

Grassroots Global Justice Cochabamba Synthesis Report

Background/Context

From April 18–22, 2010, Grassroots Global Justice and the Indigenous Environmental network had the chance to send a delegation of a delegation of 22 grassroots leaders and resource allies to participate in the first–ever People’s World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights, in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Our delegates came from the Indigenous Environmental Network, the Labor/Community Strategy Center, Black Mesa



Water Coalition, Southwest Workers Union, the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, Direct Action for Rights and Equality, and Movement Generation.ⁱ

At this conference, we had the chance to come together with over 30,000 people from organizations and social movements around the world who are committed to the idea of climate justice. A climate justice perspective recognizes that the people, communities, and countries who have contributed the least to cause climate change are experiencing the most severe impacts of climate change, such as:

- Sea level rise overtaking small island states;
- Increased storms and hurricanes flooding coastal communities;
- Drought – making it harder and harder for small–scale farmers to grow the food that they need to feed their families and communities;
- Extraction of fossil fuels and carbon markets devastating indigenous lands;
- Increased temperature having serious health effects on people in urban communities.

The examples of negative impacts could go on, but our organizing background helps us remember that it is the collective experiences, analysis, voices, and action of people from impacted communities like ours, around the world, that have the ability to create real solutions to the climate crisis.

This is exactly what Bolivian President Evo Morales had in mind when he called for the People’s World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights. He was at a meeting in December 2009 in Copenhagen (COP–15)ⁱⁱ with world leaders who were supposed to democratically come up with an agreement to set binding limits on greenhouse gas emissions. Instead of doing this, a small group of countries led by the United States met and wrote a document referred to as the “Copenhagen

Accord,” which failed to accomplish the goals of the meeting, and then tried to strong-arm countries into signing it by saying that those who do not sign it will not receive funds to adapt to the impacts of climate change. While all of this was going on, social movements were being kept out of the meetings, but we sent a clear message from the outside that it’s time for “System Change, Not Climate Change.” Evo recognized that the peoples and social movements were far ahead of most of our governments when it comes to seriously taking on this issue. He convened the gathering in Bolivia as a way to create the space for us to come together to analyze the root causes of climate change, and put forward a vision of how we can create a positive future for our communities and “Pachamama” (Mother Earth). This leadership from people and social movements in the Global South and the Global North is critical in determining the future of climate policy and our planet.

Why Cochabamba?

The decision to host the Conference in Cochabamba was itself a recognition of the value of social movements, for the people of Cochabamba are known internationally for winning one of the most inspiring victories against neoliberalism in the world, in a struggle known as the “Water Wars.” Ten years ago, the World Bank required Bolivia to privatize its water supply, as a condition for any future loans. This was a prime example of the World Bank’s damaging structural adjustment programs. Bolivia, which was under a different government at the time, signed a contract with the transnational corporation Bechtel to take over the water supply and distribution for Cochabamba. Almost immediately, people saw their water rates increasing tremendously, to the point where they were being charged $\frac{1}{4}$ of their monthly income or more just to pay their water bills! It was literally impossible for most people in and around the city to afford these extremely high prices, and their lives and livelihoods were at stake. Even though they were up against tremendous opponents – the World Bank, their national government, and a powerful transnational corporation – the people decided to fight back. Indigenous communities, unions, farmers, students, and other Cochabambinos rose up to take their water supply back. Their slogan, “¡El Agua Es Nuestra, Carajo!” (The Water Is Ours, Dammit!) underscores the basic idea that water and other natural resources are a human right, and cannot be claimed by private business in order to make a profit. After several months of intense struggle, and after some serious sacrifices

(several people were killed by the police), the people won! Bechtel would have to pack up and return the water supply to the public.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the days leading up to the People's World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights, the people and organizations who were at the forefront of that struggle called together a gathering called the Third International Water Fair. This was a chance to commemorate and learn from the Water Wars, reflect on the successes and challenges of the past ten years of public water management, and share examples of ways that local communities around Bolivia are expanding access to safe water. Indigenous communities from Cochabamba and other parts of the country shared their understanding of the strong connections between struggles for water rights and the rights of Mother Earth. At the end of the fourth day of the Water Fair, participants from around the world agreed on a declaration about the connection between water rights and climate justice, and decided to officially submit this declaration to the People's World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights.

This is what Democracy Looks Like!

Throughout the first three days of the conference, (in addition to all of the workshops, plenaries, and cultural events), participants broke up into 18 working groups on a variety of climate change topics, including Indigenous Peoples, Forests, Mother Earth Rights, Climate Migrants, Climate Debt, Food Sovereignty, and more. The purpose of these working groups was to develop language and policy positions



on each of these issues, to be synthesized into a broader "People's Agreement" and "Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth" from the conference as a whole. These documents would then be the concrete language that Bolivia and other countries would bring to the United Nations for adoption during international climate negotiations.

The process was at times contentious, but ultimately rewarding. There were people of many different perspectives who participated in the working groups, and each working group was charged with developing consensus on its positions within just three days! At the same time, it was amazing to



see how well this process worked. Everyone could decide which working group (or groups) they wanted to focus on, everyone had the opportunity to express their views – including people who could not travel to the conference, who had a chance to propose language for up to four working groups before the event began – and in the end, each working group succeeded in developing a statement that everyone agreed on. But it did not end there. Each working group then presented its statement to the broader conference, and people had the chance to propose changes to the language at that point, too. That way, people who may not have had the chance to participate in a particular working group could also make their contributions, and the broader group of people attending the report-back collectively decided whether or not to accept these proposed changes.

Of course, even this impressive level of deep involvement in creating the official conference conclusions was not perfect. Working Group 18 came together outside of the official process of the conference to discuss environmental injustices such as mining projects and fossil fuel extraction that are taking place in Bolivia. This working group was clear that it supported President Evo Morales and the conference, but also wanted a space to talk about issues taking place in Bolivia. The decision to go forward with this working group was a lesson in and of itself, for it demonstrated a great deal of clarity of the role of social movements. Even with a friendly government, members of these indigenous groups understood the importance of social movements continuing to have a separate role and function, in order to maintain a left pole and effectively push for what their base – and in this case, the planet – actually needs.

Our Goals

As a delegation, we had 5 main goals for our participation in the Cochabamba conference:

1. To advance a unified grassroots opposition to carbon offsets (such as REDD)^{iv}, which mean continued environmental injustice in poor and people of color communities throughout the world
2. Support Global South and Indigenous Peoples' movement calls for equity, e.g. Via Campesina calls for land and agriculture reform to support food sovereignty; Oilwatch International's call for Moratorium on Fossil Fuels Extraction; support for Ecological/Climate Debt (reparations); IEN and other indigenous groups' call for a moratorium on Nuclear power
3. Build with Southern Social movements, including Mexico-based groups and Hemispheric Social Alliance members, to prepare for both COP-16 in Cancun and local/regional/national level actions for climate justice.
4. Engage in social movement strategy sessions
5. Develop a clearer sense of the landscape of other US groups connecting to these issues, and bring all of our lessons back to the US to inform our work on the ground.

Our Achievements

As a delegation, we split up into different working groups and teams, including: Climate Migration, Indigenous Peoples, the Kyoto Protocol, Forests, Dangers of Carbon Market, Food Sovereignty, Climate Debt, and a Media Team. In addition we also attended and presented at various caucuses, panels, and meetings as necessary. We were successful in accomplishing several of our delegation's goals:

- **Indigenous Peoples of North America and our issues related to energy and climate were definitely visible in Cochabamba.** We started with Faith Gemmil of REDOIL speaking in the opening ceremony of the conference. Jihan Gearon of IEN moderated one of the most prominent plenary sessions of the conference, on Structural Causes of Climate Change – including heads of state of many Latin American countries. Throughout the week we had various opportunities, through media, v panels, and more, to talk about the situations and positions of Indigenous Peoples in North America.
- **We made REDD a key issue in Cochabamba, and educated many people about the issue.** Though REDD is a key issue for Indigenous Peoples in the climate debate, many still don't understand how it works or what it means. IEN brought five+ boxes of its REDD booklets in English and Spanish to the conference. People loved them, thanked us for the information and wanted more. Through our work with the media and working groups, this became a main area of discussion. More importantly,
- **IEN was especially integral in solidifying the conference's position against REDD and CDM (Clean Development Mechanism).** Despite lots of debate, we worked with allies in many working groups to solidify a position against REDD and CDM in several working groups. This way the final document HAD to include this position. This is a major victory!
- **IEN hand delivered two letters to President Evo Morales, and strengthened the relationship with the Bolivian government.** One letter was from our ED Tom Goldtooth to President Morales urging him to change his position on REDD. Despite Bolivia having a strong position against capitalism, they are still host to the largest pilot project of REDD. The second letter was from the All Indian Pueblo Council, inviting President Morales to meet with them face to face. Coming out of the conference, the Bolivian government invited IEN to join Evo Morales in a meeting with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, along with a small number of other social movement organizations (such as La Via Campesina and Friends of the Earth International).
- **We connected the climate crisis to other important issues affecting our communities, such as immigration and criminalization.** The Bolivian government invited Colin Rajah of NNIRR to attend and speak as part of the Climate Migration Plenary and working group. While there remains a question

on whether or not it is useful to define climate migrants and climate refugees, the working group's final document includes a recognition of the way that capitalism causes climate change and displacement, while simultaneously criminalizing and exploiting migrants.

- **We strengthened our relationships with social movements from the Global South.** During the process of working groups and beyond, our delegation deepened relationships with groups such as Friends of the Earth International, Grassroots International, the MST, and more. We began conversations with groups such as the Mexican Network for Action against Free Trade, the Network on Gender and Environment, and the Hemispheric Social Alliance on what we could do to begin preparing for upcoming actions for climate justice leading up to, during, and after the COP-16 in Cancun.
- **We attended meetings with some other people and organizations within the United States,** in order to gain an understanding of what other groups are doing, and help us clarify the contribution that may be most helpful for GGJ to make towards climate justice.

Conference Conclusions

In addition to the points discussed above, the conference had many other important conclusions. Primary among them was the recognition of capitalism as the root cause of climate change, and of the need to develop alternative economic systems that nurture people and the planet, rather than exploiting us. Other key language included a recognition of the climate debt – the concept that based on the Global North's historical responsibility for causing climate change, it has a debt to the Global South (and perhaps to other communities in the Global North who are most impacted by climate change) – and the promotion of food sovereignty and small-scale sustainable agriculture as solutions the climate crisis.

The final outcome of the conference is the Peoples' Agreement, which some social movements have begun calling the "Cochabamba Protocol," and the Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth. You can find a copy of the People's Agreement, a complete listing of the working groups and their final statements on the conference website at <http://pwccc.wordpress.com/>.

President Evo Morales declared that, "the resolutions that have come from the Peoples' Summit on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth should be treated as a law." Along with 24 other world governments and several social movement groups from around the world, he has committed to taking this statement and advocating for its positions leading up to, during, and after the next round of international climate negotiations (the COP-16 in Cancun, Mexico in December 2010).

Taking It to the Streets: Next Steps for our Movements

Leaving Cochabamba, there are several specific strategies we can take to strengthen the movement for climate justice within the US, building up to and beyond the COP-16 in Cancun, Mexico in December 2010:

- 1. We must strengthen and align the broader climate justice movement in North America, under the leadership of the frontline communities who are experiencing and will experience its most severe impacts.** Rather than falling into the deadly trap of boxing ourselves in to a limited vision of what is “politically feasible,” we must base our demands on what is materially necessary in order to address the climate crisis and prevent the kind of larger scale catastrophe that is our current trajectory – and then build power to expand what is politically feasible based on those needs. The U.S. Social Forum was one key step moving us closer to this goal – the Ecological Justice People’s Movement Assembly and many other spaces gave groups a chance to share lessons and strategies. The creation of Climate Justice Now! North America is one more important step toward this goal.
- 2. We can use the Cochabamba People’s Agreement, combined with popular political education tools, to raise awareness about climate justice, build deeper commitment to advancing social movements demands of the Global South, and connect these demands to our ongoing struggles in our own communities.** For example, some of our delegation has gone directly to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in NYC to inject these outcomes into the discussion about development with culture and identity. Others are finding ways to bring these materials and experiences into our own organizations and networks, to promote an analysis of the root causes of climate change, to build an internationalist perspective that allows us to recognize our responsibilities within the US, and to make space for our bases to develop solutions that build community resilience in the face of this crisis.
- 3. We must take up the call from social movement groups in the Global South to mobilize for “The Road to Cancun,” developing creative actions for climate justice in the months leading up to, during, and after the COP-16.** We have the chance to build stronger connections with international



social movement organizations such as La Vía Campesina, the World March of Women, and others, while continuing to work with allies within the U.S. to build power and amplify our collective demands.

We look forward to taking on this work together, and invite ideas and input from all of our members and allies!

i Specifically: IEN staff Tom Goldtooth, Jihan Gearon, and Kandi Mossett; IEN Board Chair Manny Pino; youth delegates Ben Powless, Chibon Tekatsi–tsanken Littlebear Everstz, and Daygots Edwards; community leaders Susana Deranger, Faith Gemmill (Resisting Environmental Destruction on Indigenous Lands), Carrie Dann and Joe Kennedy (Western Shoshone Defense Project); Southwest Workers’ Union Director Genaro Lopez–Rendon; National Network of Immigrant and Refugee Rights Program Director Colin Rajah; Labor Community Strategy Center Organizer Sunyoung Yang; Grassroots Global Justice Political Coordinator Cindy Wiesner; Direct Action for Rights and Equality member Sara Mersha; resource allies Alberto Saldamando (International Indian Treaty Council), Doyle Canning (SmartMeme), Jason Negrón–Gonzalez (Movement Generation), Diana Pei Wu (media support), and interpreter Cassandra Smithies;

ii The Conference of the Parties is an annual meeting that takes place under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. While the stated goal of the COP–15 was to develop an international agreement for binding limits on greenhouse gas emissions (before the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012), no such agreement was reached. Instead, on the last night of negotiations, the United States met with world leaders of just 4 other countries, and developed a document known as the “Copenhagen Accord.” It does not have any legally binding limits on greenhouse gas emissions, only voluntary goals set by each country – and if you add all of these goals together, they will lead to an increase in global temperature of nearly 4°C, which is recognized as having extremely devastating impacts and make global warming irreversible. While the “Copenhagen Accord” refers to some funding for countries to adapt to the effects of climate change, the amounts are inadequate, the sources and forms of distribution are unclear, and it is not based on the recognition of the climate debt that the Global North owes to the communities most impacted by climate change. Furthermore, it supports carbon market mechanisms, which give away atmospheric and other property rights to polluting companies, and are false solutions to climate change. There was no democratic process for discussing or approving the Copenhagen Accord. It is not an official accepted outcome of the conference, but it was noted as a report, and many countries have felt real pressure to sign onto it, because of the U.S.’s statement that countries will need to sign on in order to be eligible for funding to adapt to the effects of climate change. The United States and other countries are now promoting the “Copenhagen Accord” as a model upon which to base future international climate negotiations.

iii Check out a book called Cochabamba! Water Wars by Oscar Olivera for more information on this inspiring story.

iv REDD stands for Reducing Emissions through Deforestation and Forest Degradation. It is one of the carbon offsets that has been widely promoted during international negotiations as a response to climate change. However, it is an extremely damaging carbon market mechanism that not only allows large polluters to keep emitting high levels of greenhouse gases, but that also robs indigenous communities of their lands. See the IEN booklet on REDD for more information: <http://www.ienearth.org/REDD/index.html>

v PRESS RELEASES AND MEDIA HITS:

- Reports From Cochabamba Youtube Interview with Tom Goldtooth <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IzHNYle0YY>
- Reports From Cochabamba Youtube Interview with Marlin Santi, an Indigenous ally from Ecuador: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S92jLp58FN8>
- Indigenous Peoples of North America Join President Evo Morales in Bolivia for Historic Earth Day Climate Change Conference: <http://www.pitchengine.com/free-release.php?id=58935>
- EARTH DAY IN BOLIVIA: From Copenhagen to Cancun, Indigenous Peoples Vow to Defend the “Rights of Mother Earth”: <http://www.pitchengine.com/free-release.php?id=59552>
- Forests Not for Absorbing Carbon, Say Activists: <http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=51216>
- On the Frontline of Climate Change: For many of North America's indigenous activists at the Bolivia summit, the fight against climate change is rooted in local issues: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/apr/23/bolivia-climate-change>
- Earth Day takes on new meaning in Cochabamba: Special Report from Jason Negron-Gonzales: <http://oaklandlocal.com/blogs/2010/04/earth-day-takes-new-meaning-cochabamba-special-report-jason-negron-gonzales>
- Bolivia: Final Agreement of Peoples upholds rights of Indigenous Peoples – Final Declaration relies on wisdom of Indigenous Peoples, while upholding their inherent rights: <http://bsnorrell.blogspot.com/2010/04/bolivia-final-agreement-of-peoples.html>
- Bolivian President Blames Capitalism for Global Warming: <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/apr2010/2010-04-20-02.html>
- Tar Sands Exposed in Cochabamba: <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/council-canadians/2010/04/tar-sands-exposed-cochabamba>
- Bolivia's Morales: Eating Chicken Makes You Gay? (TIME Magazine article with a quote from Faith Gemmill!): <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1984064,00.html>
- The Narcosphere Blog: <http://narcosphere.narconews.com/>