



2nd Annual CSO Tailings Conference

28th July 2025

Commissioner Gungubele's Address

Program director

Fellow commissioner

Participants

Guests, allow me to say all protocol observed

Good afternoon

I would like to thank the organisers for the opportunity to speak with you today about the critical issue of mineral resources and the urgent need to place human rights and climate justice at the centre of how we govern them.

As we gather here, we do so knowing that critical raw materials have become the backbone of the modern economy. They are essential for renewable energy technologies, electric vehicles, digital infrastructure, and the tools we need to build a low-carbon future. South Africa, with its vast mineral wealth, has an undeniable strategic role to play in this transition.

Yet we must ask ourselves honestly: at what cost does this extraction take place, and who bears that cost? History has shown us that the story of mineral extraction in our country and across the continent is too often a story of communities displaced from their ancestral land,

water sources poisoned,

air polluted, and livelihoods destroyed.

Many rural and mining-affected communities remain locked in poverty while the wealth beneath their feet fuels industries elsewhere.

Mining is not only an economic issue, it is a climate issue. The mining sector contributes significantly to our national greenhouse gas emissions. Extracting, processing, and transporting minerals require enormous amounts of energy and water, often drawn from regions already facing water stress and ecological vulnerability.

The land scars left behind last for generations. The link between mining and climate change is therefore direct, and it is communities living in the shadow of these operations who experience the double injustice of environmental harm and worsening climate impacts.

South Africa's Mineral Strategy 2025 does attempt to address some of these injustices. It emphasises local beneficiation, the development of skills and value chains, stronger community involvement, and environmental compliance. These principles echo the promise of our Constitution — that everyone has the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being, and that we must secure ecologically sustainable development for future generations.

However, we cannot shy away from the reality that more must be done. When we measure our policies against international standards, we see gaps that must be closed if we are serious about aligning our mineral sector with climate justice. Free, prior, and informed consent remains inconsistently applied, leaving many communities without a genuine voice or fair compensation when mining projects disrupt their lives. Environmental impact assessments often fall short of rigorous, independent scrutiny, and the cumulative climate impacts of multiple mining operations in a single area are rarely accounted for in a meaningful manner.

Globally, more countries are embracing circular economy models that prioritise reuse, recycling, and responsible consumption to reduce the need for constant new extraction. South Africa must not be left behind in building this kind of regenerative economic model. Responsible sourcing, traceability, and ethical supply chains are no longer optional, they are international expectations that shape trade, investment, and our standing as a global player.

A just transition cannot be built on a business-as-usual model of extraction. It must be grounded in fairness, inclusion, and long-term thinking. Workers whose livelihoods depend on the mining sector need clear pathways and support as the industry modernises and decarbonises. Communities that host these operations must see real social and economic benefits, not just promises that remain on paper. Women, youth, and Indigenous peoples must be part of the decisions that affect their land, water, and future.

The South African Human Rights Commission stands ready to collaborate with all role players(government, industry, civil society, and affected communities) to ensure that the minerals powering the clean energy transition do not come at the cost of human rights

violations and environmental devastation. We must insist that our policies, laws, and industrial strategies place people and the planet before profit.

Let us not forget that our mineral wealth belongs to all South Africans, and its management must reflect our highest constitutional values of dignity, equality, accountability, and sustainability. It is only by closing the gaps between ambition and implementation that we can truly transform our mineral sector into an engine for climate resilience, social upliftment, and intergenerational justice.

As we deliberate today, let us hold ourselves and each other to this standard: that critical raw materials must not become another symbol of extractive injustice, but rather a foundation for shared prosperity, environmental restoration, and a fairer, greener future for all.

With this said, I would like to hand over to the panel discussing Climate Raw Materials. In their speech, they will be able to highlight their experiences, challenges, and best practices. Over to you.

Jamie Kneen, Mining Watch Canada – thinking of the global onslaught

Shane Choshane CNV International – the South African Strategy

Hassen Lorgat – linking the Mining Bill and Critical Minerals Rush

And various Community respondents

I thank you