

# The Climate Crisis is a Peace & Justice Issue

Glen Anderson

The climate crisis fits squarely into the crosshairs of the values and priorities of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) and people who care about peace and justice.

When I served on the FOR's national governing board in the early 1980s we changed the wording of the FOR's Statement of Purpose (our definition of what we believe) from affirming the oneness of all humanity to affirming the oneness of all creation.

We know that all people are one human family. Now we also affirm that our one family extends to plants, animals, ecosystems, oceans, and the atmosphere – all elements that connect us in oneness.

Likewise, we know that peace and justice are inextricably connected. Injustice is inherently violent to victims. Social, economic and environmental justice are a necessary foundation for peace. The familiar saying affirms, "If you want peace, work for justice."

Furthermore, one of the most basic concepts of environmentalism is that everything is interconnected. Ecosystems consist of plants, animals, water, sunlight, minerals, weather, and other natural elements that interact for sustainability. Disrupt any one of them and you disrupt the entire ecosystem.

Environmental problems hurt people. Environmental problems cause hunger, displace populations, force mass migrations, and lead to conflicts over land, water, and other basic resources. These problems and conflicts spill across borders, so no nation is secure when environmental problems occur, even in other parts of the world.

Several decades ago Sweden recognized that the world's environmental problems threaten the world's security, including Sweden's security. Therefore, Sweden began devoting a meaningful percentage of its "defense" budget to addressing environmental problems.

Climate scientists are virtually unanimous that the climate crisis is real, is caused by humans, and is getting worse very rapidly. Ecological destruction is already happening more quickly than scientists had predicted just a few years ago.

Already we are experiencing melting glaciers, melting arctic ice, unprecedented heat waves and

droughts, terrible losses of crops, increased hurricanes and tornadoes, and other extreme weather disasters. These problems will get much, much worse in the coming years.

Many millions of people will starve. Many millions will be displaced. Many millions of people will be thrust together into violent conflicts.

When a disaster occurs, who suffers most? The poor, the weak, the vulnerable – children, old people, people with disabilities, and so forth.

**Therefore, the climate crisis is BOTH a justice issue, AND a peace issue. The climate crisis fits squarely in the crosshairs of FOR's values and priorities. The climate crisis is something that the FOR MUST address.**

Because the FOR recognizes the oneness of all creation, our commitment to peace and social justice requires us to protect the environment and the climate, especially when we face an historic disaster for peace and justice.

For the FOR, environmental concerns and the climate crisis are NOT "add-ons." They are inherent and integral to our work for peace and justice.

Gar Lipow, who is presenting a workshop today, wrote two books. Today's workshop summarizes the graphic version of the longer hardbound book, which "connects the dots" between social & economic justice issues and the climate crisis. His book explains how social and economic injustice **feed into** the climate crisis – and also how **solving** those problems can **relieve** the climate crisis. Gar's insights – especially those in the hardbound version of his book – reinforce the connections with FOR's values.

The climate crisis is much worse and much more urgent than governments, mainstream media, businesses, the religious community, the peace movement, or almost anyone else recognizes.

So here is our choice: Either we deal with reality, or reality will deal with us.

History and humankind need the FOR to be a leader in addressing the climate crisis. We have the values and the "big picture" vision to make a positive difference.

# So What Can We Do about This?

Environmental groups ask us to e-mail petitions to giant oil companies and coal companies. Will this persuade oil and coal companies to stop abusing the climate? **No**, they own trillions of dollars of oil and coal that they want to burn. They will not forego those profits voluntarily, no matter how many e-mails we send them.

Can we protect the climate adequately by simply e-mailing petitions to senators and representatives? **No**, their campaigns are funded by giant oil and coal companies. They will not bite the hand that feeds them.

- People who care about public health
- People who have respiratory problems
- People who live on salt water front lots: People living on low-bank lots will lose land to rising seas. People living on high bank lots risk erosion that could undercut their homes.
- Insurance companies are paying out many billions in losses from storms, floods, and so forth. We should be reaching out to insurance companies and recruiting them to the climate protection movement.
- People who support mass transit, light rail, bicycling, and other alternative transportation methods belong in our climate movement. Let's recruit them too.
- Let's use the information and reasoning from resources that "connect the dots" across issues to identify constituencies who care about social and economic justice, including individuals and organizations related to poverty, racism, geographical injustices, and other problems. Besides the examples listed above, let's also consider sources of creative thinking such as Gar Lipow's hardbound book, *Solving the Climate Crisis through Social Change: Public Investment in Social Prosperity to Cool a Fevered Planet*

**The list goes on and on. We can show how saving the climate is a "win-win" for these other constituencies and for us.**

Every successful movement starts from nowhere and moves step-by-step toward victory. We need to see the big picture, the whole timeline going from a few decades ago when a few people started talking about the climate crisis, to the current time where many people are concerned (even though politicians refuse to take responsibility).

Politicians will not act responsibly until ordinary people from the grassroots **take direct action ourselves** to protect the climate – and until we **change public opinion** enough that we **force the politicians** to act responsibly.

How could we do that? Let's consider the various models about how grassroots social and political change really happens. The *Movement Action Plan* is one model, and there are other models.

We need to sit down and thoughtfully apply these models to the climate crisis. Our strategic analysis can guide our future efforts to be strategically effective rather than disorganized and random.

We **cannot** solve the climate crisis **from the top down**. We will have to do **it from the bottom up**. We need a **nonviolent grassroots movement**.

Here in Western Washington, the FOR seeks to bring people together to build nonviolent grassroots movements.

Of course we need our **natural allies** (our own FOR members, environmentalists, people who care about peak oil, and so forth).

But we also need additional people – **strategic allies** who might agree with us on this particular issue even if they don't agree with the rest of our issues. **Examples include:**

Don't feel overwhelmed. But don't get frenzied either.

We can do this.

Protecting the climate is at the core of our values.

Building nonviolent grassroots movements is what we're about.

We can do this.

Let's start now.

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The Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation is working hard in several strategically useful ways to protect the climate. See information in the Climate Crisis section of [www.olympiafor.org](http://www.olympiafor.org)