

From Copenhagen to Cochabamba to Cancun: The growing global movement for climate justice



by **Andrea Harden-Donahue**

The stakes couldn't get any higher going into the next major round of UN climate negotiations in Cancun, Mexico. Over the summer there have been severe wildfires in Russia, devastating floods in Pakistan, mudslides in China, droughts in the Sahel and Niger, and a massive 87-square-kilometre ice chunk broken off from Greenland. The U.S.-based National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reports that we are emerging from the warmest decade on record. This is consistent with the patterns that climate scientists have been warning us of.

For the sake of current and future generations, we need urgent action to stop – and reverse – climate change. This is why the Council of Canadians launched our “Climate Justice: Take Action for People and the Planet” campaign. Based on principles that have long guided our organization, climate justice is about seeking equitable solutions to climate change locally and globally.

Lessons learned in Copenhagen

We joined hundreds of thousands of people in Copenhagen, Denmark, last December calling on world leaders to agree on a strong international climate agreement. Official talks went badly off course. A handful of countries took to back-room negotiations to produce the very weak two-and-a-half-page Copenhagen Accord (which the Canadian government supports).

In an op-ed in the *Ottawa Citizen*, we argued that the true success in Copenhagen happened in the streets, where a strengthened and growing movement for climate justice gathered. While

in Copenhagen we participated in the 100,000-strong march led by Indigenous Peoples delegations. We joined the “Reclaim the Power” demonstration that challenged the world to recognize that we cannot address the climate crisis until we recognize the root causes of the crisis, including unsustainable production and consumption and a commitment to a failed model of global trade.

Lessons learned in Cochabamba

Directly responding to the failure of Copenhagen talks, the Bolivian government hosted the People's World Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in April 2010, bringing together social movements, organizations and governments to talk about ways to address the climate crisis.

The Council of Canadians' team joined in a working group process that produced the “Peoples' Agreement” – which was a direct response to the Copenhagen Accord. The agreement calls for deep emission cuts (with greater responsibility for Global North countries), supports significant climate financing for the Global South, and rejects false climate change solutions such as carbon offsets.

On the road to Cancun

Following preparatory negotiations in Bonn, Germany, for the next round of UN climate talks in Cancun, Mexico, the media is reporting that the possibility of a legally binding agreement in Cancun is slim. The Copenhagen Accord – a non-binding agreement – is already failing. New research has shown that current voluntary pledges under the Accord amount to only a 12-18 per cent reduction below 1990 emission levels by 2020. If you take loopholes (such as carbon offsets) into account, emissions could actually rise by 9 per cent. Developing countries have



Council of Canadians Energy and Climate Justice Campaigner Andrea Harden-Donahue, National Chairperson Maude Barlow, and Campaigns Director Brent Patterson pose near the stadium where thousands of people gathered for the People's World Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth.

long argued for a minimum of 40 per cent cuts from Global North countries. In its submission for the Accord, the Canadian government shamefully weakened its already bad target, justifying this by saying Canada needs to harmonize emission cuts in step with the United States.

More positively, the Bolivian government has been successful in getting key outcomes of the People's Agreement included in the new negotiating text, including reference to a climate court of justice, a 50 per cent reduction under the second period of the Kyoto Protocol, and an agreed-to limit on the increase in global temperatures to one degree Celsius.

Civil society is mobilizing

The Council of Canadians will join thousands in Cancun working both inside the formal negotiation process and outside in the streets to advance climate justice. Alongside international allies, the Council will push for the inclusion of the People's Accord in the negotiation process, and will co-host an event on the rights of Mother Earth.

We will work with Canadian allies to expose our government's failure to play a constructive role in climate action through a street event and workshop on the tar sands. We will invite climate justice activists from Arctic coastal states for a workshop to strengthen our campaign for a moratorium on new oil and gas development in the Arctic; leaving oil and gas in the ground is a real solution to the climate crisis. While false solutions and more delay tactics are predicted to dominate the Cancun talks – as we saw in Copenhagen – it's the people who will help bring to bear real climate justice.

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