

CLIMATE DEBT

November 2010, Cancún

A wealthy minority of the world's countries and corporations are the principal cause of climate change; its adverse effects fall first and foremost on the majority that is poor. This basic and undeniable truth forms the foundation of the global climate justice movement.

The climate debt primer

Key messages

- The main causes of climate change are wealthy countries and corporations
- The main victims of climate change are developing countries and communities
- Wealthy countries and corporations thus have climate debts for: 1) their excessive emissions and use of atmospheric space; and 2) the adverse impacts of climate change on the poor
- Developed countries must rapidly and radically reduce and remove their greenhouse gases from the atmosphere
- They must also provide finance, technology and reparations for adverse impacts and lost opportunities for development
- Repaying these climate debts is the basis for a fair and science-based solution to climate change

As the starting point for climate justice, those who are the main cause of climate change must embrace and address their responsibilities. Developed countries must address their climate debt in all its dimensions as the basis of a fair, effective and scientifically sound solution to climate change.

Historical responsibilities for climate change

The causes of climate change are clear. Developed countries have appropriated the Earth's atmospheric space by emitting the vast majority of historical greenhouse gas emissions, while they only represent 20% of the world's population.

Adverse effects on poor countries and people

The poor have contributed least to the climate crisis but are its first and worst victims. At greatest risk are vulnerable countries, communities and people, including women, children, elders, indigenous peoples, poor rural and urban communities, small-scale farmers, fisher-folk and forest communities, youth and future generations.

Climate debt and reparations

Developed countries and corporations owe a two-fold climate debt to the poor majority:

- For their historical and continuing excessive emissions – denying de-

veloping countries their fair share of atmospheric space – they have an “emissions debt”;

- For their contribution to the adverse effects of climate change – requiring developing countries to adapt to rising climate impacts and damage – they have an “adaptation debt”.

The sum of these debts constitutes their climate debt, which is part of a larger ecological, social and economic debt owed by the rich industrialized world to the poor majority.

A fair and science-based solution

The way to solve the climate crisis in a fair, and scientifically sound way is to honor climate debts.

This approach provides a methodology for sharing responsibilities to address climate change based on the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities enshrined in the UN Climate Convention.

It forms the basis of proposals by Bolivia and numerous other States, which call on developed countries to:

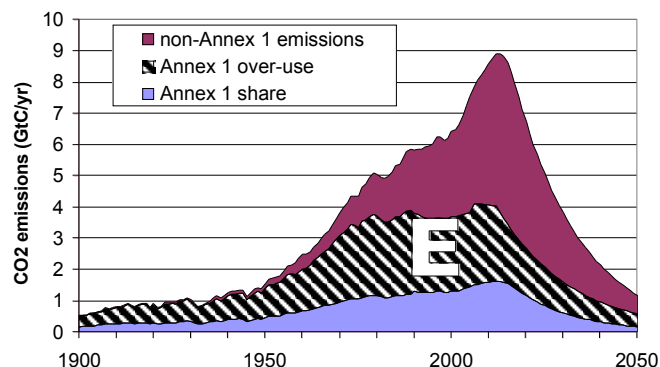
Developing countries are not seeking economic handouts to solve a problem we did not cause. What we call for is full payment of the debt owed to us by developed countries for threatening the integrity of the Earth's climate system.

Climate justice briefs #1 – Climate debt

- Take on a total commitments reflecting the full extent of their historical debt;
- Take on commitments to reduce their domestic emissions by 50% by 2017;
- Apply the difference between their total and domestic commitment as the basis for assured funding for developing countries via the Global Climate Fund under the UN Climate Convention.

Repaying climate debt focuses not merely on financial compensation, but on restorative justice – on “making whole” those people and members of the community of life on Earth that are adversely affected by climate change. It is an essential element of the broader effort to address the root causes of climate change.

Annual emissions with 80% global reductions by 2050
(showing Annex 1 over-use)



Further delay by developed country parties in implementing their commitments to reduce emissions will increase their climate debt to the developing countries and significantly constrain opportunities to achieve lower stabilization levels of greenhouse gases and increase the risk of more severe climate change impacts.

Least Developed Country Group, Statement to UNFCCC

People's Agreement, April 2010, Cochabamba

Developed countries, as the main cause of climate change, in assuming their historical responsibility, must recognize and honor their climate debt in all of its dimensions as the basis for a just, effective, and scientific solution to climate change. In this context, we demand that developed countries:

- Restore to developing countries the atmospheric space that is occupied by their greenhouse gas emissions. This implies the decolonization of the atmosphere through the reduction and absorption of their emissions.
- Assume the costs and technology transfer needs of developing countries arising from the loss of development opportunities due to living in a restricted atmospheric space.
- Assume responsibility for the hundreds of millions of people that will be forced to migrate due to the climate change caused by these countries, and eliminate their restrictive immigration policies, offering migrants a decent life with full human rights guarantees in their countries.
- Assume adaptation debt related to the impacts of climate change on developing countries by providing the means to prevent, minimize, and deal with damages arising from their excessive emissions.
- Honor these debts as part of a broader debt to Mother Earth by adopting and implementing the United Nations Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth.

The focus must not be only on financial compensation, but also on restorative justice, understood as the restitution of integrity to our Mother Earth and all its beings.

ActionAid

Arab NGO Network for Development

Asian Indigenous Women's Network

Campagna per la Riforma della Banca Mondiale (CRBM), Italy

Friends of the Earth International

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

International Forum on Globalization

International Rivers

JS - Asia/Pacific Movement on Debt and Development (JSAPMDD)

Jubilee South

Nord-Sud XXI

Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA)

Sustainable Energy & Economy Network, Institute for Policy Studies

Tebtebba

Third World Network

Unnayan Onneshan Bangladesh

What Next Forum

Organizations contributing to the Climate Justice Briefs