TOGETHER WE CAN TRANSFORM THE ENERGY SYSTEM

SUMMARY

PEOPLE. POWER. NOW.

AN ENERGY MANIFESTO SUMMARY

PEOPLE. POWER. NOW.
The Covid-19 pandemic has reminded us all of a stark truth: that capitalism is undermining core human needs and pushing ecological and social systems to the brink of collapse. The need to restore the relationship between our societies and nature has never felt more urgent. We must build a just recovery on environmental, social, gender, racial, economic and people-centred justice.

People Power Now is a manifesto presented by Friends of the Earth International for the just transition of our energy system. It is based on 10 key demands. Each sets out a positive measure that will accelerate the transformation towards a climate-just world. Moving away from an economy dependent on fossil fuels, and transforming our energy system, is key to a just transition. From this moment forward, let us put the sustainability of life and peoples’ rights and justice at the centre.

“PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD ARE ALREADY LIVING OR IMPLEMENTING THOUSANDS OF INITIATIVES WHICH EMBODY JUSTICE AND CHALLENGE THE CAPITALIST LOGIC. NOW WE MUST EXPAND THEM. THE MAGNITUDE OF THE CRISIS WE FACE DEMANDS SYSTEM CHANGE, AND THAT SYSTEM CHANGE WILL RESULT IN THE CREATION OF SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES AND NEW RELATIONS BETWEEN HUMAN BEINGS, AND BETWEEN HUMAN BEINGS AND NATURE, BASED ON EQUALITY AND RECIPROCITY.”

KARIN NANSEN, CHAIR OF FRIENDS OF THE EARTH INTERNATIONAL

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WE DEMAND
SYSTEM CHANGE!
PEOPLE POWER NOW!

System change means building a new energy system, not simply trying to fix parts of the existing one, which only creates and deepens other crises.

The way we manage, extract, use and distribute Earth’s natural resources under the dominant economic model has led to brutal inequality between and within countries, biodiversity collapse and the climate crisis. Most recently, this model has led us into a global pandemic.

As a result, millions of people are now vulnerable to the sudden loss of access to their means of survival. The extreme impacts of the pandemic on the working class, Indigenous Peoples, women, Black people and people of colour, and local communities, are the result of the systematic dismantling or outright denial of their rights and their humanity. These are also the communities most at risk from the climate crisis even though they are the ones least responsible for creating it.

System change means confronting these truths, abandoning neoliberalism and austerity, and moving forward towards an economy that is distributive, healthy and sustainable by design; an economy that values people, planet and care, not profit and endless economic growth - which is an impossible goal on a planet with ecological limits.

CHILDREN PLAYING NEAR A WIND FARM. RENEWABLE ENERGY IS BOTH ECONOMICALLY AND TECHNOLOGICALLY FEASIBLE IN THE PHILIPPINES.

- GUIMARAS ISLAND -

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WE DEMAND
ENERGY AS A COMMON GOOD

Everyone should have the right to energy, and energy should not be treated as a commodity. The sun and the wind are shared resources, with a value beyond the market.

They have cultural and spiritual value to people all over the world, particularly to Indigenous Peoples. These resources should not be exploited for corporate gain. Our energy system should exist to meet our needs, not to make profit.

Every energy source and technology – including renewable energy technology – has an environmental and societal cost.

Large-scale renewable infrastructure, the sourcing of minerals and metals for renewables, the manufacture of lithium batteries at scale, also have consequences for the environment and for workers’ rights.

People’s sovereignty is crucial for this just transition: if we accept that generating energy comes at a cost, it makes sense that all affected communities should be the ones to decide which impacts may be acceptable, or manageable, and which may not be.

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WE DEMAND

ENERGY SUFFICIENCY FOR ALL

Access to energy must be recognised as a basic human right and a necessary condition of a dignified life. Sufficient energy is essential for education and employment opportunities.

Crucially in times of pandemic, access to electricity is vital to adequate health care. We need energy for fuel and electricity to cook, to have habitable homes and workplaces in hot and cold regions, to communicate and travel and to share and access information via the internet. Yet nearly 800 million people, the vast majority of whom live in the global South, still lack access to electricity.\(^1\) This figure is set to rise with the impacts of Covid-19.

Energy sufficiency is about using enough—not more, and not less. Currently, energy consumption is deeply unequal: the richest 10% of the population are responsible for the same amount of carbon emissions as the rest of the world put together; and the richest 1% have put twice as much carbon into the atmosphere as the poorest 3.5 billion people have.\(^2\) It is critical that we end overconsumption of energy by the very rich and the corporate elite. Ending overconsumption of energy in the global North — those with the biggest historical responsibility for the climate crisis — is crucial for an equitable and just energy transition. Drastically reducing energy waste, too, through energy efficiency and energy saving, would cut emissions, lower bills for heating and cooling, and alleviate energy poverty. Energy sufficiency requires enough safe, affordable energy for everyone.

Footnotes:


WE DEMAND
FINANCE FOR
THE ENERGY REVOLUTION

Rich countries in the global North have an enormous historical responsibility for climate change.

Their overconsumption, based on the plundering of developing countries’ resources, has led to the climate shocks that are being experienced today – mostly in the global South.

As governments turn their attention to Covid-19 recovery packages, it is all the more crucial that they contribute their fair share to the climate effort, in line with the principles of equity, justice, and repayment of the climate debt. Climate finance is a mandatory obligation for rich countries and must not be channelled through offsetting mechanisms or other false solutions. Neither should it support intellectual property rights for renewable technology.

For countries in the global North grappling with economic precarity and underfunded health and social care in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the idea of contributing tax dollars to an international pot might sound unfair. Potential sources of additional public finance do exist, however. These include redirected military spending, fair taxation of the rich and elites, and an end to tax havens. Ending tax havens alone could power half the world with 100% renewable energy in less than two decades.3

FOOTNOTE:
WE DEMAND

100% RENEWABLE ENERGY FOR ALL

100% renewable energy means healthier people and cleaner air, soil and water – helping to end the ecosystem and habitat destruction that uncovers dangerous pathogens.

It means safer workplaces, homes and roads. It should be at the heart of a just recovery from Covid-19. But the call for 100% renewable energy must go hand in hand with the demand for a just transition, to protect peoples and workers’ rights.

The need for a global transformation to a renewable energy system is urgent and must take place simultaneously in the global North and the global South, although at different rates. Countries in the North have the responsibility – and in most cases the capacity – to drastically and urgently overhaul their energy system right now. We must therefore demand that the North act faster, and contribute its fair share of emissions reductions and climate finance, so that the South can transform as quickly as possible, too.

This does not give global-South countries the green light to continue polluting for decades – not at all. As well as fuelling the climate crisis, dirty energy has an array of devastating impacts on people and nature near extraction, production, storage and transportation sites – displacing people, polluting water, air, soil, bodies and food sources. Commonly, developing countries get no benefit in terms of energy generation for local communities – energy goes for export or heavy industry, accumulating profits for transnational corporations.

100% renewable energy means an end to new dirty energy projects anywhere in the world - including fossil fuels, nuclear, mega dams, industrial agrofuels and biomass, and waste-to-energy incineration. It means a managed but rapid phase-out of fossil fuels and extractive projects.
WE DEMAND
RENEWABLE TECHNOLOGY
THAT IS CLIMATE-RESILIENT, LOCALLY
APPROPRIATE & LOW-IMPACT

The fastest and fairest way to shift to 100% renewable energy is to prioritise technology that is as small-scale and decentralised as is practicable.

The wholesale rollout of solar and wind technology for small-scale generation will mean 100% energy sufficiency for all.

Efficient, locally appropriate technology that meets people’s daily needs should be in the hands of communities and municipalities, and controlled democratically. Small-scale and inter-connected grids with a diversity of renewable technologies, designed to protect biodiversity and strengthen the land rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples, will reduce energy insecurity and increase resilience to disasters, such as climate impacts and future health crises.

There must also be a fundamental shift in how we protect workers. There is a need to substantially improve human rights in renewable energy production chains, and to end the exploitation of workers in the renewables industry so that an exploitative model does not become the norm in this sector. We must hold ourselves accountable for how we source and produce these technologies’ components.

JAMELAH HASASNAH
WORKING ON THE
HYDROPONICS AND
AQUAPONICS SYSTEM
POWERED BY SOLAR
ENERGY, AL BASMA CENTER
ARAB WOMEN’S UNION.
- BEIT SAHOUR -
Palestine

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WE DEMAND
ENERGY SOVEREIGNTY
& ENERGY DEMOCRACY

07

To demand energy sovereignty is to demand that our energy systems are under the control and ownership of people, not corporations.

Energy democracy means that any decisions about the production and use of energy should be democratic, participative, open and accountable. We do not want to see the same broken corporate energy system replicated simply with renewable energy substituting for dirty energy. This is not merely a technical problem. We need a paradigm shift to a whole new people-powered energy system.

We must give power to the people who are directly affected by decisions about energy – that includes energy users, energy sector workers, and people facing energy exclusion. We must also delegate decisions to the most local and least centralised level possible. Decision-making processes must acknowledge power relations in our communities, and promote the voices, needs and knowledge of women – particularly women workers, black women and women of colour, indigenous and peasant women and LGBTQ women – and all those who are not currently heard within patriarchal, racist and classist societies.

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WE DEMAND

A JUST TRANSITION WHICH PROTECTS THE RIGHTS OF ENERGY SECTOR WORKERS, THEIR COMMUNITIES & THEIR LIVELIHOODS

A just transition means rapidly transforming our energy system while protecting the millions of workers across the energy, agricultural and transport sectors.

These workers’ current livelihoods - and the wellbeing of their communities - depend on the current unjust and unsustainable economic system.

A just transition requires addressing the root problems of a system that has turned energy into a commodity and denied the right to energy for all. As dirty energy industries shut down, it is crucial that future jobs offer strong and robust levels of unionisation, collective organising, rights and conditions for workers. Throughout the globe, the pandemic has shown us what an unjust transition can look like – mass job losses with inadequate or non-existent social safety nets, and governments prioritising the needs of corporations over the needs and safety of people and the environment.

In recent years, the definition of a just transition has transcended the labour movements and has become a key demand for working-class peoples, local and peasant peoples, Indigenous Peoples, climate justice movements and grassroots feminist movements. As we build power with women’s movements, we are committed to a just transition, founded on grassroots anti-capitalist feminism, towards a feminist, social and solidarity economy. Inclusivity is key in achieving just transition.

Corporations and political players are also using the terminology of a ‘just transition’, often merely as a slogan, without commitment to it or sincerity of purpose. This must be challenged.

During a time of pandemic recovery, no bailouts should be acceptable for transnational corporations – least of all for fossil fuel and mining companies, agribusiness, airlines or any companies based in tax havens. A Covid-19 recovery that is climate-just means using public finance to strengthen social infrastructure, to end income precarity, and to ensure the safety and wellbeing of workers and their communities.
WE DEMAND

That people-centred renewable energy is allowed to flourish, & that obstacles to progress are removed.

Peoples everywhere are ready and eager to take control of their energy systems.

However, huge obstacles remain to implementing small-scale and community-controlled renewable energy systems in peoples’ homes, towns and villages.

Those obstacles include unfavourable government policies, a lack of public resources for community energy initiatives, and limited access to locally appropriate and climate-resilient renewables technology. Differing legal contexts mean that existing national legislation often does not provide sufficient support for, and in some cases actively impedes, community ownership.4

Many of the obstructions to the transformation of the energy system have come about through the deliberate actions of corporations. We must dismantle the stranglehold that transnational corporations have over our energy policies - all policies and incentives should be decided by peoples and communities. By ending subsidies for climate-wrecking dirty energy, and shifting public funds towards providing renewable energy to meet peoples’ needs, the energy revolution will be able to reach its full potential. Policies and incentives should be decided by peoples and communities.

FOOTNOTE:

WE DEMAND
A CLIMATE-JUST WORLD THAT IS FREE FROM PATRIARCHY & ALL SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION, DOMINATION & INEQUALITY

There can be no climate justice without social justice. We must work for a future free from unequal power relations, where humans live in harmony with each other as well as with nature.

This means a world free from injustice, discrimination, racism, sexism, classism, Islamophobia, militarism, LGBTQ-phobia and all other forms of structural and economic oppression.

The dominance of these ideologies in our governments, public policies and institutions has stifled progress to climate justice. Decades of inaction on the part of most of the richest countries in the global North have been largely a result of the low importance that is placed on Black, brown and poor bodies – those who are currently facing the worst climate impacts.

Black lives matter. We assert that those people who are currently marginalised by this system - their lives matter. We do not accept that anyone’s home should be a sacrifice zone, and no loss of life from climate change is acceptable. People should have the right to move and migrate, but also the right to stay in a home and territory that is safe.

While disproportionately affected by climate impacts, women are protagonists in the fight against dirty energy and in the defence of territories. Because of the sexual division of labour in our patriarchal societies, women are primarily responsible for sustaining the home and family and being caregivers. Traditionally under-valued and under-resourced, ‘feminised sectors’ such as care, health and education, have been truly life-saving and life-sustaining during the Covid-19 pandemic, and we demand that the system no longer ignore their essential role.

At the heart of a just recovery and a just energy transformation must be the commitment to end the disproportionate burden of care work on women. Free public care systems for children, the elderly and sick, among others, would be part of bringing about climate justice. By putting the sustainability of life at the centre of social organisation, we can restore a healthy interdependency between all peoples and eco-dependency between peoples and nature. Climate justice means freedom from all systems of oppression, for a future that is safe, healthy, and just.

Basma Giacaman, Director at Al Basma Center Arab Women’s Union, manages the solar energy system that runs all the center’s facilities.

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Cover image: Rooftop solar project giving energy to communities through solar lamps, at the Banishanta union parishad building, Sundarbans, Bangladesh. © Luka Tomac / Friends of the Earth International