

Building the Movement for Climate Justice in Canada

Climate change is real. Action is urgent.

Scientists agree that climate change is human-induced and is causing more intense storms, heat waves and droughts. In spite of some successful policies in some countries, many governments are falling behind in addressing what is being called the most serious crisis humanity has ever faced.

The Growing Movement for Climate Justice

A vibrant global movement for climate justice is animating a transition to a fossil-free future. This movement recognizes the interconnectedness of struggles for human rights and social, economic and ecological justice. It is about transformation toward equitable economies and societies in harmony with nature. The climate justice movement is diverse, ranging from community-based engagement to mobilization demanding national and international action.

UN Climate talks: an equitable climate deal?

The climate crisis is universal in scope. For many years, UN talks have focused on seeking international agreements to address this crisis. The Kyoto Protocol emerged from these talks.

Bali Principles for Climate Justice

The Bali Principles for Climate Justice, developed by a network of international organizations in 2002, are an important guide. They affirm, among other principles, that:

- ♦ governments are responsible for addressing climate change in a manner that is both democratically accountable to their people and in accordance with the principle of common, but differentiated, responsibilities; and
- ♦ the rights of Indigenous Peoples and affected communities to represent and speak for themselves.

Climate justice and the UN climate talks

Many, including climate justice organizers, attend UN talks to lobby negotiators for better results. Others use the opportunity to mobilize and take action through street demonstrations and alternative conferences.

A number of climate justice organizations are critical of these talks because of the failure of global North countries to commit to binding domestic emission reduction cuts.

These countries also put a priority on mechanisms such as carbon trading and the use of carbon offsets, allowing the global North to avoid repaying its climate debt and putting the burden of emission reductions on the global South.

The 2009 UN Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen was a dismal failure in planning for next steps after the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012. Several Southern countries rejected the so-called “Copenhagen Accord,” negotiated behind closed doors by just 26 countries, as undemocratic and totally inadequate. While the 2010 Cancun climate talks kept the Kyoto Protocol alive, there were no commitments to new binding emission reduction targets.

Even if all the countries, including Canada, were to meet their pledged targets under the Copenhagen Accord, global temperatures would still rise by nearly 4 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Consequences include:

- droughts that will imperil prairie farmers and our food supplies;
- billions of people suffering water shortages due to disappearing glaciers;
- melting polar ice caps causing sea levels to rise several metres, displacing over 100 million people.

Cochabamba Conference: a pivotal moment for the climate justice movement

In response to the failure of the Copenhagen conference, Bolivia convened the *World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth* in Cochabamba in April 2010. More than 35,000 people participated, including a strong representation of Indigenous and Global South voices – people who are disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis.

A number of Canadian organizations and unions participated, joining the varied workshops and working groups. This participatory process informed the final conference document, the “Peoples’ Agreement” or “Cochabamba Accord.” This agreement features a call to repay the climate debt while rejecting carbon trading and carbon offsets – market mechanisms that supposedly contribute to emission reductions but in fact allow ‘business as usual’ climate-polluting practices to continue in the global North. It affirmed the importance of solutions such as local sustainable agriculture, public- and community-owned renewable energy and alternative global mechanisms such as a financial transaction tax. The Cochabamba Accord continues to be an inspiring and rallying document for climate justice organizations.

Buen Vivir

People attending the Cochabamba conference drew inspiration from the Andean Indigenous peoples’ vision of “*buen vivir*,” i.e., “living well” in harmony with Mother Earth. For all peoples to live well we must preserve life-sustaining clean water, clean air, fertile soils and end climate change. Living well presupposes the provision of the necessities of life, but rejects an endless race for economic growth at the expense of other humans and other species.

Canada Headed in the Wrong Direction

Canada is quickly earning a failing reputation when it comes to addressing climate change. Reasons include:

- ♦ walking away from our Kyoto Protocol emission reduction commitments;
- ♦ failing to meaningfully reduce and regulate the fastest growing source of emissions in Canada – the tar sands in Alberta – while lobbying against climate policies in the U.S. and Europe that oppose expansion of the tar sands;
- ♦ federal funding cuts to an important renewable energy programme and cutting 11 percent of Environment Canada’s workforce, including meteorologists, scientists, chemists and engineers.

Climate debt repayment

The repayment of climate, or ecological, debt is a fundamental principle of climate justice. With less than one-fifth of the world’s population, the global North is responsible for emitting more than two-thirds of historic greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere that is shared by all life forms. Meanwhile the global South is being hit first and hardest by the ecological and social impacts of climate change. Climate debt makes it imperative for global North countries to make deeper domestic emission cuts and pay the bill for addressing climate change in the global South.

I want climate justice!

Are you ready to help build the movement for climate justice in Canada? Check out our websites for campaign news, updates and information on how to get involved.



Canadians want action

Inspired by the Cochabamba conference, a number of Canadian groups, commissioned an Environics Research poll on key conference themes, discovering that:

- ♦ 87% of Canadians strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement: “Industrialized countries which have historically produced the most greenhouse gas emissions, should be the most responsible for reducing current emissions.”
- ♦ 85% of Canadians agreed with the statement: “The root cause of climate change is too much focus on economic growth and consumerism. We need to have an economy that is in harmony with nature, which recognizes and respects the planet.”
- ♦ 83% of Canadians agreed with the statement that: “The Canadian government should invest in green jobs and have transition programmes for workers and communities negatively affected by a shift away from reliance on fossil.” fuels.”

The telephone poll of 1,000 Canadians conducted October 27 to November 1 2010 has a margin of error of +/- 3.10%, 19 times out of 20.