



Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change

As communities-of-color, Indigenous Peoples, and low-income communities, the Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change calls on federal lawmakers and the new president to enact a suite of policies to address Climate Change as an immediate priority. These policies must be just, fair, sustainable and equitable. It is clear that in Congress a cap and trade mechanism has emerged as the leading approach to addressing the Climate Change Crisis. Our nation must do better than creating a stock market that commodifies pollution and continues to trade our health and environment for profit.

Climate change is the most significant social and political challenge of the 21st Century, and the time to act is now. In our post hurricanes Katrina and Rita era, we continue to bear witness to an increase in the number of severe weather events impacting communities in the United States. Whether it is the mighty Mississippi River rising along the shores of the Midwest, or the melting permafrost creating displacement in the Arctic, out-of-season record-breaking tornadoes in Mississippi and Kentucky, the burning hills in Sacramento and San Diego or the droughts experienced in Georgia, Tennessee and Alabama, all of these events can be linked in some way to climate change.

Vulnerable communities, even in the most prosperous nations, will be the first and worst hit, as has been confirmed by the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. In the U.S. context this includes communities-of-color, Indigenous Peoples, and low-income communities that are socio-economically disadvantaged, disproportionately burdened by poor environmental quality and are least able to adapt.

The scientific debate on climate change has shifted from uncertainty about the drivers of this phenomenon to clear confidence that human activity, specifically the fossil-fuel carbon intensive way we power our modern economy, is a central culprit or accelerant in the changes in the climate or what we call global warming. Scientists and policymakers concur that climate change and global warming will result in far-ranging effects on human health, and indeed sociopolitical and economic stability. Evidence of these impacts are documented by the World Health Organization that reports tens of thousands have been displaced in developed countries by the recent severe weather events.

The history of this country is one of struggles to achieve equity, justice and opportunity. Each generation has faced this political challenge. In this moment we are confronted with the real possibility of climate change stealing the American ideal of opportunity from not just the low-income American, not just Indigenous Peoples, not just the person-of-color in America, but all Americans. The Environmental Justice Forum on Climate Change calls on Congress to develop policies to combat climate change that:

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PRINCIPLES OF CLIMATE JUSTICE

1. **Establish** a zero carbon economy and achieve this by limiting and reducing greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with the levels advocated by the scientific community (25% by 2020 and 80% by 2050) through mechanisms that are controlled by the public sector, generate revenue, are transparent, easily understandable by all, can be set-up quickly and have a track record of improving environmental quality;
2. **Protect** all of America's people - regardless of race, gender, nationality, or socioeconomic status - and their communities equally from the environmental, health and social impacts of climate change. Ensure that any solutions implemented to respond to or mitigate climate change do not violate human or environmental rights;
3. **Ensure** that carbon reduction strategies do not negatively impact public health and do not further exacerbate existing health disparities among communities. This includes crafting strategies that prevent the creation of pollution hotspots, eliminate existing emissions hotspots in vulnerable communities, and reduce the emissions of greenhouse gas co-pollutants in and near communities-of-color, Indigenous, and low-income communities;
4. **Require** those most responsible for creating the impacts that arise from climate change to bear the proportionate cost of responding to the resulting economic, social and environmental crisis. In setting the proportionate cost of climate impacting activity, the full environmental, health, social and economic cost of energy use from extraction to disposal must be included to accurately reflect the cost that energy use has on our environment, our health and our communities;
5. **Develop** a national goal supported by legislatively dedicated resources to transition us from the fossil fuel economy to the green, clean renewable energy economy by 2020;
6. **Position** the public sector to be a catalyst for change in the transition to the green, clean renewable energy economy by dedicating some of the revenues generated by carbon reduction strategies to support green clean renewable energy initiatives;
7. **Create** the opportunity for all Americans, especially people-of-color, Indigenous Peoples and low-income Americans, to experience a just transition as well as participate in the creation and operation of a new green economy by creating a workforce development program to grow living-wage, clean, safe, green jobs in the energy sector and beyond;
8. **Provide** an economic and social safety net for low-income, people-of-color, Indigenous Peoples and those vulnerable in the middle-income from the structural adjustments in the economy as we transition from the pollution generating fossil fuel economy to the green, clean and renewable economy;
9. **Ensure** that the green economy has enough jobs for those who need to be retrained and those who historically have been chronically underemployed, unemployed and/or excluded from unions; and
10. **Ensure** that people-of-color, Indigenous Peoples and low-income communities, who are and continue to be disproportionately impacted by climate change, have the inalienable right to have our voices shape what is the most significant policy debate of the 21st Century.

The Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change believes that climate change policies that incorporate these principles are the way forward for the United States of America to restore our credibility nationally and globally on the issue of climate change while preserving the livelihood, health and safety of all Americans.