

The Cape Town Civil Society Charter

Adopted at the Civil Society Symposium, Cape Town, November 2025

We, the undersigned members of civil society — representing community-based organizations, social movements, environmental justice groups and people's movements from across Cape Town and beyond — gathered in Cape Town to imagine a different society, a different country, and a different world.

We met in the spirit of solidarity and justice, committed to building a society that places people and the planet above profit, that is grounded in equity, transparency, and care for future generations.

Through dialogue, reflection, and collective action, we have agreed on the following principles and demands to guide governments, corporations, and multilateral institutions, including the G20:

1. Urgent and People-Centered Climate Adaptation

Governments must develop and implement national and local adaptation plans that are participatory, transparent, and inclusive of those most affected — including women, youth, informal workers, rural communities, and people living in informal settlements. Adaptation must not be driven by profit but by the need to protect livelihoods, secure water and food sovereignty, and build climate resilience at the grassroots level.

2. Accountable and Honest Leadership

We call for ethical and transparent leadership across all levels of government and society. Leaders must be accountable to the people, not to corporate interests. Public funds and climate finance must be managed with integrity and openness. Corruption and political patronage continue to deepen inequality and undermine trust — this must end.

3. A Fossil-Free Future

We demand an immediate phase-out of fossil fuels and a halt to new coal, oil, and gas projects. South Africa and all G20 nations must commit to a rapid transition to renewable energy systems that are locally owned, community-driven, and accessible to all. The current fossil-fuel economy destroys our environment, deepens inequality, and violates human rights.

4. Fair and Credible Public Participation

We insist on fair, open, and meaningful public consultation in all policy-making processes. Civil society must not be treated as an afterthought. Communities must be empowered to influence policies that affect their lives — including land use, housing, energy, and environmental governance. Consultation must be accessible, inclusive, and rooted in mutual respect.

5. A Just Transition for All

We support a Just Transition that centers workers, communities, and marginalized groups in the shift toward a green economy. Transition policies must ensure decent work, retraining, and social protection for affected workers. The costs of the climate crisis should not fall on the poor — justice must be at the heart of every climate solution.

6. Social and Economic Justice

We reaffirm our commitment to fighting inequality in all its forms — gender, racial, class, and spatial. We call for policies that ensure fair wages, access to land, food sovereignty, quality education, and universal health care. Development must serve the people, not the elite.

7. Protection of Human Rights and Civic Space

Civil society and grassroots activists must be free to organize, speak, and protest without fear of harassment or repression. Governments must uphold human rights and the rule of law. A vibrant and protected civic space is essential for democracy and justice.

8. Global Solidarity and Climate Finance

We stand in solidarity with movements and communities across the Global South who face the greatest burdens of the climate crisis despite contributing the least to it. We call on the G20 and other developed nations to fulfill and go beyond their climate finance commitments — ensuring that funds for mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage are predictable, accessible, and grant-based, not debt-inducing.

We demand that global financial systems be transformed to serve people, not profit. Climate finance must prioritize frontline communities, indigenous peoples, and women-led initiatives that protect ecosystems and livelihoods.

The current system of broken promises, delayed disbursements, and conditional loans must be replaced with a justice-based global framework that recognizes historical responsibility and ecological debt. Wealthy nations must pay their fair share for the destruction caused by centuries of extractive and carbon-intensive development.

We further call for South-South cooperation — a renewal of solidarity between African, Latin American, and Asian nations — to build alternative pathways of development that are just, democratic, and ecologically sustainable.

Conclusion: From Cape Town to the World

From Cape Town, we raise our collective voice — the voice of people who refuse to be silent in the face of injustice and destruction.

We declare that another world is not only possible, but necessary. A world where people's power, not corporate power, shapes the decisions that affect our future. A world where governments are accountable, leaders are honest, and development is equitable. A world where the planet is protected, and all life — human and non-human — is valued.

We call upon the G20 and all global leaders to hear this call, to move beyond empty declarations and act decisively. The time for incremental change has passed. The era of justice, accountability, and shared humanity must begin now.

From Cape Town, we send this Charter as a commitment to action — and as an invitation to solidarity.

We will continue to organize, mobilize, and resist until justice is done and the world we imagine becomes the world we live in.

Signed in unity,

The Cape Town Civil Society Collective

(Civil society organizations, movements, and networks of South Africa and beyond)