CLIMATE CHANGE: CRISIS AND CHALLENGE

“The sphere of rock on which we live coalesced from the dust of ancient stars. … And between its dynamic surface and the vacuum of space, in a film as thin and vibrant as a spider’s web, lies the fragile miracle we call the biosphere… Within this realm, every organism is linked, however tenuously, to every other. Microbe, plant, and mammal, soil dweller and ocean swimmer, all are caught up in the cycling of energy and nutrients from the sun, water, air and earth.”

Indigenous protest during the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Bali, Indonesia in December 2007. Indigenous peoples were protesting their exclusion from the climate talks, even though the climate talks were focusing on use of indigenous lands a central strategy for addressing climate change. Photo: Langelle/GJEP-GFC

Global Justice Ecology Project’s mission is to build local, national and international alliances to address the common root causes of social injustice, ecological destruction and economic domination. There is no better example of the interconnection of these issues than climate change.

Climate change may well be humanity's greatest challenge. It is a crisis that must be rapidly addressed if catastrophe is to be averted. Already the impacts are being felt by millions in the world’s most vulnerable and marginalized communities. Climate Change is at once a social and environmental justice issue, an ecological issue, and an issue of economic and political domination. As such, it must be addressed through broad and visionary alliances.

To successfully address the climate crisis, we must also identify and address the deep root causes that link it to the myriad other crises we face — economic, militarism and war, as well as the intertwined crises of food, water and biodiversity loss. These crises are unified by their common roots in an economic system that encourages banks and corporations to ignore ethical and moral considerations and gamble with the Earth, peoples’ lives, and our collective futures in the service of higher profits. To paraphrase neoliberal economic pioneer Milton Friedman, ‘the corporation cannot be ethical. It’s only responsibility is to make a profit for its shareholders.’

Successfully addressing climate change will require a fundamental restructuring of our society that, if thoughtfully done, can lay a new foundation that will simultaneously help us achieve both global justice and ecological balance.

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What then will the solutions look like? The solutions to the climate crisis will be found in a model that is the opposite of the dominant economic model of incessant and unsustainable growth, oppression and injustice.

Solutions to climate change will not be controlled by corporations. There is no single “silver bullet” solution. Solutions to climate change will be many. They will be small in scale, locally controlled, decentralized, bioregionally appropriate and socially just. Thousands of such solutions already exist. Opening space for dialogue in communities around the world to uncover, promote and launch these real solutions is key.

At the same time, the large-scale, ecologically and socially devastating corporate-controlled false solutions to climate change that currently dominate the conversation must be eliminated.

Climate justice must become a core part of all of our work. This will require broad and visionary alliances with diverse peoples and movements around the world, and will require the fundamental transformation of society to one that is based in principles of justice and ecology.

**Global Warming = Global War**

“To me the question of the environment is more ominous than that of peace and war... I'm more worried about global warming than I am of any major military conflict.”

--Hans Blix, UN Weapons Inspector

Gross overproduction and overconsumption by and for industrialized countries has resulted in a severely shrinking resource base, as evidenced by pandemic ecological crises, the estimated loss of more than 300 species per day (as a conservative estimate), and by climate change itself. The intensification of the impacts from climate change are further depleting resources such as water and soils and threaten widespread destruction of forests and their biodiversity.

In February 2004, a Pentagon report on global warming was leaked to the press. It predicted that abrupt climate change could bring the planet to the edge of anarchy as countries develop a nuclear threat to defend and secure dwindling food, water and energy supplies. The report went on to say that the threat to global security vastly eclipses that of terrorism, concluding, "disruption and conflict will be endemic features of life. Once again warfare would define human life.”

Wars for resources are nothing new. In 1980, Jimmy Carter pronounced the Carter Doctrine declaring that the U.S. would take any actions necessary to ensure an uninterrupted supply of oil from the Middle East. A report by the World Bank published in 2000 found that countries that produce oil are forty times more likely to be involved in violent conflict.

The World Bank itself is one of the primary engines of global warming, despite the fact that at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the Bank was entrusted with promoting and developing renewable energies. According to the Sustainable Energy and Economy Network, since the Rio Earth Summit the World Bank has spent well over $30 billion on fossil fuel exploitation (seventeen times what they spent on

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2 http://www.heatisonline.org/main.cfm
4 www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/speeches/su80jec.html
renewables). In contrast to the World Bank’s “mission” to help address poverty, over 80% of World Bank funded fossil fuels are exported to G8 countries (the eight richest countries in the world).  

The World Bank is headed up by former US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick. Zoellick was one of the main architects of the ecologically and socially disastrous North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and is one of the people behind the Project for a New American Century, the neoconservative blueprint for American Empire.

The World Bank is now insinuating itself into the global effort to stave off climate change by assuming the role of the world's carbon broker. The World Bank facilitates the global trade in carbon emissions (and profits handsomely through an estimated 13% trading commission). Carbon Trading has been a disaster. Many one-time proponents are now critics. It has resulted in the biggest corporate polluters making windfall profits, while leading to even higher emissions.

This means that the World Bank is directly driving climate change through fossil fuel development at the same time that it is taking a central role in the promotion and implementation of massive-scale, market-based false solutions to climate change—including not only carbon trading, but also carbon offsets like monoculture tree plantations, as well as incinerators, large-scale hydroelectric dams and agrofuels (large-scale industrial biofuels). One of the Bank’s newer carbon offset schemes is the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, which seeks to reduce emissions from deforestation by privatizing tracts of forest for the purpose of “protecting” them as carbon sinks so that companies in the north can use the carbon stored on these lands as offsets to avoid reducing their own carbon emissions. The UN is negotiating a similar Reducing Emissions from Deforestation (REDD) proposal.

The International Indigenous Peoples’ Forum on Climate Change declared that these REDD proposals will “result in more violations of Indigenous Peoples’ rights. It will increase the violation of our human rights, our rights to our lands, territories and resources, steal our land, cause forced evictions, prevent access and threaten indigenous agricultural practices, destroy biodiversity and culture diversity and cause social conflicts. Under REDD, States and Carbon Traders will take more control over our forests.”

The opportunism and irrationality of the climate capitalists cannot be underestimated. With the specter of climate catastrophe looming, oil companies are extracting oil from the tar sands in Alberta, Canada—a process that requires a massive and incredibly toxic strip mining process and includes the destruction of a tract of boreal forest the size of Florida. Extracting the oil from the tar sands is extremely energy intensive and puts out nearly three times the carbon emissions of conventional oil extraction. Not only

are tar sands companies ignoring the fact that climate change means we need to be moving away from fossil fuels, not looking for new deposits; they are wantonly destroying vast stretches of intact native forests—which are considered critically important climate stabilizers and one of the keys of the planet eventually recovering from climate change.⁸

Similarly, at the same time that scientists and arctic peoples are raising increasingly urgent alarms about the melting of the arctic regions due to global warming, oil companies are competing to claim the vast oil reserves that lie beneath the melting arctic, while at the same time celebrating that enough ice has melted to allow the opening of the Northwest Passage as a new trade route. There is no consideration paid even to the existing generation, much less future generations.

**Disaster Capitalism and Climate Change**

Disaster capitalists are seizing on climate change as the newest means to:

* expand and consolidate corporate power. Agrofuels, for example, are being promoted through an unprecedented cooperation between oil, biotechnology, agro-industrial and timber corporations;⁹
* further entrench centralized energy production by using propaganda and advertising to paint dirty energy “green.” Examples of this include:
  - **“Clean” coal.** Coal-fired power can never be clean. Use of coal requires massive-scale mountain-top removal mining or strip mining of indigenous lands, and pollution of communities where coal plants are based. Additionally, “carbon sequestration” technologies, upon which “clean” coal schemes rely, are scientifically unproven, and could contaminate ground water.¹⁰
  - **Nuclear power.** Far from being emissions free, nuclear power puts out tremendous greenhouse gas emissions when the entire energy cycle of nuclear power is considered—from the construction of each facility to the mining and enrichment of uranium to the permanent problem of storing the waste. In addition, most of the mining of uranium is done on indigenous lands.¹¹
  - **Hydroelectricity.** From the manufacture of the dams themselves, to the methane created through the drowning of vast expanses of land, to the emissions released when water is churned through turbines, to the millions of people who have been displaced for hydro projects, dams are yet another example of climate-unfriendly, socially unjust and ecologically destructive energy.¹²
* Land grabbing. Through schemes like the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, the UN's Reducing Emissions from Deforestation initiative and through disaster response—after the Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, for example, land was stolen from poor and marginalized communities and given to developers. The financial crisis is also leading investors to buy up land as a more secure investment.
* Further the commodification of life. An especially egregious example of this is the work of scientific extremists to manufacture entirely synthetic organisms for the production of agrofuels.¹³
* Prolong the continuation of business as usual.

Among the various profit-making and power centralizing false solutions to climate change being promoted by the disaster capitalists, agrofuels are one of the most disturbing. First came agrofuels manufactured out of food crops like corn, which directly contributed to skyrocketing food prices and escalating rates of starvation, and were quickly and loudly denounced. But besides being a humanitarian

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⁸ [http://www.ienearth.org/clits.html](http://www.ienearth.org/clits.html)
⁹ [http://vh-gfc.dpi.nl/paginas/view/33](http://vh-gfc.dpi.nl/paginas/view/33)
¹¹ [http://www.commoditydreams.org/views06/0929-33.htm](http://www.commoditydreams.org/views06/0929-33.htm)
disaster, agrofuels have also been proven to exacerbate climate change. Corn based ethanol, for example, requires more fuel to create than is produced.\textsuperscript{14} Oil palm-derived biodiesel is driving widespread logging and burning of tropical peat forests in Indonesia making Indonesia the third largest emitter of carbon on the planet and massively destroying the region’s rich and unique cultural and biological diversity.\textsuperscript{15}

Deforestation is also accelerating in South America due to agrofuels. In 2008, deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon rainforest increased by 228\% due to the rapidly expanding market for soy for both biodiesel and animal feed. In addition, the shift of many soy farmers in the U.S. to corn, due to its high market price (a result of the corn ethanol boom), has led to an acceleration of the destruction of forests in Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil to make room for expanding soy production to fill the gap.\textsuperscript{16} Deforestation annually contributes well over 20\% of global greenhouse emissions annually.

The solution, we are told, is so-called “second generation” agrofuel technologies that do not use food, but rather cellulose from trees and other inedible plants. Cellulosic agrofuels, however, do nothing to address the problem of agricultural land being taken over for production of fuel crops. In addition, agrofuels are being used as the excuse to develop and commercialize new and unproven technologies such as the potentially disastrous genetic engineering of trees. GE trees are a favored feedstocks for the future manufacture of cellulosic agrofuels. GE trees threaten to escape into native forests and indigenous lands, leading to devastating, irreversible and unpredictable impacts on forests, wildlife and humans. South Carolina-based ArborGen is developing GE cold-tolerant eucalyptus for deployment in vast plantations throughout the U.S. South. Eucalyptus are notorious for being invasive, flammable and water-intensive.\textsuperscript{17}

Eliminating corporate-controlled false solutions such as agrofuels is critical to make room for real, decentralized, community-controlled and bioregionally appropriate solutions to climate change.

**The Growing Global Movement for Climate Justice**

"This \textit{international climate negotiation} process has become nothing but developed countries avoiding their responsibilities to cut emissions and pushing the responsibility onto developing countries. [False solutions]... sound very nice but they are trashing our indigenous lands. People are being relocated and even killed; my own people will soon be under water. The money from these projects is blood money."

--Fiu Mata’ese Elisara-Laula of the O Le Siosiomaga Society of Samoa, on the 2007 UN Climate Convention

The movement for climate justice grows out of the grassroots and community-based environmental justice movement. Climate change, though often regarded as strictly an environmental issue, has at its

\textsuperscript{14} http://www.physorg.com/news4942.html
\textsuperscript{15} http://news.mongabay.com/2007/0326-indonesia.html
\textsuperscript{16} http://www.wrm.org.uk/bulletin/85/oilpalm.html
\textsuperscript{17} http://globaljusticeecology.org/stopgetrees_about.php?ID=117
core important social justice concerns. Indigenous and rural peoples, women, people of color and the poor are already on the front lines of the climate struggle.

According to the UN’s Environment and Human Security Group, by 2005 there were already over 20 million environmental refugees—more than refugees from war and political repression combined. By 2010 the group estimates the number could hit 50 million, growing to over 150 million by 2050. In 2007 Christian Aid suggested that nearly a billion people could be permanently displaced by 2050: 250 million by climate change-induced phenomena such as droughts, floods and hurricanes, and 645 million by dams and other development projects.

Some of the same people being threatened by impacts of climate change are also being threatened by proposed “solutions” to climate change. Because in many regions of the world indigenous peoples have been careful stewards of their ancestral lands, these biodiverse and rich lands are now being coveted by the World Bank, corporations and governments. Massive land grabs are taking place to privatize vast expanses of land where legal ownership is unclear or has not been established. These lands are prized for the rich resources they contain, for the development of agrofuel feedstocks or monoculture tree plantations; and for the important role they can play in offsetting carbon emissions. Both the World Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), and the UN’s REDD schemes threaten to relocate resident communities under the guise of protecting the forests so that the carbon they absorb can be used to offset emissions in the North. This environmental protection = human exclusion model has been perfected over the years by the likes of Conservation International and the Nature Conservancy. At the World Bank’s press conference during the 2007 UN Climate Convention in Bali, Indonesia where Zoellick announced the Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), The Nature Conservancy pledged $5 million toward the effort.

Contrary to this colonial model, however, one of the steps toward truly addressing climate change must be to give indigenous peoples autonomy and full control over their ancestral lands.

Because of the inherent injustice of REDD and the FCPF, indigenous peoples and others from around the world staged a loud and angry protest outside of the World Bank’s press conference at the UN Climate Convention in Bali. This was, in fact, the most hopeful thing that emerged from the Bali talks where once again the U.S. bullied the rest of the world into accepting "The Bali Roadmap"—a deal with no hard targets for emissions reductions, but rather a vague agreement to talk about potential action on climate change at future meetings.

Social movements, indigenous peoples organizations and NGOs came together numerous times throughout the UN Climate Convention in Bali to demand real action on climate change, oppose false solutions and to stand up for climate justice, resulting in the founding of the international Climate Justice Now! alliance. CJN! has continued to grow since the Bali talks and now includes over 180 groups.

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20 http://www.nature.org/initiatives/climatechange/press/press3743.html
21 http://www.zmag.org/zmag/viewArticle/16304
Efforts are now coalescing toward the 2009 UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen. This is where the global climate agreement will be finalized that will succeed the Kyoto Protocol when it expires in 2012. One challenge for the international climate change movement is effectively mobilizing to force these international climate negotiations to take real, substantial, effective and just action to address global warming. Ensuring that these negotiations proceed from a climate justice, rather than a corporate capitalist perspective, however, will be a tall order indeed. At the Poznan climate talks in 2008 there were over 1,500 industry lobbyists. That widespread direct action will be needed is clear. Coincidentally, the Copenhagen climate talks begin one week after 30 November 2009—the tenth anniversary of the WTO shutdown in Seattle where grassroots movements demonstrated the power of coordinated action.

**Mass Action on Climate Change**

"What has been singularly lacking [in the climate debate] has been any widespread popular campaign. There have been no Seattle-style protests... Politicians respond to pressure. When they have big, angry demonstrations outside their conference centers, it focuses their minds..."

--*The Guardian* (UK)

The movement against climate change in the United States plays a pivotal role in the global effort to avoid climate catastrophe. This is because:

- The U.S. is historically responsible for the lion’s share of global greenhouse gas emissions.
- The U.S. military is the largest single emitter of carbon on the planet.22
- The U.S. and the World Bank (in which the U.S. has de-facto veto decision-making power) dominate the discussion of what to do about global warming with market-based false solutions.
- The historic role of the U.S. in the international climate negotiations has been to obstruct any forward progress (under both Democrats and Republicans).

In much the same way that the Seattle protests bolstered the position of the underdog countries in the WTO negotiations, ultimately derailing them, a U.S. mobilization in support of countries fighting for real action on climate change at the international level could help neutralize the obstructive role of the U.S. and its allies by demonstrating that even U.S. citizens are demanding real action.

With the election of Barack Obama, there is a rising sense of possibility in the U.S. and around the world. It is clear, however, that any real change is going to have to come from a mobilized and radicalized grassroots. People are beginning to look back toward the 1960s as a model for organizing and for making the impossible, possible.

In the 1960s and 70s the Vietnam War was an omnipresent danger to people in the U.S., Vietnam and around the globe. From the threat of the draft, to the direct threat to life, to the great numbers of dead and wounded soldiers and civilians—with nearly everyone knowing someone who had died in the war—and with the war on the front page of the papers and the lead story of the news nearly every day, there was simply no escape from the direct or indirect impacts of this war. This, of course, had a radicalizing and mobilizing influence. The movement to stop the war became a massive force. When combined with the rising black power and civil rights movements, the militant GI resistance movement, the emerging feminist movement, and of course the overwhelming resistance of the Vietnamese people, the movement became virtually unstoppable.

Today we are seeing a similar situation with climate change. The media bombards us with bad news about the climate as increasingly severe weather—storms, droughts, fires—directly or indirectly impacts growing numbers of people, and we are all sensing that things are not quite as they should be. The

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parallel between the climate crisis and the 1960s provides us with the possibility of mobilizing a massive, powerful and diverse grassroots movement on climate that takes important lessons from the successes and failures of the 1960s movements.

While raising the militancy of the movement toward international climate negotiations is a crucial component of forward motion on climate change, we must also learn from social movements around the world that are already taking direct action on issues related to climate change. Indigenous peoples in Brazil are taking back their ancestral lands, cutting the non-native and invasive eucalyptus plantations and re-establishing villages. In March 2008, more than 900 women from Via Campesina occupied a eucalyptus plantation and cut down the trees. 800 women and children were violently arrested. Social movements based on small island nations in the Pacific are struggling for the very survival of their peoples. The climate movement must project these voices and stand in solidarity with them. The model of community action at the local level is a key toward solving the climate crisis.

Let's be clear, we cannot buy our way out of this problem. Consuming more “stuff,” even energy efficient stuff, is not the answer. Consuming stuff still requires fossil fuels to mine the resources for the stuff, to manufacture the stuff and to transport the stuff.\(^23\)

The myriad solutions to global warming will come, not from the top down, but from communities identifying bioregionally appropriate and truly sustainable solutions that are both decentralized and recognize the importance of local control and bioregional distinctions.

Mass action around the Copenhagen climate talks is being mobilized by organizations, social movements, Indigenous Peoples organizations, environmental justice groups and grassroots activists from all corners of the globe. A Call to Action was written by more than 100 climate activists from 21 countries at a meeting in Copenhagen in September 2008. It has been translated into 20 languages.\(^24\)

In the U.S., the Mobilization for Climate Justice was formed in the fall of 2008 to organize action to demand real, effective and just solutions to climate change in the build up to the UN Climate talks in Copenhagen in December 2009, and beyond.

You can join this process and stand with the growing legions of people around the world who are joining forces to find real and just solutions to the climate crisis.

“To be symbolically present at the EPA meeting next week is not enough. In fact, it is laughable. We can’t have symbolic resistance while the world is on fire. People are dying. If you are a person of faith, you know that you can’t pray for rain and then turn your back on the people who are literally in the rain. Symbolic resistance must never replace real civil disobedience. You cannot stop war [or climate change—ed.] with a weekend march. We must refuse to comply with the status quo. We be many and they be few and they need us more than we need them.” -- Arundhati Roy

**GET INVOLVED!**

For more information about Global Justice Ecology Project’s Climate/Connections Program, go to [www.globaljusticeecology.org](http://www.globaljusticeecology.org) or email contact@globaljusticeecology.org

To get involved in the growing U.S. Mobilization for Climate Justice, go to [www.actforclimatejustice.org](http://www.actforclimatejustice.org).

\(^{23}\) [http://www.storyofstuff.com/](http://www.storyofstuff.com/)

\(^{24}\) [http://risingtide.org.uk/copenhagen](http://risingtide.org.uk/copenhagen)