

# System Change, Not Climate Change

A People's Declaration from Klimaforum09

## 1. Preamble

There are solutions to the climate crisis. What people and the planet need is a just and sustainable transition of our societies to a form that will ensure the rights of life and dignity of all people and deliver a more fertile planet and more fulfilling lives to present and future generations. A transition based on democratic principles of solidarity, especially for the most vulnerable, non-discrimination, gender equality, equity, and sustainability, acknowledging that we are part of nature, which we love and respect. To address the climate crisis, however, awareness creation and determined actions adhering to a rights-based framework are required. The nations have an obligation to cooperate internationally to ensure respect for human rights everywhere in the world according to the Charter of the United Nations.

We, participating peoples, communities, and all organizations at the Klimaforum09 in Copenhagen, call upon every person, organization, government, and institution, including the United Nations (UN), to contribute to this necessary transition. It will be a challenging task. The crisis of today has economic, social, environmental, geopolitical, and ideological aspects interacting with and enforcing each other as well as the climate crisis. This very moment of conjunction of crises—climate, energy, financial, food, and water, among others—urges us to unite and transform the dominant social and economic system as well as global governance, which blocks necessary solutions to the climate crisis. For this reason, a movement from below is called upon to act now.

Environmental and climate debts must be paid. No false, dangerous, and short-term solutions should be promoted and adopted, such as nuclear power, agro-fuels, offsetting, carbon capture and storage (CCS), biochar, geo-engineering, and carbon trading. Instead we should implement a truly sustainable transition built on clean, safe, and renewable resources and energy conservation. We welcome alliances across social movements and sectors, representing all ages, genders, ethnicities, faiths, communities, and nationalities.

We want to take the future into our own hands by building a strong and popular movement of youth, women, men, workers, peasants, fisher folks, indigenous peoples, people of color, urban, and rural social groups, which is able to act on all levels of society to deal with environmental degradation and climate change. We call for a new international economic order and support a strong and democratic UN as opposed to G8, G20 or other closed groups of powerful countries.

## 2. The challenge, as we see it:

The concentration of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere is already so high that the climate system has been brought out of balance. The CO<sub>2</sub> concentration and global temperatures have increased more rapidly in the last 50 years and will rise even faster in the coming decades. This adds to a multitude of other serious ecological imbalances, the impacts of which threaten the lives and livelihoods of the people of the world, most acutely, the impoverished people and other vulnerable groups. The imbalance of the climate system leads to greater and more frequent extremes of heat and rainfall patterns, tropical cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons, extreme flooding and droughts,

loss of biodiversity, landslides, rising sea levels, shortage of drinking water, shorter growing seasons, lower yields, lost or deteriorated agricultural land, decreased agricultural production, losses of livestock, extinction of ecosystems, diminished fish stocks, among others. These phenomena are resulting in food crisis, famine, illness, death, displacement, and the extinction of sustainable ways of life. Interacting with this is the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), monoculture farming, and industrialized agriculture strongly promoted by corporations that seriously threaten the stability and diversity of ecosystems. This also marginalizes and impoverishes small-scale farmers and undermines food sovereignty. Corporate-controlled agriculture is geared to meet global demand for overconsumption, especially in the North, rather than for local basic needs. The same can be said about modern industrial fisheries, intensive forestry, and mining, which destroy ecosystems, diminishes biodiversity and destroys the life and livelihoods of local communities.

These effects of climate change together with growing social inequalities and severe impacts on our common environment are already devastating the lives of millions of people as well as their local communities. However, we—the people—are not prepared to accept this fact as our fate. That is why there are fast-growing popular movements determined to defend their livelihoods and stand up against those forces and causes which have led us on to this ultimately suicidal route of environmental destruction.

In Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Oceania, and South and Central America, as well as the periphery of North America and Europe, popular movements are rising to confront the exploitation of their land by foreign interests and to regain control over their own resources. A new type of activism has revitalized the environmental movements, leading to a wide variety of protests and actions against mining, big dams, deforestation, coal-fired power plants, air travel, and the building of new roads, among others. There is a growing awareness about the need to change the present economic paradigm in a very fundamental way.

Among various movements, alternative ways of life are proliferating. At the same time it is becoming evident to the public that the present holders of power are unwilling to face and deal with the threats of climate change and environmental degradation. The so-called strategy of “green growth” or “sustainable growth” has turned out to be an excuse for pursuing the same basic model of economic development that is one of the root causes of environmental destruction and the climate crisis.

### **3. The causes, as we see them:**

The immediate and primary cause of human-induced climate change is an unprecedented emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs) into the atmosphere originating from the increasing burning of fossil fuels from industry, commerce, transport, and military purposes, to mention a few but significant sources. Other important drivers of climate change are deforestation, extractive industries, forest degradation—excluding indigenous people’s sustainable practice of shifting cultivations—disturbance of the water cycle, expanding areas through land grabbing for industrial agriculture, increased industrial meat production, and other types of unsustainable uses of natural resources.

#### ***Uneven control and ownership over resources***

These immediate causes are the result of an unsustainable global economic system built on unequal access to and control over the planet's limited resources and the benefits that accrue from their use. This system is premised on the appropriation of local, national, and planetary commons by local and global elites. What has been praised as great strides in technology, production, and human progress has in fact precipitated global ecological and development disasters. Still, a privileged global elite engages in reckless profit-driven production and grossly excessive consumption, while a very large proportion of humanity is mired in poverty with merely survival and subsistence consumption, or even less. This is the situation not only in countries of the South but also in the North. The world's largest transnational corporations (TNCs) based mainly in the northern countries and tax havens, but with expanding operations, have long been at the forefront of these excesses.

The competition among global corporations and rich nations for resources and greater market shares, as well as trade agreements and treaties, have led to a neocolonial suppression of southern peoples, denying them rightful ownership and control of their resources. The World Trade Organization (WTO) and international financial institutions, as well as the European Union (E.U.) and United States (U.S.) using bilateral trade agreements, are increasing the privatization and commoditization of public resources, intensifying the plunder of natural resources of underdeveloped countries and imposing conditions that increase their dependence.

### ***Prevailing patterns of thought and alternatives***

The development model promoted by these institutions is not only a question of "economics." The prevailing economic paradigm is strongly related to the system of thought, which is based on an imagination of the human being as "economic man." This ideology is reinforced by corporate media and marketing firms which promote egoism, competition, material consumption and boundless accumulation of private wealth in utter disregard of the social and ecological consequences of such behavior. This system of thought is intimately intertwined with patterns of patriarchy and paternalism.

If we really want to address this crisis, we need to recognize that the human species is part of both nature and society and cannot exist without either. Therefore if humanity is to survive, we need to respect the integrity of Mother Earth and strive for harmony with nature and for peace within and between cultures.

We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live according to the principle of "One among many."

## **4. A just and sustainable transition**

It is clear that solving the climate crisis requires far-reaching transformations, which are currently excluded from the agenda of policy-makers in governments and multilateral institutions. People are calling for system change, not "business-as-usual" and the uncritical use of technology and market fixes along which powerful interests have set and confined the climate agenda.

People's movements are not lacking alternative visions for society and concrete steps that must be taken in order to move towards a sustainable future while addressing the climate, water, food, and

economic crises at the same time. Such a sustainable transition will begin by many different initiatives. Some of these steps towards sustainable transition are:

- **Food sovereignty and ecological agriculture:** Uphold the rights of people, communities, and countries to determine their own systems of production including farming, fishing, food, forestry, and land policies, which are ecologically, socially, economically, and culturally appropriate to the circumstances. People's—especially women's access to and control over productive resources such as land, seeds, and water—must be respected and guaranteed. Agricultural production must rely principally on local knowledge, appropriate technology, and ecologically sustainable techniques that bind CO<sub>2</sub> in the diverse and native plant systems, bind water, and return more nutrients to the soil than were taken out. Food and agricultural production must be primarily geared towards meeting local needs, encouraging self-sufficiency, promoting local employment, and minimizing resource use, waste, and GHG emissions in the process.
- **Democratic ownership and control of economy:** The reorganization of society's productive units around more democratic forms of ownership and management in order to meet people's basic needs such as employment-creation, access to water, housing, land, health care and education, food sovereignty, and ecological sustainability. Public policy must make sure that the financial system serves public interests and channel resources for the sustainable transformation of industry, agriculture, and services.
- **Energy sovereignty:** A dramatic reduction of energy consumption, especially in the unjustly enriched countries, combined with a blend of renewable and public energy sources such as solar, wind, geothermal, mini-hydro, wave, and the development of off-the-grid electricity distribution to secure energy supplies to communities, and public ownership of the grid.
- **Ecological planning of urban and rural zones:** The aim is a radical reduction in the inputs of energy and resources and the outputs of waste and pollution while encouraging locally based supply of basic needs of the citizens. An urban and rural planning built on social justice and equal service to all, reducing the need for transport. Promoting public transport systems such as light and high-speed rail systems and bicycles, reducing the need for private motor vehicles, thus decongesting the roads, improving health, and reducing energy consumption.
- **Education, science and cultural institutions:** Re-orientate public research and education to meet the needs of people and the environment rather than the present bias for developing commercially profitable and proprietary technologies. Research and development should be primarily an open and collaborative endeavor in the common interest of humankind, and eliminate patents on ideas and technology. Fair and just exchange of appropriate technologies, traditional knowledge and indigenous innovative practices, and ideas between countries should be encouraged.
- **End to militarism and wars:** The present fossil fuel-based development model leads to violence, war, and military conflict over control of energy, land, water, and other natural resources. This is demonstrated by the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq and

Afghanistan, militarization across the globe in regions rich in fossil fuels and other natural resources. Peasants and indigenous communities are also being violently displaced from their lands to make way for agrofuel plantations. Trillions of dollars are spent on the military-industrial complex, wasting enormous material and human resources, which should instead be devoted to implementing a sustainable transition.

By taking steps forward we can learn by doing. These steps will help us to convince the broad majority of people that a sustainable transition entails the promise of a more fulfilling and good life. The social, political, economic, and environmental fields are closely interrelated. A coherent strategy must therefore address them all, which indeed is the central idea behind the concept of sustainable transition.

One aspect of this concept is the restoration of local communities rather than the global market as a basic social, political, and economic unit. Social cohesion, democratic participation, economic accountability, and ecological responsibility can only be accomplished by restoring decision-making at the lowest appropriate level. This is a basic lesson we have learned from ethnic cultures and local communities.

A community-based approach does not, however, contradict the need for extensive international cooperation. On the contrary, it will need stronger alliances within and across all borders between direct producers in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and industry. Alliances also built on the strength of gender equality and on recognizing and overcoming unjust power relations at all levels. It also includes the need for stronger regional and international cooperative arrangements to manage common and shared resources, such as cross-border water resources. Furthermore, international cooperation will promote the full mutual exchange of ideas, technologies and expertise across all boundaries as well as engage in an open-minded dialogue between different cultures based on mutual respect.

## **5. Paths to transition**

Many people are involved in the practical creation of more sustainable industry, agriculture, forestry, and fishery as well as in the renewable energy sector. These initiatives within the system have furthermore created alliances with other sectors of society, trade unions, consumers, city dwellers, teachers, and researchers, all of whom are striving towards sustainable ways of life.

### ***United Nations (UN) and Conference of Parties (COP)***

We need to address the UN negotiations on Climate Change and the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (COP15) on the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The lessons from previous rounds of negotiations are not very promising. Despite the high-profile schemes for concerted action launched first at the 1992 Framework Convention on Climate Change in Rio de Janeiro and later in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, results are meager, and the problems have not been solved. Indeed, it has worsened as the principles, targets, and the timelines of both the Convention and the Protocol have made little headway.

The same big corporate interests that are largely responsible for causing the climate crisis appear to have immense influence on climate policies at the national and global level. We strongly oppose this undemocratic influence of corporate lobbyism in the current COP-negotiations. Contrary to this, we

call on states to put in place an appraisal mechanism for all policies and policy instruments under the UNFCCC, to ensure inclusive and deliberative multi-stakeholder processes that repair existing inequalities whether based on gender, color, age, disability, or other forms of discrimination in the COP-negotiations.

We demand of COP15 to reach an agreement that will initiate the restoration of the environmental, social and economic balance of planet Earth by means that are environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable and equitable, and finally come up with a legally binding treaty.

### **Our demands**

We are raising our voices to the leaders in the UNFCCC to put forward the people's demands and alternatives.

1. Phasing out fossil fuel: We call for a clear strategy for dismantling the fossil fuel era within the next 30 years, which must include specific milestones for every five-year period. We demand an immediate cut in GHG emissions by industrialized countries of at least 40 percent of 1990 levels by 2020.
2. Reparations and compensation for Climate Debt and crimes: We demand full reparations for southern countries and those impoverished by northern states, TNCs, and tax-haven institutions. By this, we partly address historical injustices associated with inequitable industrialization and climate change, originating in the genocide of indigenous nations, transatlantic slave trade, colonial era and invasions. This must be accompanied by an equally clear strategy for compensating impoverished people for the climate and broader ecological debt owed by the enriched. A global and democratic fund should be established to give direct support to the victims of climate change. Developed countries must provide new, mandatory, adequate, and reliable financing and patent-free technologies to better adapt to adverse climate impacts and undertake emission reductions. This would allow developing countries to play their part in curbing climate change while still meeting the needs and aspirations of their people. International financial institutions, donor agencies, and trade mechanisms should have no part in reparations.
3. An immediate global ban on deforestation of primary forests and the parallel initiation of an ambitious global tree-planting program based on native and diverse species in partnership with indigenous peoples and forest-dependent communities: Similarly a ban on large-scale industrialized fishing methods and a return to primarily local and sustainable fishing practices. Finally, a ban on land grabbing by foreign interests and the full acceptance of people's sovereignty over natural resources.
4. We express strong opposition to purely market-oriented and technology-centered false and dangerous solutions put forward by many corporations, governments, and international financial institutions. These include nuclear energy, agro-fuels, carbon capture and storage, Clean Development Mechanisms, biochar, genetically "climate-readied" crops, geoengineering, and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation as it is in the UNFCCC definition (REDD), which only produce new environmental threats without really solving the climate crisis. Carbon trading and offsetting are also false and unjust instruments because they treat a common planetary resource—the atmosphere—as a commodity that can be owned and traded. So far the

system has not proven its merits, and by allowing rich countries to offset their reduction obligations, it has maintained this unjust and unsustainable system.

5. Equitable tax on carbon emissions: Instead of the regime of tradable emission quotas, we demand an equitable tax on carbon emissions. Revenues from this carbon tax should be returned equitably to people, and a portion should be used to compensate and contribute to finance adaptation and mitigation. This is, however, not a substitute for repayment of already accumulated climate debt. This compensation and funding should be unconditional and free of market mechanisms and financial institutions. Reduction of emissions must be strongly encouraged by a briskly-increasing, transparent carbon tax, in addition to direct regulations to drive the phase-out of fossil fuels while enabling safe, clean, and renewable energy.

6. Multilateral institutions and TNCs: Unjust, unsustainable and unaccountable global economic and financial institutions like the WTO, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), regional development banks, donor institutions, and trade agreements should be replaced by democratic and equitable institutions functioning in accordance with the United Nations Charter to respect people's sovereignty over resources and promote solidarity between people and nations. A mechanism for strict surveillance and control of the operations of TNCs should be created as well.

Finally, we commit ourselves to a full and active involvement in carrying out sustainable transitions of our societies along the lines put forward in this Declaration.

## **6. A global movement for sustainable transition**

Irrespective of the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change, there is an urgent need to build a global movement of movements dedicated to the long-term task of promoting a sustainable transition of our societies. Contrary to the prevailing power structures, this movement must grow from the bottom and up. What is needed is a broad alliance of environmental movements, social movements, trade unions, farmers, and other aligned parties that can work together in everyday political struggle on the local as well as national and international level. Such an alliance entails at the same time the creation of a new mindset and new types of social activism and must be capable not only of reacting to unsustainable practices, but also showing by example how a new sustainable economy can indeed function.

We, participating peoples, communities, and social organizations at Klimaforum09 are all committed to build on the results achieved at this event in the further development of a global movement of movements.

This Declaration aims to inspire the further development of such a movement by pointing to the general direction in which we choose to move. Together, we can make global transitions to a sustainable future. Join us.