

Climate Justice: Racism and Climate Change are Connected

Proposed Principles for Activists and Supporters:

- We are in this together – people of color, indigenous people, and white people – in the U.S. and around the world.
- We seek fundamental transformation of the oppressive system of power and values that places profit, consumption, and growth over human needs, the environment, and the common good - harming all of us and dividing us from each other.
- We commit to advancing and prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion; shifting power to, and backing the leadership of, people of color, indigenous people, and those bearing the greatest burden of climate change.
- We commit ourselves to developing and taking immediate steps as large and radical as necessary to end the damage from climate change, racism, and genocide.
- We seek to ensure our actions against climate change always include redressing the disproportionate burden being borne by people of color and indigenous people and move us toward a more unified, multi-racial movement for climate justice.

To stop climate change we must unite against racism

None of us can achieve the changes we need on our own or remaining siloed in our separate struggles and organizations. We must work in solidarity with communities and causes whose fights require a parallel shift of power and values. (Greed, narrow self-interest, disregard for others, domination and exploitation are the driving forces behind both racism and the despoiling of the planet.) United we will be powerful enough to build the world we want.

To achieve racial justice we must unite against climate change

because climate change, if unchecked, will be the greatest cause of impoverishment, suffering and death of people of color and indigenous people in the remainder of this century.

Springfield Climate Justice Coalition

Here in Western Massachusetts, since 2014 the Springfield Climate Justice Coalition has brought together organizations across the City of Springfield to take on the issues of climate change and environmental justice at the local level, “out of a deep concern for the future of our environment and public health”. Recent major victories include winning agreement to repair over 500 gas leaks in the city and the commitment of the City of Springfield to implement a Climate Action and Resiliency Plan.



Hurricane Harvey

flooded much of Houston, but the flooding was worst in the east end of the city where one Hispanic neighborhood had 9 feet of water. The petrochemical plants, oil refineries and shipping lanes that run adjacent to neighborhoods of color on Houston’s east side spread toxic waste each time the city floods, adding to the woes of those communities. Furthermore, low income families of color have the fewest resources for recovering from such a disaster. Hurricanes may be colorblind, but the effects fall hardest on the most vulnerable.

Facing and Responding to Our History

From the early white settlements, the wealth and prosperity of the United States was built on the genocide and theft of land from the native population, and the labor of enslaved Africans. Any movement that seeks to respect the land, include all people equitably, and prioritize the common good, must face and respond to this history. Because we are organizing in the context of an unjust society with racism, white supremacy, classism and more, in order to make enduring change we must ensure that our actions do not reinforce these injustices, but help to dismantle them.



Climate Debt

The developed nations have used up far more than their fair share of the atmosphere's capacity to safely hold carbon emissions. Over time the U.S. has emitted more carbon than any other nation. Now developing nations must deal with the effects of climate change and pursue economic development without the benefit of fossil fuels, using more costly alternative energies and sustainable practices. Fairness requires that developed nations help pay for the increased costs to developing nations. The payment of this "climate debt" is necessary in order to reduce greenhouse gases in the planet's atmosphere. Developed nations set a goal of paying \$100 billion a year in climate debt by 2020, but the US is not funding this commitment. Racism in the U.S. is the biggest obstacle to our nation paying its fair share.

In the U.S. and worldwide, people of color and indigenous people are already disproportionately affected by climate change (despite having done the least to cause it).

Droughts, floods, and changing temperatures are disrupting subsistence agriculture in many parts of the developing world, resulting in increasing hunger and starvation. West Nile virus, Dengue, Ebola, Zika are all spreading in Africa and/or Latin America (and to the US) as a result of changing temperatures and rainfall patterns. Rising sea levels are already making some islands and low-lying areas uninhabitable (including in Louisiana). An average of 26.4 million people per year are now displaced from their homes by catastrophic weather events, mostly in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

To connect with a working group on Racism & Climate Connections or for more information:
Coming Together: Understanding Racism, Working for Justice & Building Connections
coming-together@coming-together.org