

# Twin Cities Peoples Agreement on Climate Change

May 2012

If global warming increases by more than 2 degrees Celsius, there is a 50% probability that the damages caused to our Mother Earth will be completely irreversible. Between 20% and 30% of species would be in danger of disappearing. Large extensions of forest would be affected, droughts and floods would affect different regions of the planet, deserts would expand, and the melting of the polar ice caps and the glaciers in the Andes and Himalayas would worsen. Many island states would disappear, and Africa would suffer an increase in temperature of more than 3 degrees Celsius. Likewise, the production of food would diminish in the world, causing catastrophic impact on the survival of inhabitants from vast regions in the planet, and the number of people in the world suffering from hunger would increase dramatically, a figure that already exceeds 1.02 billion people. (*Peoples Agreement, Cochabamba Bolivia, April 22, 2010*)

Inspired by, and in solidarity with, the World People's Conference on Climate Change held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, communities in the Twin Cities (the Minneapolis and St. Paul region) convened a series of dialogues in 2011 to discuss climate change and propose a framework for solutions. The dialogues resulted in the formulation of this *Twin Cities Peoples Agreement on Climate Change*.

**WE THE PEOPLES OF THE TWIN CITIES ACKNOWLEDGE AND AFFIRM** that as recipients of the benefits of living in a “developed” nation, we have a responsibility to other peoples throughout the world who are impacted by climate change. If developed countries like the United States do not significantly reduce their emissions of global warming pollution by 2020, we are committing ourselves to a 2 degree (Celsius) temperature change. This will have devastating impacts on families and communities, and on our brothers and sisters all over the world, particularly those in Africa, Asia, Latin America and island nations. Unless we act, climate change will also have disproportionate and catastrophic impacts to indigenous, communities of color, low-income residents, women and children, persons with disabilities and other marginalized communities in the U.S.

We fully support the Mystic Lake Declaration developed by community members, youth and elders, spiritual and traditional leaders, Native organizations and supporters which declares that Native Nations shall be active participants with full representation in United States and international legally binding treaty agreements regarding climate, energy, biodiversity, food sovereignty, water and sustainable development policies affecting Indigenous peoples and respective Homelands on Turtle Island (North America) and Pacific Islands.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Mystic Lake Declaration. From the Native Peoples Native Homelands Climate Change Workshop II: Indigenous Perspectives and Solutions. At Mystic Lake on the Homelands of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, Prior Lake, Minnesota. November 21, 2009. <http://portal3.aihec.org/sites/NPNH/Document%20Center/The%20Mystic%20Lake%20Declaration2.htm>.

**We acknowledge that we cannot address solutions to climate change in a just manner without acknowledging the historic factors that have created the current problem.** Historic and present attacks on indigenous peoples land and culture, on communities of color and on women and children, are breaking our connection to Mother Earth. The highway oriented transportation infrastructure built in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century was not only energy and greenhouse gas intensive, but perpetuated geographic racial segregation in the Twin Cities. Due to redlining and other historically racist land use and planning policies legally practiced in the Twin Cities until the 1960s, many indigenous and communities of color live in older, less efficient housing.<sup>2</sup> The recent recession has had an unprecedented impact on these communities, with the rental market now saturated (2% vacancy), homelessness up by 21%, over-crowding, and high rates of foreclosure. In Minnesota almost 11 percent of the state's residents are in poverty, including 14.1 percent of its children; and an additional one million are “near poor.”<sup>3</sup> As a result of these conditions, Indigenous peoples, communities of color, low-income residents, women, children, and persons with disabilities are most vulnerable to climate change impacts.

Climate change is a consequence of a development model that harms our natural environment and produces economic inequality. Climate change, therefore, is a moral problem. The models of development we support will exemplify our values and our commitment to justice and equality. Solutions focused on profits may not be healing to the earth and climate, and those that perpetuate past inequalities are unacceptable. The ecological health of our Earth shall not be subordinated to the needs markets. *How* we respond to climate change is as important as *if* we respond –social equity must be the basis for solutions.

**We acknowledge that the effects of climate change are already being experienced here in the Twin Cities region.**

- Record floods that occurred in the Midwest in the summer of 2011, displaced communities, and affected families, migrant laborers and children;
- The tornado in North Minneapolis in 2011 caused great harms, which had psychological effects on children and families. The governmental response to the North Minneapolis tornado was highly police dominated (with guns drawn) which the community deems unacceptable. Additionally, the media inaccurately portrayed ‘looting’ in the community rather than the coming together and support that occurred;
- Urban and rural farmers are witnessing heat stress to crops due to sustained high temperatures; non-corporate farmers who are economically vulnerable, have the least access to the infrastructure to accommodate these weather extremes;
- Water and freshwater ecosystems will be negatively impacted, affecting community rights and access to water; this will negatively impact food production;
- Air quality and increased number of high-heat days is exacerbating the onset of asthma and other respiratory illnesses among children and the elderly;
- Indigenous, communities of color, low-income residents, women and children, persons with disabilities and other marginalized communities face greater hardships for recovery due to extreme weather events;
- Climate change has disproportionate economic impacts due to increased energy heating and cooling costs.

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<sup>2</sup> Redlining refers to the practice, whereby financial institutions marked a red line on a map defining the neighborhoods or geographical areas to be excluded from capital investment; these areas were synonymous with boundaries where people of color resided.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Bureau of Census. Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010.

**As all these issues are interlinked, we highlight that the current approach to solutions to climate change are exacerbating local inequities in the Twin Cities.** Many of the energy efficiency and renewable energy funds (i.e. ARRA recovery dollars from the federal government) have disproportionately benefitted upper middle class homeowners and wealthier communities, bypassing low income communities and communities of color. The “greening” of our cities in the name of climate stabilization is resulting in gentrification and the displacement of our communities, and in many cases is not in line with the best research on job creation potential.<sup>4</sup> Climate responses must prioritize people and community development; and re-invest in place-based green job development and small business entrepreneurship.

**WE, THE PEOPLES OF THE TWIN CITIES, DECLARE** that the people of the Twin Cities and the governmental organizations, institutions and agencies that serve them, have a moral responsibility to seriously address the causes and impacts of climate change. We call on the following, that:

- The precautionary principle shall be instituted as our guide to policy decisions with the objective of stopping global warming at 1 degree Celsius, and with the goal of reducing our region’s emissions by 80% below 1990 levels by 2050. Actions to achieve these reductions shall guarantee human rights, and social and economic justice.
- Facilities that are polluting the air, water and land and using fossil fuels must transition to healthier practices and green job creation, prioritizing the most vulnerable as first recipients.
- Those most effected by climate change -- indigenous, communities of color, low-income residents, women and children, persons with disabilities and other marginalized communities -- must be full participants at all levels of climate change mitigation and adaptation planning processes; and must have adequate resources to effectively and meaningfully participate.
- All levels of governmental policies and programs, including the Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul shall operate in compliance with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; and respect and honor the tribal sovereignty of the 11 tribal nations located within the boundaries of the State of Minnesota.
- The response to climate-related disasters in the Twin Cities shall be humanitarian in concept and implementation and must not be militarized; emergency responses shall include resources to address physical and psychological traumas associated with climate change events. Community residents shall be supported and prepared to be “our own first responders,” acknowledging the limits of governmental assistance. Communities must be able to respond simultaneously and creatively.

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<sup>4</sup> Gentrification refers to the transformation in a community when certain community revitalization projects occur and wealthier people buy or rent property in neighborhoods that were previously low income and working class. Rising rents and property values/taxes force lower income residents to leave.

- The Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul and the State of Minnesota shall have plans for supporting and assisting regional climate refugees resulting from floods, tornadoes, and other severe weather events. National and local immigration policies and practices shall support climate refugees. FEMA and other governmental emergency response officials must equally assist all people regardless of immigration status.
- Public health planning and programs must be responsive to the needs of Indigenous peoples, communities of color, low-income residents, women, children, and persons with disabilities.
- All infrastructure projects shall be non-discriminatory both in intent and in outcome, and be in full compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. This includes “green” infrastructure development, transportation systems, and brownfield redevelopment.<sup>5</sup>
- Government programs in energy efficiency and renewable energy (state, county, city, nonprofit) shall be transparent and accessible in multiple languages, and include core programs targeted toward renters and low and moderate-income homeowners. Energy efficiency and renewable funds shall be equitably distributed across neighborhoods and communities. Energy costs shall be included in housing affordability calculations and renters should have the same opportunities for energy self-sufficiency as homeowners.
- Policies governing the ‘commons’ and ‘cooperative’ shall be researched and implemented to govern the disposition of resources that are needed collectively for survival (housing, food, energy, water, land, etc.). Community-based solutions to energy services are the foundation of solutions to the climate crisis and must be supported in all their variety.
- Food security and sovereignty shall be goals of climate policy and planning, upholding the rights of peoples to preserve and protect culturally significant foods and plants such as wild rice and sage.
- Land shall be made equitably accessible to all residents including low and moderate-income renters (the ‘land-less’ people in the Twin Cities) and homeowners for local food production, with resources to utilize non-genetically modified plants and crops that are climate stabilizing.<sup>6</sup> Land values shall include social, ecological, and community benefits.

As the Peoples of the Twin Cities, we write this Agreement in solidarity with communities fighting for ecological and environmental justice around the country and the world. As we enter into these uncertain times, with the baseline constantly shifting now with climate change, it is even more important for us to stay connected and learn lessons from each other. In all of our diversity as the people of the Twin Cities, we commit ourselves to relearning our own heritage and ancestors’ relationship to the earth and passing this on to our children. Overall, we stand in solidarity against aggressions to land and people in the Twin Cities as a microcosm of the global aggression to Mother Earth.

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<sup>4</sup> Brownfield redevelopment refers to the reuse of land that was in the past used for industrial or commercial purposes and may be contaminated by hazardous waste or pollution.

<sup>6</sup> Climate stabilizing crops include crops that have deeper root systems (such as perennial crops) that store carbon, are indigenous to this region, and can adapt to extreme weather patterns. It also can refer to developing an agricultural system that minimizes resource intensive inputs and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.