

13.3 Climate Justice for Future Generations

Climate Justice

What is 'justice'? Justice is giving everyone their due. Do the future generations deserve the climate of the Earth we are leaving behind? If not, what must we do? The list is very long, and time is very short.

The climate crisis is a clear and present danger to humankind. It is also the perfect chance to take the massive social shift needed to face the crisis – a change in perspective, in policy, and in practice. This is the thinking-shift that will enable humankind -- as the thinking member of the animal kingdom – to survive and thrive as a species.



A Mind-shift Moment

In the evening of Saturday, December 12, 2015, almost 200 countries of the world finally approved the Paris Agreement. It was a moment in the human story and in its journey to address the climate crisis.

Finally, the whole world agreed that:

1. The climate is in crisis.
2. Burning by humans is the cause.
3. The time for talk is over.

It took an entire generation for humans to finally understand and accept the obvious. The UN Climate Change Convention that pointed to a climate in big trouble was passed in 1992. It took another 23 years for everyone to finally agree to do something.

In the Philippines, as early 1989, an article appeared in a national newspaper entitled "*On Global Warming and Soft Energy Paths*". 26years ago, the article raised the alarm of a heating atmosphere and called for an urgent shift to renewable (soft) energy sources. No one read the article, perhaps not even its author.

To rephrase a line from a song,

“They did not listen,
They did not know how.
Perhaps they’ll listen now”

Until today, there are many who still do not quite understand the climate emergency. The link between cause and effect of climate change is not as direct as biting a chili pepper. How does turning on our lights and appliances and running our motor vehicles be the cause of super-typhoons like Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda)? What does electricity and motor vehicles have to do with flooding and droughts?



For people like us in the tropics who see ice only in our freezers, it is difficult to imagine what a massive mountain of ice -- called glaciers -- looks like. Even more difficult to understand is an increase in temperature of only 1 degree Celsius can melt these ice mountains so fast that it is making our seas rise and eating up our beaches.

But the scientists have spoken – thousands of them in the Nobel-prize winning UN Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). And finally, finally, the whole world is beginning to listen. Finally, the world has accepted that the pyromaniacs called humans is the cause of the heating that is changing the face of the Earth ... for the worse.

If only for acknowledging the obvious, the Paris Agreement was indeed a landmark achievement. But it did not stop there. The Paris Agreement called for immediate action and sent a signal to the world time for reckless burning must end. It also hints at the course of human development for the centuries to come.

Do Our Political Leaders Get It?

Climate disasters are hitting us from all sides. Unfolding before our very eyes are more intense and erratic typhoons, extensive flooding, dry spells and droughts, storm surges, rising seas, landslides, and other clear and present dangers of a climate in crisis. As this is being written, the Philippines is undergoing a very severe El Nino episode. At the same time it was being battered by another strong typhoon and intense flooding that killed dozens and displaced one million people. All these now seem to be the new normal.

“That is the difference between the obscure and the obvious: The obscure is figured out sooner or later. It is the obvious that takes a lot longer.” Especially for politicians.

Yes, at last, the world has finally spoken in a voice that is loud and clear. The remaining question is: Are our leaders listening? Do they understand that our

climate-related disasters are real and the cause must be cured? Or will they simply insist on looking too close to election season and, by doing so, become mere *'polluticians'*?

The work is done; the work has just begun.

While the intense work of crafting the words and phrases -- and dotting the i's and crossing the t's -- for a global agreement is finally done, the real work has just begun. International Law is not self-executing. The hand-to-hand action must be done on the ground by the member-countries.

The Philippines already has a Climate Action Plan. The Philippines also has all the laws needed to implement the Plan. The only question for our would-be leaders is: Do they understand the scientific reality and emergency? Are they ready, willing, and able to take the needed action? Or do they think that the paralytic traffic condition is a sign of progress?

Another example of the mind-shift moment in progress is the movement for climate justice for future generations. The movement for Inter-generational Climate Justice in the International Courts of Justice, also known as the 'climate justice movement')

Climate Justice for Future Generations

The Climate Justice Movement has many faces. Some seek to hold accountable for actions of the past. The Climate Justice for Future Generations (ICJ Movement) seeks out the young of the world to engage them take acts of enlightened citizenship. The children of today, and those yet unborn, have the most at stake in the climate crisis. They will be here long after – some 30-100 years from today. How can we as their elders, and the youth of today, engage and empower them to use the courts of law and the courts of public opinion to:

1. Tell a story
2. Spark action

Call to Action

As an academic exercise, we will identify the international and national courts and tribunals where the stories of the climate crisis can be told. It will be the avenue where and as the avenue to trigger action.

As an action exercise, we plan to request the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for an advisory opinion on the question:

“Under International Law, what are the duties of States to protect humankind of the present and future generations from the climate crisis?”

Process

The first step is to pass a UN General Assembly resolution to seek the Advisory Opinion from the International Court of Justice. Upon receipt of the UN Resolution, the ICJ invites all States to submit their written statements. The process of getting a UN Resolution will serve as a rallying call to action.

To join the movement, one must “be the change that he seeks”. At the individual level, one must take personal action to shift away from the wasteful practices – the very cause of the environment and climate crises. (A personal commitment form must be filled).

When thus empowered, the member may join a global collective movement to petition their respective heads of states, foreign ministers, and UN Ambassadors to support the UN General Assembly resolution. To raise the bar for cooperative action, we plan to hold hearings around the world.

And then, the fun begins.
Global Public hearings

The players of this movement are planning for conduct public hearings around the world, in all ___ UN regions of the world – Asia, Latin America, ____, etc. to:

1. Story-Telling
 - a. Listen to the stories of the climate crisis happening around the world
 - b. Learn what that are doing to face the crisis.
 - c. Share stories of what others are doing in their countries.
2. A Bicycle Ride and Rain Gardens

Hands-on Action

In the places we will visit, we will cooperate with bicycle groups and garden clubs. With the cyclists, runners, and health buffs, we will organize road sharing exercises to divide their roads by half: half for motor vehicles and half for wide walkways and bikeways and edible rain gardens.

We will also cooperate with the private garden clubs and government agriculture offices of the countries and regions we will visit. We will plant the idea of edible rain gardens.



Membership in the Movement

We seek out the young of the world to engage them in acts of enlightened citizenship. Because all change must begin within, a person who seeks to join the movement must commit to personal acts of positive change. ([Click here for the form](#)). Only when one has taken personal action will he/she have greater credibility to ask for the action of others, and will they be better placed to guide on what is right.

When a person becomes a member, he/she will be allowed to enter the portals of fun activities and meaningful action. Among such activities are:

1. Helping to organize the public hearings and story-telling sessions around the world.
2. Proof-of-concept exercises for
 - a. Road Sharing and
 - b. Edible Rain Gardens

Yes, we will engage the young of the world to take acts of enlightened citizenship, maximizing the power of the law to nurture the Earth, for themselves in their generation, and for the generations yet unborn.

“To plan for one year,
Plant rice.
To plan for ten years,
Plant a tree.” ([End note](#):)
To plan for a thousand years,
Plant a seed
In the mind and heart
Of a Child.



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End note

Confucius

NB. Source of the first two lines is supposedly Confucius. I just tweaked the third line to make it sound more poetic. It supposedly said in the original: "To plan for a hundred years, educate the young."

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Annex A

Personal commitment form