

Final Conclusions working group 8: Climate Debt

April 30, 2010 in [08. Climate Debt, Working Groups](#)

We, the people attending the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba, Bolivia, demand to the countries that have over-consumed the atmospheric space to acknowledge their historic and current responsibilities for the causes and adverse effects of climate change, and to honor their climate debts to developing countries, to vulnerable communities in their own countries, to our children's children and to all living beings in our shared home – Mother Earth. Climate change threatens the balance of life on Earth. The poor have contributed least to the climate crisis but are its first and worst victims. At greatest risk are small island states, coastal ecosystems, and vulnerable groups; among which are women, children, elders, indigenous peoples, rural and urban communities, small-scale farmers, fisherfolk and forest communities, youth, biodiversity and future generations and other groups.

The causes of climate change are clear. Developed countries have appropriated the Earth's atmospheric space by emitting the vast majority of historical greenhouse gas emissions, while they only represent 20% of the world's population. Their excessive consumption, lifestyles and emissions have induced climate change, and are turning the Earth's capacity to absorb greenhouse gases into a scarce and limited resource.

The way to solve the climate crisis in a fair, effective and scientifically sound way is to honor climate debts. This approach provides a methodology for assigning and sharing responsibilities to address climate change based on principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities established in the UN Climate Convention.

It focuses not merely on financial compensation, but on restorative justice – on “making whole” those people and members of the community of life on Earth that are adversely affected by climate change, and by restoring the balance, integrity and harmony of the Earth and its climate system.

It provides a means by which all peoples – particularly those who are mainly responsible for causing climate change and with the capacity to correct it – can honor their historical and current responsibilities, as part of a common effort to address a common cause. Ultimately, the compensation of climate debt is about keeping all of us safe

As the starting point for climate justice, those who are the main cause of climate change must embrace and address their responsibilities. Developed countries must address their climate debt in all its dimensions as the basis of a fair, effective and scientifically sound solution to climate change. We therefore demand that they:

- Return the atmospheric space that is occupied by their greenhouse gas emissions causing adverse effects to all countries and peoples. They must decolonize the atmosphere by

reducing and removing their emissions, to ensure a fair distribution of atmospheric space among all countries according to their population, taking into account both historical and current emissions and the need for adequate development space and equilibrium with Mother Earth.

- Honor debts reflecting the loss of development opportunities due to the costs and technological demands to developing countries to live within a restricted atmospheric space. Even in the case of the deepest possible emission reductions and removals by rich countries, poor countries will face climate-related challenges to their development that were not faced by the developed countries in the process of their own development.
- Honor debts relating to the adverse effects of climate change, to the hundreds of millions of people who will be forced to migrate due to the loss of livelihoods, floods, fires, famines and other adverse effects. They must assume their responsibilities to these people, by eliminating their restrictive migration policies and offering climate migrants homes and lives with dignity in their countries.
- Honor adaptation debts related to the impacts of climate change within developing countries – including impacts on water, forests, agriculture and on peoples lives and livelihoods. They must provide the means required by all people – including indigenous peoples, women, rural communities and other vulnerable communities – to prevent and minimize harms, and they must address their responsibilities for the damages arising from their excessive emissions and from the lost opportunities of people to “live well” and in harmony with nature.
- Honor these debts as part of a broader ecological debt to Mother Earth, reflecting the growing damage to the integrity, balance and harmony of life and all species and elements of our planet. We call on all countries to accept and implement at the United Nations a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth.

The responsibility to honor these climate debts belongs to the governments and States of the developed countries, which bear the collective responsibility of those who have traditionally exploited poor countries, and whose patterns of production and excessive consumption, reliance on fossil fuels, and ideologies of unlimited economic growth and militarization are the main cause for climate change. They also have the practical capacity and moral and legal responsibility to honor their climate debt and to restore equilibrium and harmony. Other entities, such as transnational corporations and financial speculators, also bear responsibility to compensate for the disasters that they provoked. All countries and people must take their responsibility to live in harmony with Mother Earth.

To fulfill their responsibilities we call on the developed countries to:

- Rapidly and radically reduce and remove their greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, to ensure the equitable allocation of atmospheric space and restore balance to Mother Earth;
- To implement fast-acting mitigation strategies to restore the atmospheric space, including the reduction of short-lived emissions, to reduce the risk of reaching tipping points, which put the entire climate system of the planet in risk of abrupt climate changes that could potentially run out of control.
- To provide the means required by developing countries to facilitate adequate responses to climate change and to meet the costs its adverse effects;

- To develop and provide appropriate technologies and knowledge to improve local technologies and capacities. Also to remove barriers such as intellectual property rights;
- To provide additional unconditional financial resources to enable technology transfer, capacity building and adaptation in developing countries;
- To alter their domestic policies, including those related to migration;
- To protect and preserve human rights, the rights of indigenous peoples and of Mother Earth;
- To review structural relations causing climate change, by altering their patterns of life and development, immediately cancelling external debt, stopping the production of armaments, shifting from fossil energy to renewable energy, and changing the international financial, economic and social systems that perpetuate these patterns;
- To undertake all necessary actions to address their historical and current responsibilities for the climate crisis in a holistic manner.

We reject the so called “Copenhagen Accord”, which was negotiated behind the back of the Conference, as it fails to provide real solutions to the climate crisis. The proponents of this “Accord” offer inadequate pledges for mitigation and financing and seek to eliminate the commitment undertaken in the Kyoto Protocol, putting in danger the existence human species and Mother Earth.

An effective effort to solve the common challenge of climate change must be based on equity, social justice, science, and ancestral knowledge and know-how, as well as the agreed principles and legal commitments. Our attention must focus on solutions – identifying the responsibilities and specific actions required to address climate change. Success will require a shared effort to build a way of life, which will allow people to live well and in harmony with nature.

The fulfillment of these responsibilities must be assured through the creation of an International Tribunal to address debt and climate justice, and through multidisciplinary efforts to gather information, analyze impacts, and assess responsibilities. We oppose the intrusion of the World Bank’s, the IMF, and other international financial entities. We demand new and improved institutions, and debate spaces to be accountable in front of the countries and peoples.

Finally, our common journey to restore the integrity of Mother Earth reflects the wisdom of many peoples and generations that have lived in harmony with nature. The rights of all people and all of the members of the community on this planet must be protected. The future of the unborn must be secured. Resolving the climate crisis will be possible if we listen with open hearts and minds to the concerns of our children, to the lessons of our ancestors, to the cries of our Mother Earth, and fulfill our responsibilities. Acknowledging and honoring climate debts is the first main step in this journey.
