



Jews and the Climate Emergency: Building a United Front

The climate emergency affects everyone. It threatens our world and our future. Turning climate change around can only be accomplished through broad-based coalitions that cross all lines of division including: racism, classism, sexism, Anti-semitism, Islamophobia, ageism, LGBTQ+ oppression. Jews can and need to be an integral part of this coalition.

The origins of the Jewish people are inextricably connected to the natural world, including a commitment to ethical relationships with the land, animals, and all peoples. However, in the different lands and time periods in which Jews have lived, we have been targets of genocide, prohibited from owning land, and exiled from our countries. As part of the climate justice movement, Jews can reclaim our relationship to land in cooperation with all the world's peoples.

As a people now spread over all of the earth, Jews are of all races and ethnicities. Jews are Mizrahi, Sephardi, Ashkenazi; we are religious and secular. Jews are white, Global

Majority and Indigenous¹, young and old, of all class backgrounds. Jews are a people of broad diversity who have survived genocide and exile and carry intergenerational trauma. Jews can heal from this trauma and build greater unity amongst our own people. As we build unity, we will be better able to support and follow the leadership of frontline communities, including poor people, Global Majority, Indigenous and tribal peoples within the climate justice movement.

¹ The peoples of Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands, the Caribbean, and Latin America, and those descended from them, and Indigenous people, are over eighty percent of the global population. These people also occupy most of the global land mass.

Using the term "Global Majority and Indigenous (GMI)" for these people acknowledges their majority status in the world and interrupts how the dominant (U.S. and European) culture assigns them a minority status.

Many Global Majority and Indigenous people living in dominant-culture countries have been assimilated into the dominant culture—by force, in order to survive, in seeking a better life for themselves and their families, or in pursuing the economic, political, or other inclusion of their communities. Calling these people "Global Majority and Indigenous" contradicts the assimilation.



Anti-Semitism² is the institutionalized mistreatment of Jews and the singling out of Jews for blame for many of the world's problems. Jews have been continually scapegoated to protect the interests of the ruling classes. Although

² While the term anti-Semitism is not precise (there are also Semitic peoples who are not Jews), it is the term that has been widely used to refer to the specific oppression directed against the Jewish people.

anti-Semitism inflicts terror and violence against Jews, it is aimed at all working people: historically, anti-Semitism has divided the working class and diverted them from organizing effectively to secure equal access to the world's resources.

The timing of the current rise of anti-Semitism is not random. It is occurring when income inequality is at a high.



Sustaining All Life (SAL) is an international grassroots organization working to end the climate emergency within the context of ending all divisions among people. *United to End Racism* (UER) consists of a wide diversity of people in many different countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal. UER and SAL are projects of and use the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from emotional harm resulting from oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging the release of painful emotions, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved. Re-evaluation Counseling currently exists in 95 countries.



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Unions have less power, neo-fascism³ is rising, immigrants and other groups are being attacked. In these increasingly desperate economic and climate conditions, feelings of anger and betrayal among working people can be diverted into a search for scapegoats. Working class people need information on how anti-Semitism operates in order to recognize it, speak out against it, and prevent it from dividing our movements—including the movement to restore our environment.

In many progressive movements, issues around Israel have become divisive. Criticism of the policies of the Israeli

³ Neo-fascism is an ideology and political culture that includes ultra-nationalism, white supremacy, authoritarianism, male domination, xenophobia, opposition to immigration, and the strategic erosion of basic democratic rights of citizenship, voting, independent press and judicial system, enacted through violence, intimidation, cult of personality and propaganda.

government towards the Palestinian people is not anti-Semitism. But singling Israel out for blame for the complex difficulties in the Middle East can be an aspect of anti-Semitism and can play an unnecessarily divisive role in liberation movements globally. It is important to have climate activists understand how anti-Semitism operates so it cannot be used to derail the climate justice movement.

Jews can and must bring our long history of progressive organizing to the climate justice movement. Anti-Semitism has in the past led many Jews to remain invisible as Jews in our movement activism. It is crucial now for Jews to be fully active in climate justice work, visible as Jews, and fighting alongside all other oppressed groups.





The Work of *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism*

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—if we make some very large changes in our economy and the lives we live in the next decade. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis can be resolved only if we by simultaneously address racism, genocide of Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on the groups targeted by these oppressions, and on other vulnerable populations (including populations of people who are elderly, disabled, and very young). Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of both climate change and racism.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression, and especially racism and classism) between nations and between groups of people, (2) widespread feelings that it's too late and any actions will be ineffective, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the climate emergency, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of our economic system. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these and other issues.

The role of oppression

The economic and political forms of our societies demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the earth. This results in exploitation and oppression. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) target everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we tend to act toward others in ways that repeat the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the mental and emotional harm we experience is the result of this passing on of hurt. Though people are vulnerable to acting in oppressive

ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a person has been hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

The importance of healing personal harm

The mental and emotional harm done to us by oppression and other hurtful experiences interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the climate emergency.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other harmful behavior is neither quick nor easy work. Many of us resist this personal healing work. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the harm done to us by oppression. Some of us assume that we will never be free of this harm.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts and address barriers to effective organizing. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. By releasing emotional pain in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.



Sustaining All Life



For more information, see:

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