



Nothing About Us Without Us

By Jess Wallach and Dionne Foster

In 1991, delegates from around the country came together in Washington, D.C., with representatives from Puerto Rico, Canada, the Marshall Islands, and Central and South America for the first National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, where they drafted and adopted the *Principles of Environmental Justice*.

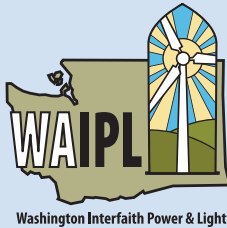
The gathering was focused on addressing a hard truth: communities of color and low-income communities are disparately impacted by environmental degradation and are more likely to be situated in neighborhoods with highly polluting industries than their wealthier or whiter neighbors. High exposure to environmental pollutants is destroying the health of these communities, and without access to financial resources or decision-making institutions, communities struggle to protect their well-being.

The 17 key environmental justice principles produced at that summit reflected the rights of all communities to have healthy places to live, learn, work, and play. The principles also asserted

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Join Earth Ministry/WAIPL and add your voice to the growing movement of people of faith caring for creation! Membership includes a subscription to *Earth Letter*.

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ABOUT US

Earth Ministry engages the religious community in environmental stewardship. We work in partnership with individuals and congregations to respond to this great moral challenge through education, modeling sustainable lifestyle choices, and organizing for social change through environmental advocacy.

Founded in 1992, Earth Ministry has a history of leading the way in caring for the environment from a faith perspective. Our Greening Congregations Program was the first in the country to help houses of worship implement sustainable practices, and our faithful advocacy program is on the cutting edge of empowering clergy and lay leaders to speak out on public policy issues.

Earth Ministry supports a growing network of congregations and has a national membership. While Earth Ministry is rooted in the Christian tradition, we actively engage all religious communities on climate and energy issues through Washington Interfaith Power & Light. Our programs and resources are available to all.

www.earthministry.org www.waipl.org

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program acknowledges that, "in the past, and to some extent still now, when people think of environmentalism they often think of saving the whales or hugging trees. Historically, American society has failed to make the connection in terms of the direct impact of environmental injustices – including climate change – on our own lives, families, and communities."

Responding to the call for religious communities to lead on climate justice, this issue of *Earth Letter* articulates an equitable path forward. In "Nothing About Us Without Us," our colleagues from Puget Sound Sage highlight how communities of color are on the front lines of climate impacts but are frequently left out of decision-making. Dr. Sylvia Hood Washington, a nationally-recognized environmental justice leader, articulates climate justice as a matter of faith in an interview with *U.S. Catholic*. And as the world continues building the clean energy economy, the transition must include protection for impacted communities and the wellbeing of workers whose jobs may be threatened, a concept known as "Just Transition" – covered on page 14.

When you hear that God's creation is threatened by climate change, the image invoked needs to go beyond melting ice caps or suffering polar bears. The real injustice is that the most vulnerable among us disproportionately bear the burden of our changing climate. Our faith compels us to take action and we thank you for joining Earth Ministry in working together for climate justice.

Blessings,



GOINGS-ON at Earth Ministry

Earth Ministry relies on donations from individuals like you to make this important work possible. Join or renew your membership in Earth Ministry, sign up for monthly giving, or make a special gift at www.earthministry.org or by calling (206) 632-2426. Thank you for your support!

Healthy Kids at Last!

Thanks to advocacy efforts of faith leaders and our partners, Washington State is leading the way on phasing out toxic flame retardants! Governor Jay Inslee signed the Toxic-Free Kids and Families Act into law on April 1.

The bill, which is the strongest policy in the nation, bans five of the worst chemicals used as flame retardants, including the first ban ever on TBBPA. It also establishes a process for addressing another six harmful chemicals found in consumer products. This is a pivotal victory for the health of our children and our communities. Thank you for making your voice heard!



Earth Ministry staff and campaign partners look on as Gov. Inslee signs the Toxic-Free Kids and Families Act

Every Day Is Earth Day

Earth Day truly is an interfaith holiday — all religions can claim it as central to our faith and yet it belongs to none. The day is a chance to gather in community and enjoy the bounty of the Earth while learning about solutions that protect our common home.

Earth Ministry/WA IPL partnered with Seattle University and other faith-based organizations to host Interfaith Earth Day on April 21. An interactive fair included sustainable campus tours, an open mic cafe, guided meditation, and a solutions center. Earth Ministry/WA IPL coordinated the solutions center, where we and local groups offered opportunities to put faith into action by engaging in climate action.

Everyone Came out a Winner at Earth Ministry's Brunch BINGO!

Earth Ministry/WA IPL hosted our first-ever Brunch BINGO fundraiser on April 16. It was wonderful to fill a room to bursting with people having a great time for a good cause! Over 30 BINGO prizes were awarded along with three fabulous grand prizes, which were claimed by the happy winners of our raffle.

The real winners were everyone who came out to support the great work of Earth Ministry. Thanks to you, we raised nearly \$20,000 to protect our air, water, climate, and communities. Mark your calendar for next year's Mardi Gras Brunch BINGO on Saturday, February 25, 2017— we'll be back with a bigger venue and even more great prizes. See you then!





Standing at the Crossroads

Northwest residents have mobilized in large numbers to oppose expansion of fossil fuel projects in and transport through our communities. People of faith are raising the moral voice saying that there's a better way forward: an equitable shift to the clean-energy economy.

Cleaner energy and transportation options are becoming cheaper and more widely available every day. We can keep more of our energy dollars at home – wasting less and investing in our buildings, communities, and local resources. As we increase local control of our energy system, we should invest our energy dollars in healthier communities, good local jobs, a stronger democracy, and a brighter future.

We stand at the crossroads now, and working together we can make this future a reality. On April 27, Earth Ministry/WAIPL co-sponsored a “Crossroads Forum” to learn, share, and vision together. Rev. Cody Natland, pastor of Bayview United Methodist Church and Central UMC in Sedro Wooley, joined speakers from OneAmerica, Railroad Workers United, and Climate Solutions to tackle these issues as a community.

Justice Is Served

After years of effort, we celebrate victory for the sacred lands and waters of the Lummi Nation at *Xwe'chi'eXen*, also known as Cherry Point, Washington.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers denied the necessary permits for SSA Marine's proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal, agreeing with the Lummi Nation that building North America's largest coal export terminal would have adverse impacts upon the Lummi Nation's treaty fishing rights and way of life.

Almost five years ago, Lummi leadership approached Earth Ministry/WAIPL asking for faith community support in protecting their sacred lands and waters at *Xwe'chi'eXen*. You responded with outstanding solidarity, raising this clear moral concern with decision-makers – and action, attending dozens of Totem Pole Journey blessings in impacted communities.

This is an historic victory, and you also have helped to foster an authentic partnership between people of faith and Northwest tribes. We thank you for your support over the many years of this difficult battle. Justice is served.



Last Project Standing

With the proposed terminal at *Xwe'chi'eXen* (Cherry Point) denied, the last coal export project standing is the one slated for Longview, Washington.

In early summer, hearings on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) of this project were held around Washington State – in Longview, Spokane, and Pasco – with over 1,500 participants. Especially inspiring was the hearing at ground zero in Longview, where opponents of the terminal comprised nearly 85% of the crowd. It was truly amazing to hear such compelling community, elected, religious, tribal, fishing, ranching, and health professional voices united against coal export.

Pastors, lay leaders, and people of faith came together from all across the state to share their story at these hearings. With her baby in tow, Rev. Liv Larson Andrews of Salem Lutheran highlighted the sacredness of our Earth at the Spokane rally. Long-time activist Rev. Kathleen Patton shared her passion to care for her local community in Longview.

Rev. Nathaniel Mahlberg of First Congregational UCC and a caravan from Walla Walla joined people of faith from Richland, Pasco, and Leavenworth at the Pasco hearing, where the faith community comprised over half of the testimony against the coal terminal.

Thank you to all the Earth Ministry/WAIPL members who commented on behalf of climate justice. Both in person and through written comments, we sent a loud message about our moral obligation to power past coal!



Rev. Liv Larson Andrews at the Spokane rally

From Washington State to Washington, DC

LeeAnne Beres and Jessica Zimmerle traveled to Washington, DC the first week in May for the annual Interfaith Power & Light conference and lobby day. Nearly 70 religious leaders from 34 states participated, and Earth Ministry's Washington Interfaith Power & Light project was well represented.

Our staff led a popular lobby training session to help prepare state leaders for visits to Capitol Hill. On lobby day, LeeAnne and Jessica met with staff of the

Washington State Congressional delegation regarding coal export, the EPA's Clean Power Plan, and the Green Climate Fund.

Earth Ministry/WAIPL's Jessica Zimmerle ready to meet with Senator Murray's staff!



Earth Letter Summer 2016

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Faith at the Crossroads By Jessie Dye

Here's the thing. We've already won.

It's 2016: the cost of renewables per kilowatt hour is now generally equal to the cost of fossil fuels. A plane, the Solar Impulse 2, has crossed the Atlantic Ocean using solar batteries as part of its round the world flight. The US, Canada, and Mexico have pledged a "stretch" goal of 50% power from clean energy by 2025. Three of the biggest coal companies have bankrupted, and no new coal plants have come on line in the US in a decade. Jobs in solar and wind are outstripping employment in fossil fuels. We are past the tipping point.

In fact, we are in the middle of a system change so profound, it was almost unimaginable a decade ago. Ten years from now the energy grid we rely on will be a thing of health and beauty.

Yes, you can make a list of destructive projects happening around the world and awful climate effects underway. It's certainly not all good news, and we will continue to fight rear-guard actions against fossil fuels.

Given the change in energy technology, the question is how do we navigate our political and cultural choices? The last 100 years of fossil fuels have created winners and losers. It is essential that we hold a vision for the next 100 years of our global energy future as one that makes us all healthy.

At this crossroads in human evolution, Pope Francis has stepped in to remind us that we are only one part of the web of life on Earth, beloved children of God and deeply related to all of creation. As we treat each other and the Earth, so we treat ourselves and our Creator. This means we are also standing at a spiritual crossroads. We have it in our power, politically and culturally, to choose

a clean energy future where all have equal access to the benefits of a healthy grid. What guidelines, in particular, do we have for moving to a green energy economy?

First, people who have been harmed the most by the fossil fuel economy must be given a powerful voice in the move to a clean energy economy. What do these communities say? They must be at the table to be

decision-makers for their own future.

Second, the truth is that coal mining regions and jobs in fossil fuels are at the end of their run. It's a false choice to pit mining communities against environmentalists. In truth, these same communities could be filled with workers reclaiming damaged mining ecosystems and building clean energy infrastructure. This is where faith leaders can step in and articulate real options for a shared future with laborers and rural communities.

Looking ahead, the big spiritual, political, moral, and economic questions are going to be about how to navigate the dramatically changing world ahead. Earth Ministry has done our due diligence in opposing fossil fuels and advocating for a clean energy future. Now is the time to hold fast to our belief in the common good and advocate for an energy sector that works for all. Join us in asking the right questions and fighting for the right outcome for all of God's children.

Jessie Dye is Earth Ministry's Program & Outreach Director.



Building a Just and Sustainable Future By Jessica Zimmerle

You may have heard it numerous times, but have you ever reflected on Earth Ministry’s long-time mission statement “to inspire and mobilize the religious community to play a leadership role in building a just and sustainable future?”

There’s a lot packed into this short sentence: inspiration, leadership development, and action all jump out at first glance. But what about the end goal of “a just and sustainable future?”

Perhaps you can imagine what a sustainable future looks like: we cut back consumption, use renewable energy, and create innovative responses to a changing climate. But what makes this future *just*?

Those four little letters change everything. They change our future from one in which we survive to one in which we thrive. One where, in good faith, we address the reality that the groaning of creation is felt by some more than others. And not only do we address it, but we act on it.

The campaigns that Earth Ministry/WAIPL engages in seek to acknowledge, address, and resolve the injustice placed disproportionately on impacted communities, which are predominantly low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. Although

admittedly many of our members are not those directly experiencing climate injustices, we facilitate right relationship and respectful action in response to leadership from within the communities that are facing frontline impacts.

Take, for example, our ongoing support of the Lummi Nation, which recently stopped a coal export terminal proposal that threatened their sacred lands and treaty fishing rights. You may be familiar with this partnership, but the story behind the scenes is what makes it genuinely just. Earth Ministry/WAIPL’s relationship with the Lummi began in response to a direct request for faith community support from tribal leaders.

Referencing a public Letter of Apology from Christian denominational executives to Native peoples of the Northwest, the Lummi called on people of faith to uphold their commitment to solidarity and action when tribal sovereignty, spirituality, and lifeways were threatened. With guidance from Earth Ministry/WAIPL, religious communities responded to this request with justice-minded hearts.

Rather than acting based on assumptions of what the Lummi needed, we waited to hear the strategy of the tribe and then asked where we could amplify their message. One way was organizing houses of worship to host stunning Totem Pole Journey blessings. Another was reaffirming the initial Letter of Apology with an updated letter in which Northwest bishops denounced fossil fuel projects threatening Native rights. Finally, we made sure the tribes were first to respond to the good news that coal would not be coming to *Xwe’chi’eXen* (Cherry Point).

Taking the time to foster right relationships is the core of Earth Ministry/WAIPL’s work for environmental justice. It is through these partnerships that we can live out our faith values to care for all of creation in a way that prioritizes the most vulnerable among us.

If you embrace the Earth Ministry mission statement, my hope is that you feel inspired and mobilized to lead with your faith as you help create a brighter future – one that is both sustainable and *just* – because the true Kingdom of God on Earth is built on the rock of justice.

Jessica Zimmerle is Earth Ministry’s Outreach Coordinator.

NW Christian denominational executives standing in support of Native peoples at the 2014 Totem Pole Journey stop at St. Mark’s Cathedral, Seattle



Climate Justice Is a Matter of Faith

Dr. Sylvia Hood Washington didn't set out to be an advocate for climate justice. "I don't want to be on this mission," she says. "My kids are out of college and graduate school and it would be so easy to sit back and plan a vacation to Hawaii." But her personal experience with climate change and her feeling of responsibility to her community, her family, and her faith made it impossible to turn away from the need she saw around her.

Washington says, "My parents had this real deep understanding of environmental integrity, and they felt that they were not getting it." Years later, it would be this same environmental mindset and community activism she learned from her mother that spurred her into the environmental justice movement.

While Washington started her career as an environmental engineer working at institutions like NASA, today her work for climate justice has led her in unexpected directions. Her environmental justice accomplishments include working with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) on a documentary project about African American Catholics and environmental health and, more recently, traveling to the Paris United Nations Climate Change Conference.

Why is concern for the environment a justice issue?

Our way of living is costing human beings their lives. It is causing cancer, miscarriages, and a degradation of living. And, because it is the people with fewer resources who live in poorer communities who are most likely to be affected, environmental degradation and climate change impacts a disparate number of people of a particular color. There are communities all around the world who have an unequal interaction with the environment.

People once thought we could put waste somewhere else—in someone else's backyard—and it wouldn't bother anyone, at least not anyone important. But, it's all God's creation, and it's all



tied together. When someone puts chemicals in the water in one place, it doesn't stay there; it goes into the ground and through the aquifers, it evaporates and comes back as precipitation.

The first Earth Day was celebrated in 1970. Many African Americans criticized the movement at the time, saying it was an attempt to distract people from the unrest that was created by the other major social movements that were going on—things like women's rights, African American rights, and the anti-war movement. And here you have this environmental movement, which is not focused on human beings, but instead on things like planting trees.

The result was that many newly elected black leaders—from Carl B. Stokes to a young Jesse Jackson Jr.—went to the Capitol, saying, "Do not let this new environmental movement deflect from the public health situations in African American communities, most, if not all, of which are environmentally created."

This is where the environmental justice movement came from. It was grounded in a call for public health equity. Today environmental justice continues to make people pay attention to the fact that our modes of production are actually costing people their health and their long-term stability as human beings.

What's an example of environmental injustice?

It's hard to overcome growing up in a situation where exposure to lead or other pollution is common. Imagine living in those kinds of corrupted communities, exposed to pollution and chemicals, with no safe place to send your kids outside to play. These are also the communities subject to violence. How can you be a true parent, a true family?

Our environmental behavior and our willingness to pollute our planet have totally corrupted people's existence as living beings for generations. That's horrifying. Every living creature deserves a safe ecosystem, and yet we're failing to provide that for human beings.

That's the injustice. That need to care for creation on such a deep level needs to be articulated by Catholics around the world.

Is climate justice a Catholic problem?

As an environmental scientist and as an environmental justice scholar, I wholeheartedly agree with Pope Francis and his call to make climate justice an issue for the whole church. People have been protesting about whether climate change exists and the science in the document, but his recent encyclical *Laudato Si'* is not about climate change. *Laudato Si'* is about environmental justice.

In the encyclical, Pope Francis talks about how everyone thinks that technology is progress and that industrialization is



always moving us forward. He says we have to stop and talk about the downside to technological advancement.

People of color understand that. They have borne the cost of technological production. We've borne it with the polluted land and waters. And the encyclical is the first really widespread document that talks about it.

In our society, we treat those suffering because of climate change like throwaway people.

St. Francis was the same way before his conversion. He was a playboy, earning good money—he said he could not stand the sight of a leper. But at one point he suddenly sees Christ in the face of a leper, has a conversion experience, and starts ministering to the man.

If we follow St. Francis and live the gospel life, then we don't put these modern-day lepers into some colony outside the city where we don't have to interact with them, or even see them. Everyone is a child of God, and Christ is in everyone: all of the people who have been exposed to HIV/AIDS, all the people who are violent, who suffer with endocrine disrupters, who have asthma. All the people who shovel coal for a living or who we see as the "other." Jesus calls us to embrace the leper. We can go even further and make sure that what is creating the leprosy is no longer a problem.

When I talk to Catholics—regardless of color—about climate justice, environmental justice, and the right-to-life perspective, they get it. They understand. Catholics have always been involved in environmental movements.

How did you get involved in climate justice?

My mother was a victim of climate change. It was in Cleveland in 1988, and she was 56 years old.

She was happy; my father had passed away three years prior, but my family was bouncing back. My mother was laughing again, talking. She loved her house, but she started having strokes every six months, and she couldn't live by herself anymore. So she started living with different kids every couple months.

She went to stay with one of my relatives that September and it was extremely hot. She started feeling sick, but this time it wasn't another stroke. She just said, "I feel overheated." So we took her to the hospital to figure out what was wrong. She was fine. I went to visit her, we picked out really cute pajamas and a book for her together.

We were laughing. But the next thing I knew she was in a coma.

We found out later that she'd had a heart attack while in the hospital. Since my mother also had diabetes, she had developed a condition like neuropathy; it actually killed the ends of her nerves,

so she couldn't feel anything at all. She had a heart attack and probably didn't even know it because all her nerve endings were dead. She couldn't even cry out.

After my mother died, at first I didn't make any connections between her death and climate change. I knew about pollution, of course—I'd seen cities dumping waste in poor neighborhoods. But I was working at NASA doing environmental modeling, so this was not something that was on my radar at all.

Years later, in 1995, there was another heat wave in Chicago. Almost 800 people died; many of them were African American men of a certain age. I also had a miscarriage that year. It was so hot, and our air conditioning went out. I started thinking about the connections between temperature and human health, especially in these high-risk populations.

That's when I created the group People of Color for Climate Change. I never thought I would be involved in climate change, but there it was, right in front of my face. It was something that affected me personally.

I use social media to reach out to people, and I created a climate and justice conference in Chicago. I bring the information to laypeople. I didn't want to do it or see myself doing it, but I'm called to it, and I will do what I can to make sure my mission is accomplished.

Catholics are not supposed to just go to church and sit there doing rosaries and adorations. That's not what our faith is all about. We're called to mission. That's what's scarier, because it's hard to leave our comfort zone. But that's what Pope Francis is saying.



“ I didn't know it then, but my life has been impacted by climate change beginning the summer that my Mom, Sadie, died prematurely at the age of 56.

She went into the hospital for heat exhaustion and never came out.

It was a death that no one saw coming. ”

- Dr. Sylvia Hood Washington

PEOPLE'S CLIMATE MARCH



Is there hope?

I believe in miracles. I believe that we are never given too much to bear. That’s my core faith belief. If we don’t have the solution, it’s not because a solution doesn’t exist; it just hasn’t been revealed to us yet.

God gave Noah the knowledge and the wisdom to build the ark to save creation. He told him the flood was coming, and he told him how to deal with it. We’re in a similar situation now with climate change. God has given us the wisdom to figure out how to deal with it so that we don’t destroy ourselves.

I am a scientist and an engineer who worked for NASA, and I don’t think climate change is a tall tale someone is spinning. The data is there. Ninety-seven percent of all scientists polled agree that climate change is real and that it’s exacerbated by human action. That knowledge is given to us by God. But God also gave us knowledge on how to deal with climate change.

I believe that Pope Francis is not spinning his wheels. He’s a scientist, and he has spent many hours discussing climate change with other scientists. I don’t think the pope would have written *Laudato Si’* if he did not believe, as a leader of our church, in climate change and the dangers to all of humanity.

What can we do to help?

We need to embrace the truth that we have limited resources. We now live on a planet that has been compromised for everyone, rich and poor, black and white.

That is the hard truth we have to live with. We’re American, so we’ve always been on top, and we’ve always had a certain number of resources and way of living. We haven’t had to think about how those resources get distributed or if there’s enough

for everyone. So the fact that we have to change our ways is going to be a very difficult thing to grasp.

When we see the massive flooding and islands going under water on television, we have to know that our consumption patterns are tied to that. That’s hard. But we can’t stick our heads in the sand and ignore what’s going on. We have to be educated. We have to have homilies by our pastors. We have to have religious education that talks about these issues. I’m in

a small Bible study group that’s reading a little bit of *Laudato Si’* every week and talking about it. More Catholics should be doing this in their churches and in their families.

Don’t purposely stay ignorant and don’t cling to someone because they’re telling you that you don’t have to change your way of life. We need to listen to what Pope Francis is asking us to do. He’s saying to educate yourselves, accept the truth, and act on that truth.

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Dr. Sylvia Hood Washington is Chief Environmental Research Scientist at Environmental Health Research Associates, LLC. She is an environmental epidemiologist, environmental engineer, and environmental historian with 30 years of research experience working on the impact of industrial pollution on human health and ecosystems using qualitative and quantitative analyses.

Continued from page 1

that communities most impacted by pollution and climate change should get to lead the transition from environmental inequity to environmental justice.

One of the principles states, “Environmental Justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.” This principle evokes a common saying in social justice movements: “Nothing about us without us.”

What both statements drive home is the need to make sure people impacted by a decision or policy have a meaningful voice in all steps in the decision-making process. Nowhere is this call more relevant than in policymaking for climate change, because of climate change’s disproportionate impacts on people of color and low-income communities.

Our jobs, our health, and the communities where we live are threatened by the consequences of climate change. Without bold intervention, we can expect more severe heat waves, flooding, exposure to air pollutants and allergens, extreme weather events, food scarcity, and increased spread of disease. Moreover, climate change is a threat multiplier, intensifying the impacts of these existing health and environmental hazards.

Nationally, race is still the most significant predictor of a person living near contaminated air, water or soil in the United States. People of color and low-income people are also more likely to live in urban areas most vulnerable to the “heat island effect,” where a deadly combination of low tree cover and vast concrete, heat-trapping surfaces amplifies the health risks of high temperatures and heat waves. Extreme weather events such as hurricanes Katrina and Sandy painfully reveal how people

of color and people from low-income communities pay the price of climate change through their health, financial security, loss of home, and psychological well-being.

Beyond these climate burdens, people of color and low-income communities are also less likely to have the resources they need to adapt to a climate-changed world. Increasing costs for such basic necessities as food and utilities will disproportionately affect these communities, which already pay a higher portion of their income for these goods and services.

These economic challenges are only expected to increase with climate change. Economic sectors such as agriculture and tourism, which in many places predominantly employ people of color and low-income people, will be hard-hit by climate change. And while there has been much talk about green jobs, there are few accessible pathways to them.

When we talk to our communities, they put real words to these problems; people feel they are often first and worst impacted by pollution and other environmental problems but last and least informed. One community member we spoke with said, “We know that ‘environmentalism’ has a long history of exclusion; shifting the framing and language around environmental issues is an important first step in engaging our communities in environmental decision-making.”

Just as important, leadership from communities of color has been sidelined in the mainstream environmental movement. While “people of color support environmental protection at a higher rate than whites,” they are far less represented in the environmental nonprofits, foundations and government agencies – currently only 16% of all people in the field. This “green ceiling” limits both people of color and the environmental movement more broadly. When the most impacted communities do not have a seat at the table, decision-making and solutions cannot reflect their realities and concerns.



Addressing both the disproportionate impacts and underrepresentation in decision-making requires a new kind of climate policymaking, one that centers the voices and experiences of the most impacted communities. It challenges us to imagine new solutions that address the economic as well as the environmental impacts of climate change. Working from the shared roots of the crises, we can begin to work toward meaningful, systemic transformation.

Communities around the world are calling for climate justice, highlighting the inequities produced by the current capitalist economic system and the importance of putting people most impacted by climate change into decision-making spaces. Foreseeing the impacts of climate change on people with low incomes, a movement for a just transition is being led by frontline communities of color and workers.

The Just Transition movement asserts that the impacts of climate change are inextricably linked to poverty from a local to a global scale. Authentic solutions will respond to environmental challenges by simultaneously addressing economic stagnation, racism, and a lack of people of color in the historically white-led mainstream environmental movement.

Working toward a just transition, we must develop a strategy to price and reduce carbon for the health of our communities and environment. We need carbon pricing to achieve equitably the emissions reductions that are critical to our planet's survival. Yet as history has shown many times over, environmental policies can perpetuate injustice and exclusion. We cannot afford to make this mistake again, locking in a future that is as oppressive as the one from which we are transitioning.

A just transition means that any approach we take to pricing carbon is revenue positive, with funds dedicated to building climate resilience in highly impacted communities. Without dedicating revenue, we risk transitioning to a new economy that continues to benefit the privileged while heaping health and environmental burdens on those most at risk. Deepening local democracy and centering the transition process on communities most impacted by climate change in mitigation and adaptation planning are key to realizing this future.

There are no throw-away places and no throw-away people. To create a climate movement built on principles of equity and justice, we must create policies that address both the economic and environmental impacts of climate change, such as equitable carbon pricing.

As we transition to carbon neutrality, we have a tremendous opportunity to strengthen the resilience of communities of color and low-income families. In the process, we must ensure that those most impacted are in a position to lead and benefit – creating a more just future for everyone, everywhere.

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What Is a Just Transition? By The Labor Network for Sustainability

Crucial to winning labor support for climate protection is the idea of a “just transition.” A basic principle of fairness mandates that the burden of policies necessary for society—protecting the environment, for example—shouldn’t be borne by a small minority who happen to be victimized by their side effects. Protecting workers and communities from the effects of socially and environmentally necessary economic change is often referred to as a just transition.

A just transition is a matter of elementary justice: it is unfair that workers who happen to hold jobs that need to be eliminated to achieve a social good should bear the burden of that change by losing their jobs. Insisting that climate protection policies protect the current and future livelihoods of workers and communities they affect is a prerequisite for addressing labor about climate. Climate protection advocates should insist from the outset that part of any transition away from fossil fuels includes protection for the impacted communities and the wellbeing of workers whose jobs may be threatened.

A just transition means that the burden of change that benefits everyone will not be placed disproportionately on a few. It means that those most vulnerable to change will be protected. It means that the process of change will increase social justice for workers, women, the poor, and all oppressed groups. Such a just transition is essential to produce the broad and sustainable political consensus necessary to make climate protection policy work in the long run.

Although the transition from dirty fuels to clean energy will create far more jobs than are lost, we must not ask workers and communities who have helped power our country to bear the burden of changes that will benefit everybody. Sustainable investment and job creation is an important step in regions where the coal and other mining industries have abused and abandoned the land, air, water, and people.

In a fair and just transition, affected workers, their unions, and communities are equal partners in a well-planned, carefully negotiated, and managed transition from fossil fuels to clean energy. A just transition brings job opportunities to those traditionally left behind and job security and livelihood guarantees to affected workers. Workers’ pensions and health care benefits are preserved, and workers and members of affected communities receive right of first employment for any jobs created by plant decommissioning or site reclamation. Workers receive education and training for industries—ideally unionized—with similar pay and benefits.

A fair and just transition engages every level of government and business in an all-out effort to maximize public and private investments in economic development and diversification,



provide workforce training, replace lost tax revenues, and create lasting, good jobs that strengthen the economy and sustain working families—especially jobs related to clean energy, energy efficiency, and climate-resilient infrastructure. Just transition requires that coal plant owners responsible for harmful pollution be held accountable for cleaning it up so that communities are left with usable land and clean water.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which represents 170 million workers in unions all over the world, says a just transition can be achieved through socially responsible and green investment, low-carbon development strategies, and by providing decent work and social protection for those whose livelihoods, incomes, and employment are affected by the need to adapt to climate change and by the need to reduce emissions to levels that avert dangerous climate change.

The global trade union movement recognizes that certain sectors, for example, fossil fuel and energy-intensive industries, will be significantly impacted by carbon reduction. This includes such industries as steel, iron, aluminum, power generation, and road transportation. Protecting workers in such sectors requires investment in low-carbon technologies and industries, energy efficiency, and retraining. Active labor market policies that redeploy workers from high-carbon to “green” jobs are essential to avoid bottlenecks in the development of the new green economy.

The issues of economic justice, however, go far beyond simply protecting those in existing jobs. Rather, the transition to a green economy must create the means to create an economy that is fairer overall. “Trade unions propose that employment, income, wealth distribution, purchasing power, gender equity, and measures to tackle poverty” should be placed “at the center of discussions.”

The threat of global warming requires a different concept of solidarity, one that recognizes the common interest of all workers in climate protection. That concept gives all unions a legitimate role in shaping labor’s climate policy. But it also gives them an obligation to protect the livelihoods and well-being of any workers who might be adversely affected by climate protection policies through a just transition to a climate-safe economy. It emphasizes labor’s traditional role representing the interests of its members’ communities, as well as labor’s role as a central player in the movement for social good.

Climate change changes everything: Everything about how we organize society, how we conduct politics, and how we envision our role as trade unionists in society. All workers, no



matter what industry they work in and no matter what harm their industry may do to society, deserve union representation. But in an age of global warming and climate disruption, labor can no longer advocate for every possible job regardless of its impact on the world around us.

Our society is transitioning before our eyes to a sustainable future, and the struggle for this transition is intense, with the forces of capital arraying against us. Whether this transition is fair and just remains an open question. The path to future growth for organized labor lies in its ability to become a central player in the movement to build a sustainable, carbon-neutral future for the planet and its people. The climate fight may not be won without labor.

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Launched in 2010, the Labor Network for Sustainability is playing a critical role in building the strong, broad movement that is needed to advance strategies for a transition from a world with an economy, society, and climate in crisis to one that has a sustainable future.

The fight against climate change is part of a larger struggle for a more just, equitable, caring, and mindful world. As such, greed, apathy, and arrogance have no place in our pursuit of this bright future.

If we are to confront our problems as a human family effectively and pursue that bright future we all want, we must build a better world – eradicate poverty, build resilient and sustainable communities, protect the Earth, promote honor and integrity, and foster a culture of caring.

– Naderev “Yeb” Saño, former lead Philippines climate negotiator

