

Building the movement for climate justice: The significance of the Cochabamba conference



What happened in Cochabamba?

On April 17-19, 2010 in Cochabamba, Bolivia, the Bolivian government hosted a conference called The World Peoples' Conference on Climate Change and Rights of Mother Earth, bringing together more than 34,000 participants (with 10,000 registered from countries outside of South America) for a dialogue on alternative proposals to the climate crisis.

Government representatives from 147 countries were present, and at least 45 were active participants. The process included 17 working groups that met and discussed key issues relating to climate justice. There were also main plenary panels and working group events.

Why is the Cochabamba climate conference significant?

The conference was held in direct response to December's UN Copenhagen negotiations failure to produce meaningful international action on the climate crisis. The Copenhagen Accord was rejected by participants during the Cochabamba conference and also in the conference's final agreement, called "The Peoples Agreement." The Copenhagen Accord was criticized for not going far enough in greenhouse gas emission reductions – including voluntary and individual commitments that could lead to a devastating four degree rise in global average temperatures – being the product of backroom negotiations between a handful of countries and further promoting the carbon market.

1. Social movement and government dialogue for climate justice

Copenhagen saw the growing exclusion of civil society and NGO participants from official negotiations (despite them having accreditation), backroom negotiations between a handful of countries, and police brutality in the streets.

In contrast, Cochabamba featured a participatory process. In addition to inviting government's representatives, the Bolivian government encouraged social movement and civil society representation and placed a strong emphasis on ensuring the presence of indigenous and Global South voices that are disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis.

The Cochabamba conference featured informative panels and workshops hosted by the many different participating organizations, 17 working groups met, discussed and, in some cases, hotly debated topics such as climate debt and financing, the dangers of the carbon market, as well as the Kyoto Protocol and Vision (both related to the UN process). Each working group produced a report, the outcomes of which were presented in the final day's dialogue between people and government and formed the basis of the conference's final document, the People's Agreement, which was read aloud at the conference's closing ceremony.

2. What is in **The People's Agreement**?



The People's Agreement affirms climate debt responsibilities in demanding deep, domestic emission cuts by developed countries and significant climate financing.

Main highlights:

- Aims for a 50 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by developed countries in the 2010-2017 period of the Kyoto Protocol.
- A draft Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth.
- Proposal for a global referendum on climate change.
- Recommendations for the creation of an International Climate and Justice Tribunal.

Clear reduction targets are called for under the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol. There are also guidelines for the provision of financial resources by developed countries to developing countries for climate mitigation, adaptation and technology transfer.

It rejects false solutions to the climate crisis.

The agreement is clear about the role of carbon markets, "There should not be use of an international carbon market or an international carbon market approach in the offsetting of developed countries mitigation commitments or in the financing of developing countries climate actions as it has serious adverse effects." Geo-engineering and forest offsets are also rejected.

It calls for harmony with nature.

The agreement identifies the need for a new model for how humans relate with the environment based on, "...the principles of harmony and balance between humanity and nature, solidarity and equity between people and respect for Mother Earth Rights and Human Rights." This stems from a key theme throughout the conference about the role of overproduction, overconsumption and trade in driving the climate crisis.

The concept of the Rights of Mother Earth and the protection of these rights is a proposed framework to help correct the imbalance where the environment is frequently externalized from economic decisions, or secondary to profit interests. The Tribunal is proposed as a mechanism to hold those who violate these rights accountable.

3. **People's Agreement and UN climate negotiations**

In addition to informing the global climate justice movement, the People's Agreement has the potential to influence the UN climate negotiating process. The Bolivian government forwarded a submission on April 26 to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that includes the main content of the Peoples Agreement and the draft proposal for a Universal Declaration of Mother Earth's Rights. The submission will be added to the proposals for the draft negotiating text under one of the UNFCCC's two-track process.

On May 7, 2010 Bolivian President Evo Morales, and a delegation representing civil society that included National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians Maude Barlow, , personally presented UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon with the conclusions of the Cochabamba conference. The outcomes were also presented in a briefing to the G77 and China.



Why did the Council of Canadians participate in the Cochabamba conference?

The Cochabamba conference was a key opportunity for identifying social movement strategies leading into the next round on UN climate negotiations in Cancun, which will be held in November 2010. This will be further opportunity to build the international movement against the tar sands and recognize the connections between water and climate justice.

These are clear focuses for the Council of Canadians as we fight for the values and progressive policies

Key Council of Canadians actions in Cochabamba:

- Hosted workshops on tar sands and water justice.
- Participated in workshops on climate change and glaciers and community organizing strategies.
- Maude Barlow was a featured plenary panelist on water and climate change.
- Participated in working group processes.
- Ongoing work with Common Frontiers, Climate Justice Now! and water justice networks.
- Reported back to our members and broader Canadian audience through blogs, video, photos and media.
- Issued an open letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper requesting the government publicly share their plans in response to Bolivian government's invitation to the conference. We highlighted that it was a key opportunity for the Canadian government to become a constructive player in international climate action.

that will build climate justice locally and globally.

With the launch of our "*Climate Justice: Take Action for People and the Planet*" campaign, climate justice has become an important part of the Council of Canadians' energy work. Many of the principles that have long-guided our organization such as achieving greater equity, reclaiming "the commons," and resisting corporate control, are central to achieving climate justice and central to the Cochabamba conference and People's Agreement.

The tar sands are a climate

justice issue. Indigenous rights are being overlooked while water is increasingly polluted and communities face unusually high cancer rates. The tar sands are the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada and there are plans for significant expansion. Harper government ambitions to make Canada an "energy super power" focused on export-oriented energy trade are being allowed to trump much-needed action on climate change and energy security.

It is widely acknowledged that climate change is having a profound and negative impact on fresh water systems. What is less understood is that our collective abuse and displacement of fresh water is also a serious cause of climate change and global warming. If we are to combat these negative effects, the way we use water must be addressed. The good news is that dealing with water justice will directly support climate change mitigation – by finally treating our water with respect, we will also assist in slowing climate change. This is an important message that the Council of Canadians' Blue Planet Project is sharing alongside building support for the UN resolution on the human right to water.



What's next?

Globally: Both the Bonn (May 31-June 11) and Cancun (November 2010) UN climate negotiations are identified as key opportunities to build support for demands coming out of the Cochabamba conference, including the 50 per cent emission reduction target for developed countries under the Kyoto Protocol, and the draft Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth.

The U.S. Social Forum (which will be held in Detroit, Michigan in June 2010) and the meeting of the G8/20 (to be held in Huntsville and Toronto, Ontario in June 2010) are also identified as opportunities for the development of actions supporting the outcomes of the conference.

Working groups are continuing to develop strategies to move the draft Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth forward, build support for the UN resolution on the human right to water, and develop a technical proposal for the International Climate and Environmental Justice Tribunal.

Locally: We will continue to build campaign strategies and produce popular materials for:

- A tar sands-free future with the first step of a moratorium on all new tar sands development.
- Opposing false solutions to the climate crisis. This includes opposing proposals for a North American cap and trade system, the use of carbon offsets, and calling for a moratorium on oil and gas exploration in the Arctic. We will continue to promote viable and sustainable solutions by building on the *Green Decent and Public* report, produced by the Council of Canadians and the Canadian Labour Congress, that supports the expansion of public and community owned renewable energy.
- Opposing new trade deals such as the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), which is currently being negotiated and would give free trade and investment guarantees that will discourage and undermine environmental protections.

Watch for more information soon on: A Climate justice workshop at the G20 People's Summit, People's Assemblies for Climate Justice, and Green Decent and Public pop-ed. tools

We want the Canadian government to:

- Commit to an emission reduction target of 50% for the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, by 2017, in line with the conclusions of the People's Agreement of the World People's Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights (April, 2010).
- Commit to innovative public climate financing for the Global South such as the proposed Robin Hood Tax.
- End the expansion of the tar sands, recognize aboriginal treaty rights and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and begin a transition to a tar sands free future including strong regulations limiting carbon emissions, water extraction and pollution and create "just transition programs" for affected workers and communities.
- Demand an end to offsets in international and national climate agreements.
- Commit to significant investments in improving energy efficiency and expanding public and community owned renewable energy.
- Recognize the link between addressing climate change and the need for water justice and water as a human right.