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Radical new agenda needed to achieve climate justice

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Members of Climate Justice Now! - a worldwide alliance of more than 160 organisations — have been in Poznan for the past two weeks closely following developments in the UN climate negotiations.

This statement is our assessment of the Conference of Parties (COP) 14, and articulates our principles for achieving climate justice.

THE URGENCY OF CLIMATE JUSTICE

We will not be able to stop climate change if we don't change the neo-liberal and corporate-based economy which stops us from achieving sustainable societies. Corporate globalisation must be stopped.

The historical responsibility for the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions lies with the industrialised countries of the North. Even though the primary responsibility of the North to reduce emissions has been recognised in the Convention, their production and consumption habits continue to threaten the survival of humanity and biodiversity. It is imperative that the North urgently shifts to a low carbon economy. At the same time in order to avoid the damaging carbon intensive model of industrialisation, the South is entitled to resources and technology to make this transition.

We believe that any 'shared vision' on addressing the climate crisis must start with climate justice and with a radical re-thinking of the dominant development model.

Indigenous Peoples, peasant communities, fisherfolk, and especially women in these communities, have been living harmoniously and sustainably with the Earth for millennia. They are not only the most affected by climate change, but also its false solutions, such as agrofuels, mega-dams, genetic modification, tree plantations and carbon offset schemes. Instead of market led schemes, their sustainable practices should be seen as offering the real solutions to climate change.

UNFCCC IN CRISIS

Governments and international institutions have to recognise that the Kyoto mechanisms have failed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The principles of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) - common but differentiated responsibilities, inter-generational equity, and polluter pays — have been undermined in favour of market mechanisms. The three main pillars of the Kyoto agreement — the clean development mechanism, joint implementation and emissions trading schemes — have been completely ineffective in reducing emissions, yet they continue to be at the center of the negotiations.

Kyoto is based on carbon-trading mechanisms which allow Northern countries to continue business as usual by paying for “clean development” projects in developing and transition countries. This is a scheme designed deliberately to allow polluters to avoid reducing emissions domestically. Clean development mechanism projects, which are supposed to support “sustainable development”, include infrastructure projects such as big dams and coal-fired power plants, and monoculture tree plantations. Not only do these projects fail to reduce carbon emissions, they accelerate the privatisation and corporate take-over of the natural world, at the expense of local communities and Indigenous Peoples.

Proposals on the table in Poznan are heading in the same direction.

In the current negotiations, industrialised countries continue to act on the basis of self-interest, using all their negotiating tactics to avoid their obligations to reduce carbon emissions, to finance adaptation and mitigation and transfer technology to the South.

In their pursuit of growth at any cost, many Southern governments at the talks are trading away the rights of their peoples and resources. We remind them that a climate agreement is not a trade agreement.

The main protagonists for climate stability – Indigenous Peoples, women, peasant and family farmers, fisherfolk, forest dependent communities, youth, and marginalised and affected communities in the global South and North, are systematically excluded. Despite repeated demands, Indigenous Peoples are not recognised as an official party to the negotiations. Neither are women’s voices and gender considerations recognised and included in the process.

At the same time, private investors are circling the talks like vultures, swooping in on every opportunity for creating new profits. Business and corporate lobbyists expanded their influence and monopolized conference space at Poznan. At least 1500 industry lobbyists were present either as NGOs or as members of government delegations.

The Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) scheme could create the climate regime’s largest ever loophole, giving Northern polluters yet another opportunity to buy their way out of emissions reductions. With no mention of biodiversity or Indigenous Peoples’ rights, this scheme might give a huge incentive for countries to sell off their forests, expel Indigenous and peasant communities, and transform forests into tree plantations under corporate-control. Plantations are not forests. Privatisation and dispossession through REDD or any other mechanisms must be stopped.

The World Bank is attempting to carve a niche in the international climate change regime. This is unacceptable as the Bank continues to fund polluting industries and drive deforestation by promoting industrial logging and agrofuels. The Bank’s recently launched Climate Investment Funds goes against government initiatives at the UN and promotes dirty industries such as coal, while forcing developing countries into the fundamentally unequal aid framework of donor and recipient. The World Bank Forest Carbon Partnership Facility aiming to finance REDD through a forest carbon mechanism serves the interest of private companies and opens the path for commodification of forests.

These developments are to be expected. Market ideology has totally infiltrated the climate talks, and the UNFCCC negotiations are now like trade fairs hawking investment opportunities.

THE REAL SOLUTIONS

Solutions to the climate crisis will not come from industrialised countries and big business. Effective

and enduring solutions will come from those who have protected the environment - Indigenous Peoples, women, peasant and family farmers, fisherfolk, forest dependent communities, youth and marginalised and affected communities in the global South and North. These include:

- Achieving low carbon economies, without resorting to offsetting and false solutions such as nuclear energy and “clean coal”, while protecting the rights of those affected by the transition, especially workers.
- Keeping fossil fuels in the ground.
- Implementing people’s food and energy sovereignty.
- Guaranteeing community control of natural resources.
- Re-localisation of production and consumption, prioritising local markets
- Full recognition of Indigenous Peoples, peasant and local community rights,
- Democratically controlled clean renewable energy.
- Rights based resource conservation that enforces indigenous land rights and promotes peoples sovereignty and public ownership over energy, forests, seeds, land and water
- Ending deforestation and its underlying causes.
- Ending excessive consumption by elites in the North and in the South.
- Massive investment in public transport
- Ensuring gender justice by recognising existing gender injustices and involving women in decision making.
- Cancelling illegitimate debts claimed by northern governments and IFIs. The illegitimacy of these debts is underscored by the much greater historical, social and ecological debts owed to people of the South.

We stand at the crossroads. We call for a radical change in direction to put climate justice and people’s rights at the centre of these negotiations.

In the lead-up to the 2009 COP 15 at Copenhagen and beyond, the Climate Justice Now! alliance will continue to monitor governments and to mobilise social forces from the south and the north to achieve climate justice.