



Call to Action: People's Assemblies on Climate Justice during Cancun climate negotiations

The next major round of UN climate negotiations will be held in Cancun, Mexico from November 29 to December 10, 2010 and the stakes are high. This past summer has seen severe wildfires in Russia, devastating floods in Pakistan, mudslides in China, droughts in the Sahel and Niger, and an 87-square-kilometre chunk of ice break off from Greenland. These events are all consistent with climate change patterns that climate scientists have been warning us of.

Why wait for governments to take action. The media is already reporting that the possibility for a legally binding agreement in Cancun is slim. It is the collective voice of people that can help make climate justice a reality.

Let's meet, talk and take action locally for climate justice.

What is a People's Assembly on Climate Justice?

A People's Assembly is an interactive process that provides the opportunity for people to listen and be heard about what climate justice means to them, in their community and globally. It is not a speakers panel or a public forum.

It is a movement-building and organizing tool. It is a gathering of people to discuss and analyze climate justice that can feature a local climate justice issue or campaign.

A People's Assembly is a space to discuss demands, commitments and visions for how things could be different. It is aimed at transforming awareness into action by invigorating ongoing and new climate justice actions in your community.

Assemblies are stronger when there are people with a diversity of genders, ethnicities, cultures, from different generations and with varying physical abilities.

A little bit of background on People's Assemblies on Climate Justice

There was an international call-out for People's Assemblies on Climate Justice from the Reclaim the Power action that took place at the same time as Copenhagen climate negotiations. A People's Assembly, attended by thousands, was held in the streets and brought together many voices to counter what was happening inside. The assembly featured diverse voices speaking to both real and false solutions to the climate crisis.

The World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba, Bolivia (April 2010) represented an historic gathering of social movements – a significant assembly of peoples – that produced clear demands for solutions to the climate crisis.

How do People's Assemblies work?

An assembly could focus on a central question about on climate justice; this was the format for the Toronto People's Assembly held during the G20 . (See suggested framing questions below.)

Or you could get the discussion flowing with an introductory talk by someone about the growing global movement for climate justice. The movement is calling for "system change, not climate change." Addressing the climate crisis isn't just about getting off our addiction to fossil fuels. We need to revision our economies and societies to focus first on meeting people's needs and respecting the environment, not profit.

You can also make the links between the global movement and a local climate justice issue by having a speaker highlight the problems with a Big Oil or Big Coal local polluter, such as a nearby coal mine or unconventional natural gas fracking proposal. You could also continue the discussion by highlighting a campaign for a local solution to the climate crisis, such as initiatives supporting local sustainable agriculture, transition towns, and public and community-based renewable energy expansion.

But remember – the focus of the assembly is on dialogue and action; this isn't another speakers panel. (It may be a good idea to limit speakers to 5 minutes).

How can we organize a People's Assembly?

Local organizers can come together in their communities to define the process and focus of their assembly.

For example, you can start by forming a local organizing committee that can take on the details of organizing the assembly. Use your communication networks and relationships to bring together community members, organizations, leaders, youth, elders and activists who are interested or working on climate justice.

Set a date during the Cancun negotiations (November 29 to December 10), pick a time and place – think about allowing enough time (for example, 3 hours) for a meaningful discussion and a follow-up process for ideas and initiatives that emerge from the assembly. Engage community leaders and work to reach out broadly in your community for participation.

Be in touch! There may already be organizing underway in your community that you can join and support.

Examples of People's Assemblies

Check out the Toronto People's Assembly website to see how local organizers set the agenda: <http://torontopeoplesassembly.wordpress.com/>

The U.S. Social Forum's Organizing Kit for People's Movement Assemblies has some useful ideas about how a people's movement assembly works, and how to organize an assembly. Note: the guide is not specifically for Climate Justice Assemblies: <http://abc.ussf2010.org/assemblies>

Sample framing questions for a People's Assembly on Climate Justice:

- What does climate justice mean locally? What does climate justice mean globally?
- Does advancing climate justice mean questioning and changing society's model of overproduction and overconsumption, a driving force of climate change?

Question posed by organizers of the Toronto Peoples Assembly (June 2010):

- Given our government's lack of leadership on the climate crisis and failure to respect the rights of impacted communities at home and abroad, and given the call for climate justice coming out of Cochabamba – what do you think the connection is between climate change and justice in your community?

TAKE ACTION

Want to find out whether there is organizing for a People's Assembly underway in your community? Want to form a local organizing committee, join a local organizing committee or a regional gathering? Start by being in touch! Make sure to contact:

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**Endorsed by the Council of Canadians, Indigenous Environmental Network,
Canadian Youth Climate Coalition and KAIROS**