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South Africa: 'Joule' On Display At Climate Change Conference

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Johannesburg — South Africa's first electric car will be on display at the National ClimateChange Conference on Wednesday.

Named "Joule", the ultra sleek zero-emission car is Africa's answer to climate change.

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It was unveiled at the Paris Motor Show last year and named after British physicist James Prescott Joule, who was best known for his research in electricity and thermodynamics. Joule is a six-seater multi-purpose vehicle (MPV) designed by Optimal Energy in association with South African-born automotive designer, Keith Helfet. Optimal Energy, a privately-owned company based in Cape Town specialising in optimal solutions for urban transport, was capitalised with a R50 million investment from the Innovation Fund (IF), an instrument of the department.

The Director General of the Department of Science and Technology, Phil Mjwara said in South Africa, the commercial roll out and manufacture of electric cars had huge commercialization challenges associated with it.

However, government was investigating how to go about it.

He said apart from researching renewable energies, energy efficiency, hydrogen and fuel cell technology, a better understanding of climate change was needed.

"We need to improve the fundamental understanding of the earth system, and we need to deepen our understanding of the impacts of climate change through the downscaling of globalmodel to make it more relevant to Africa and South Africa.

"Also, we need to build earth observation capabilities which includes the monitoring and collection of earth data, as well as use innovation and technology for climate change mitigation," Mr Mjwara said.

The department has also established and undertaken a 10 Year Innovation Plan which identified five grand challenges including farmer to pharmaceuticals, space and science, energy, global change and observing changes in earth data, and human and social dynamics and their impact on climate change.

South Africa has an Earth Observation Strategy and is currently one of the four co-chairs of the Group on Earth Observation, Mr Mjwara said.

The Earth Observation Strategy aims to ensure South Africahas sufficient data on the atmosphere and oceans using, among other devices, satellites to capture changes in the earth, in order to better understand climate change.

Mr Mjwara highlighted that scientists were currently developing a Risk and Vulnerability Atlas which would provide risk analysis on floods and droughts not only for South Africa, but for individual provinces.

"We as the department are trying our best to help in the fightagainst climate change, but much more is needed and this should be reflected in the outcomes of this summit," Mr Mjwara said.

The National Climate Change Summit, underway at Gallagher Estate until Thursday, aims to establish a national policy framework toward climate change that is adopted and supported by all environmental and climate change stakeholders.

A further aim of the conference is to come up with policy milestones and timelines for the implementation of the policy framework.

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