



South, Central, and West Asians and Climate Change

Climate change has had a devastating impact on South, Central, and West Asia—from the rise in sea level, to heat waves in Iraq and India, to droughts in Central Asia, to floods in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The greatest impact has been and will be on the poorer countries and communities in these regions, those least able to protect themselves. People in these regions are already suffering from widespread disease and a decline in agricultural production.

Climate change is being felt in the context of an already prolonged environmental crisis that is largely the result of the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, and Yemen. These wars have already seriously degraded the natural environments of these countries. They have ruined agricultural lands, contaminated soil, increased desertification, polluted water, destroyed wildlife habitat, and, of course, caused

millions of civilian deaths as well as mass migrations.

It is a cycle of destruction. War accelerates climate change by degrading the environment. Climate change causes drought and famine. Then, under these conditions, violence, war, Islamophobia, and racism targeting Arabs and Muslims are easily incited. All of this makes it more difficult to unite and end war and its impact on the environment.

Despite all the above, the situation is hopeful. It is possible to limit the effects of climate change and completely restore the environment.

Big problems require big solutions. The people of South, Central, and West Asia can play a key role in finding solutions that leave no human behind; that do not pit one group against another; that do not allow one group of people to benefit by taking advantage of another;



that focus on collaboration, not division; that unify more and more people; and that focus on decisive actions to sustain all life.

People also need to become aware of where they may have “benefited” from the oppressive policies, and recover from the confusions that have led them to not challenge them.

Sustaining All Life offers tools to individuals and organizations to support the development of these big solutions. Using these tools, people are able to heal from emotional hurts, for example, by telling their personal stories about how they have been affected by the following:

- War and other violence
- Destructive movements



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.



SustainingAllLife.org



UnitedToEndRacism.org



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- Islamophobia
- Refugee crises and migration
- Poverty
- Droughts, floods, and other extreme weather
- Reliance on fossil fuel

With healing comes clearer thinking and more accurate perspectives. Then it is more possible to build a united environmental movement. As a united force, the people of South, Central, and West Asia can play a key role in sustaining all life on Earth.





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 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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