

SACBC JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION URGES NEW MINERAL RESOURCE MINISTER TO PRIORITIZE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRY

We congratulate Mr. Gwede Mantashe for his appointment as the new mineral resource minister.

Inspired by the message of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si*, we would like to make an appeal to Mr. Mantashe, as the new minister of Mineral Resources, to ensure that, during his tenure, the department of mineral resources takes an active and decisive role in addressing the environmental challenges associated with extractive industry, especially issues of mine water management. In particular, we urge him to stop the growing trend of granting prospecting and mining licences in water catchment areas and other areas of high biodiversity importance.

Applications for mining and prospecting have, for example, been authorised with the Marico River Catchment which provides water to thousands of people in the country. We are deeply concerned with irreversible environmental impacts of such practices, which are often undertaken in favour of short term economic returns.

“Water is God’s treasure to humanity. We must protect it.” Pope Francis (March 23rd, 2017). In a country which is now struggling with severe drought and other climate change impacts, it is ethically irresponsible to consider mining and other activities which have the potential to impact negatively and irreversibly on country’s water systems and food security systems. The water crisis in Western Cape should send a warning to the government to reconsider its pursuit of short term economic gains and narrow energy outlook that prevent our nation from protecting water as a scarce resource and as God’s precious gift.

As he takes the new office, we therefore make an appeal to Mr. Mantashe to exercise his discretion under Section 49 of the Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act to prohibit the granting of any prospecting right and mining right in the designated water catchment areas and other areas of critical biodiversity importance.

We also ask him to work together with other departments to close policy gaps and enforcement gaps in relation to mine closure, especially in the coal and gold mines which have significant water impacts. A decisive action is required to stop companies that off-load and sell off marginal mines to small companies during the end of mine’s life as an integral part of a closure strategy.

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