PEOPLES’ SUMMIT ON CLIMATE, RIGHTS AND HUMAN SURVIVAL

18-19 September 2019

REPORT
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INTRODUCTION

On 18 and 19 September 2019, over 170 key individuals in the climate justice movement came together to discuss and brainstorm concrete strategies to build solidarity and plan the urgent, rights-based action needed to address the climate crisis. The two-day Peoples’ Summit on Climate, Rights and Human Survival, held in New York City preceding the United Nations’ Climate Week, was organized by Amnesty International, Center for Human Rights and Global Justice – New York University, Center for International Environmental Law, Greenpeace International, United Nations Human Rights Office and the Wallace Global Fund. The event also introduced the Declaration on Climate, Rights and Human Survival.

The Peoples’ Summit aimed to unleash new power, energy, and resources to supercharge connected, diverse, and action-oriented mass movements to overcome the climate crisis by putting people and human rights at the core of climate solutions. Organizers were guided throughout the planning process by a task force which included Engajamundo, International Commission of Jurists, International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC), International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net), International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), and MADRE, as well as collaborating partners including 350.org, ActionAid, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law, and Development (APWLD), Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), Business and HR Center, CARE, CIVICUS, Climate Action Network International, Earthjustice, Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Global Witness, Indigenous Environmental Network, Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA), International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), International Women’s Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP AP), Oxfam, Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA), Rights and Resources International, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO), and Yes! For Humanity. A description of the role and selection process for the task force and collaborating partners, as well as the objectives of the event can be found in the publicly available concept note.
The Peoples’ Summit sought to build upon existing work to address struggles for social justice, including the lessons from those who have campaigned for climate justice for decades and even longer. Representatives of national and local human rights groups, trade unions, Indigenous Peoples, youth-led groups, feminist organizations, social justice groups and environmental activists were present as part of a broader spectrum of international and regional human rights organizations. There was also representation from other key constituencies such as foundations, journalists and thought-leaders.

With 56 countries represented, about half the participants had a national or regional focus (Asia: 18, Africa and Middle East: 24, Americas: 36, Europe: 5, Australia-Pacific: 6) and 83 participants came from organizations with a global focus. Learning from and exchanges between participants with different experiences in the climate justice movement were critical objectives of the event.

The Peoples’ Summit was simultaneously held in English, Spanish and French. The event comprised a mix of panels, breakout groups, and team-building activities. Participants were given a chance to identify workshop topics and rank their preferences in advance of the actual meetings. Topics that came out of this selection process included promoting frontline voices, human rights mechanisms, solidarity and movement building, corporate accountability, and climate science research.

The theme of the first day was “Urgency”. The event kicked-off with keynote speakers setting the scene for the next two days and included the official presentation of the Declaration on Climate, Rights and Human Survival. Several compelling panelists took the floor throughout the day as well, to emphasize the need to combine movements, redistribute power and recognize that the solutions to the climate crisis should come from those working on the frontlines.

The second day was centered around the theme of “Ambition,” and participants had the opportunity to discuss in breakout groups their organizational commitments to integrate human rights and climate change in their field of work. Participants self-selected thematic working groups and discussed with others interested in the same area on how best to implement collective strategies related to their expertise and
methods for collaboration beyond the Peoples’ Summit. A need for an additional working group was identified, to focus on the dismantling of settler-colonial institutions within our own organizations and within community partnerships. This working group was incorporated into the program for the second day.

The sessions were stimulating—moving participants to recognize existing biases, actively listen to those working on the frontlines and strategize concrete actions to work together towards a more sustainable and just future. It clearly emerged that more time, space and resources are needed to vigorously and proactively address the power imbalance that exists within and outside the movements working on climate justice. This is essential to achieve inclusive, people-centered and rights-based climate action. The full agenda with summaries of each session can be found here. Notes from the sessions will be made available to participants and Declaration signatories.
KEY OUTPUTS

One of the key outputs of the Peoples’ Summit was a joint Declaration that dozens of groups, including most of the event’s participants and organizers, developed prior to the Peoples’ Summit. The Declaration outlines a joint vision, shared concerns and common commitments to achieve climate justice. The drafting of the Declaration was a collective, participatory process, with two rounds of consultation, first with the task force members and collaborating partners, followed by a second one with all the invited participants prior to the Summit. The final text was distilled and finalized by the organizers. Prior to the Peoples’ Summit, the Declaration was open up for institutional sign-on to all Summit participant organizations as well as to all organizations and groups that subscribed to its vision and objectives. The Declaration continues to be open for institutional sign-on.

Signed on to by 426 organizations as of 21 February 2020, the vision articulated in the Declaration voices the demands of a united global movement, in which environmental, social justice and human rights actors mutually strengthen each other and support the communities and individuals on the frontlines of the climate crisis. At the Peoples’ Summit, the Declaration was officially presented, and booklets with an abridged version in English were distributed. The Declaration is publicly available in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish.

Prior to the event, participants were also asked to submit their individual organizational commitments on climate justice. These were compiled in a list of organizational commitments and organized on the basis of the 10 policy commitments included in the Declaration. Contributing organizations also shared a list of gaps and priority issues that the climate justice movement should take forward. This document provides useful background information for facilitating the Peoples’ Summit and guiding follow-up conversations about possible collaborations on strategic actions.

Plans for future collaboration were initiated in breakout groups during the event, based on thematic focus areas and regional affiliations. Links to these proposed collaborations and future actions can be found here. Further collaborations may be
added to this list by Summit participants and Declaration signatories. The organizers hope to support groups working at the frontlines to take on leadership roles and guide the direction of national, regional, and thematic collaborations emerging from these interactions. The intention is that future working groups will be led and maintained by self-designated focal points with support from the organizers if requested.

**NEXT STEPS**

The Peoples’ Summit is an ongoing journey, with the potential of creating lasting, concrete collaborations and partnerships between stakeholders that often do not have opportunities to come together.

Shortly after the Peoples’ Summit, the organizing team distributed an evaluation survey to gather feedback from participants. Questions focused on key take-aways, suggestions for improvement, and what type of post-event activities are anticipated. Conference calls facilitated in French, Spanish and English were also made available to all Summit participants to further provide input. Of the 50 participants that completed the survey, 48% of respondents found networking to be one of the most valuable benefits of the Summit and 32% believed that the need to work across sectors, regions and generations to address the climate emergency was the key point to remember from the Summit. Other take-aways that were highly ranked were the need and hope for solidarity in movements and the importance of joint, collaborative thinking.

60% of respondents have planned or already started to follow up on new collaborations that began at the Peoples’ Summit. Also from the survey, the most noted mechanism to facilitate the implementation of collaborative actions that came out of the summit was having access to funding. One of the main intentions of having the donor community present at the Peoples’ Summit was to help bridge the gap between funders and those working on the frontlines. At the Summit, funders present indicated their interest to review and support plans for collaborative campaigning that come out of the summit and their willingness to attract other funders to support
work on climate and human rights. The post-Summit activities will take forward this interest, as described in below.

Based on the results of the evaluation and conversation following the Peoples’ Summit, the organizers suggest the following next steps:

1) **Encourage active use of the email distribution list**
   
   (climaterights4all@gmail.com)

   The vast majority of respondents (92%) indicated their desire to join an online community for continued engagement, exchanges, and shared opportunities to support each other. The organizers have created an email distribution list, which from this point on will be an online community and networking platform bringing together all event participants and signers of the Declaration. It will be used as a central hub for information sharing on activities onwards.

2) **Creation of a follow-up team**

   The organizers would also like to extend an invitation to all who are part of the climaterights4all network that are interested in joining a team to support the follow-up to the Summit. It is particularly important to have a follow-up team that reflects different regions, issue-areas and includes both small and large organizations. A follow-up team is needed to support this online community and the collaborations coming out of the Summit or proposed in this online community, taking into account the feedback from the Summit, the survey and ongoing feedback. The intention of the follow-up team is for it to be a part of a horizontal process whereby the direction of collaborations rests with the self-identified persons and/or organizations that choose to be focal points. The hope is that the follow-up team will serve the function of supporting, where requested and along with others, and as long as needed, groups working at the frontlines in guiding the direction of post-summit activities. Those interested in joining the follow-up team are requested to contact: Melanie at melanie.allen@amnesty.org.

3) **Support efforts to use the Declaration for outreach, advocacy and campaigning**
The survey showed that 68% of respondents have plans to use the Declaration in the future, with the most common purposes being for advocacy and capacity building efforts, influencing policy and disseminating with others. The organizers would like to support efforts to continue using the Declaration at different levels and for different aims. In a first instance, organizers reached out to representatives of organizations included in the email distribution list attending COP25 for an initial brainstorming about possible uses of the Declaration. Further, the organizers would like to support efforts to disseminate the Declaration at regional, national and local level and to use it as a tool to support advocacy and campaign purposes. Those interested in co-developing concrete outreach goals and plans, and/or serve as outreach ambassadors for the Declaration, are invited to write to self-organize and coordinate over the email distribution list and with climaterights4all@gmail.com in copy.

4) **Support working groups that will move forward the collaborative actions identified at the Summit**

Summit participants identified so many important collaborations, from promoting frontline voices, fostering the engagement of disability rights advocates and issues in the climate justice movement, to raising the climate ambition and human rights consistency in national climate policies, and many more. As mentioned above, the organizers, as part of the follow-up team, are keen to support working groups that will aim to move forward the proposed collaborations identified at the summit or others that might develop in the future. In some instances, some participants have already self-identified as focal points for those collaborations. In other cases, all those interested and able to act as focal points are invited to put their names forward by writing to the email distribution list (with climaterights4all@gmail.com in copy).

5) **Facilitate discussions between interested funders from the summit and focal points for proposed collaborations**

The organizers commit to encourage, as much as possible, conversations between funders and the groups focusing on human rights and climate change. With the consent of focal points, we will share the collaboration action points with funders that
participated or supported the Summit and encourage funders to engage with the focal points. We hope that this may make a small contribution to widening access to funding, particularly for smaller organizations in the Global South.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

As a result of the evaluation and the conversations following the Summit, important lessons were learned that will be incorporated going forward.

First, the need to simplify the organizing team’s decision-making structure in order to ensure a transparent, inclusive and simple methodology and means of consultation.

Second, the importance of prioritizing relationship-building and providing platforms for all voices to be heard and for all participants to be able to engage in meaningful and necessary exchanges to foster collaborations.

Thirdly, the need to proactively correct the power imbalance between larger organizations and grassroots organizations in favor of a horizontal process where the next steps are collectively held and where power imbalances actively mitigated. To that end, in addition to the single inclusive email distribution list discussed above, the organizers of the Peoples’ Summit are proposing to mostly take a supporting role in designing and implementing the next steps, hoping to foster enhanced participation from other groups and individuals that can provide significant insights and stewardship to the follow-up process.
CONCLUSION

The organizers of the Peoples’ Summit would like to acknowledge with gratitude the role of the many actors involved with making the event such a unique call to action. The panelists, speakers, and participants from the various lines of work, regions, and generations, all came together to create an atmosphere of solidarity, critical thinking, constructive exchange and hope that is truly needed to take climate justice to the next level. If we are able to continue this collaboration towards our common goals, we may be able to make a solid contribution to ending the climate crisis, and the injustices that underlie it.