

# Climate Debt

## PARIS CLIMATE JUSTICE BRIEFS

DEC 2015 #8

*“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.”<sup>1</sup>*

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 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, forest communities, and 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 developing countries their fair share of atmospheric space – they have an “emissions debt.”
- For their contributions to the adverse effects of climate change – requiring developing countries to adapt to rising climate impacts and damage – they have an “adaptation debt.”

### **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.

<sup>1</sup> Climate Justice Primer: <http://www.twn.my/title2/climate/briefings/Bonn03/TWN.BPjune2009.bonn.02.doc>

THIRD WORLD NETWORK  
ASIAN PEOPLES’ MOVEMENT ON  
DEBT AND DEVELOPMENT  
FRIENDS OF THE EARTH - ENGLAND  
WALES & NORTHERN IRELAND

EARTH IN BRACKETS  
PHILIPPINES MOVEMENT FOR  
CLIMATE JUSTICE  
LDC WATCH

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ACTION AID  
FRIENDS OF THE EARTH -  
INTERNATIONAL

In climate negotiations, Climate Debt forms the basis of proposals by Bolivia and numerous other States. Civil society organizations have expanded and developed the concept, using it to evaluate whether States are fulfilling their Fair Shares of the emissions reductions in the INDCs submitted this year. The “Fair Shares: A Civil Society Equity Review of INDCs” report was developed by climate justice organisations, social movements, faith groups, trade unions, environmental and development organisations and shows that many developing countries are pledging to do more than their ‘fair share’ to cut emissions while rich

countries are dangerously failing to pull their weight.<sup>2</sup>

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.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://civilsocietyreview.org/>

### PEOPLE’S AGREEMENT, APRIL 2010, COCHABAMBA

Climate Debt was a principle supported in the Cochabamba People’s Agreement—a declaration democratically agreed by over 40,000 grassroots civil society from the Global North and Global South.

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.