst others.

On the topic of funding, as a senior civil servant you will be well aware that the [government itself is the recipient of donor funding](#) including overseas development assistance from many sources, such as the United States amongst other nations. A [perusal of grants awarded to South African NGOs](#) by the Ford Foundation reveals clearly how development (including rights realisation) is being supported, rather than blocked as you have erroneously claimed.

We believe it would serve you well to issue a public apology for your unfounded statements and step up to minimum standards of your public office and take action to ensure our constitutional democracy is strengthened and harmonised.

We urge you, as a leader in government and in the governing party, to engage with civil society organisations in an open and honest dialogue which facilitates mutual respect and enhances social cohesion.

**Resolutely, the undersigned members and friends of the #Unmuted! CSO Coalition;**

1. Equal Education
2. Public Service Accountability Monitor (PSAM)

3. Batlhabine Foundation
4. Human Rights Institute of South Africa
5. Hennenman Victim Empowerment Forum
6. Jay Kruuse
7. Sisonke Community Advice Office
8. Waterberg Women Advocacy Organization
9. KHEYI
10. Mpumalanga Peace and Development Federation
11. Southern Africa Green Revolutionary Council
12. KZN Subsistence Fishing Forum
13. Omang-Who Are You Youth Development Initiative
14. Moeg Gesukkel Visserye Co-operative Ltd
15. Jesh Latchman
16. Legal Resources Centre (LRC)
17. Impact4Good
18. Helen Suzman Foundation
19. Isago Foundation
20. Face of Tshwane Ambassador
21. Kamvakazi Wezi Igwe Leadership Training Foundation
22. Sharing Disciples Int' Christian Centre
23. Kingdom Invisible Mysteries
24. South African Fishers Collective
25. Ekuphumleni Fishing Primary Co-operative
26. Kei-Mor Primary Fisheries Co-operative
27. dehrva organisation
28. Economic Forum Federation of South African Youth
29. Benton Fishing Primary Co-operative
30. Marcelle Primary Fisheries Co-operative
31. Elinye Fishing Primary Co-operative
32. Warren Blouw
33. Ann Bown
34. African Diaspora Workers Network (ADWN)
35. South African Youth Climate Change Coalition (SAYCCC)
36. Thusang Morwalo Advice Center
37. Eweso Solutions
38. Stacey Webb
39. African Monitor
40. Sustaining the Wild Coast
41. Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute
42. Vatsonga Mchangana Community Development forum
43. Lutsha Development Organization
44. Small Scale Fishers & Ubuntu Rural Women and Youth Movement
45. Eastern Cape Khoi-san Small Scale Fishers
46. Kiwane Fishing Primary Co-operative

47. Chascavu Fishing Primary Co-operative
48. Noyakana Co-operative
49. Coldstorm Primary Fisheries
50. Namaqualand Youth Cafe
51. Dwessa Fishing Primary Co-operative
52. Siyaphambili Primary Fishing Co-operative
53. Kobush Development Association
54. Mnini Co-operative Primary Ltd
55. Kopanang Youth Forum
56. uMlibo Fishing Co-operative
57. Siyazama Co-operative
58. Cooperatives and Policy Alternatives Centre (COPAC)
59. Climate Justice Charter Movement
60. South African Food Sovereignty Campaign
61. KE TSHWERE PLAKA SOCIAL MOVEMENT
62. Eye of the Needle Afrika Institute
63. The Green Connection
64. The Green Connection
65. Esamadoda Isibaya (Community Empowerment and Mental health support)
66. Housing Assembly
67. Bryan Ashe
68. 350Africa.org
69. Save SA Smelters (NPC)
70. Koukamma Primary Fishing Co-operative
71. Coastal Justice Network
72. MET Agency for Development
73. Isiqslo Primary Co-operative
74. Destiny World Paediatric Foundation
75. WESSA (Wildlife and Environment Society of SA)