

our climate our say



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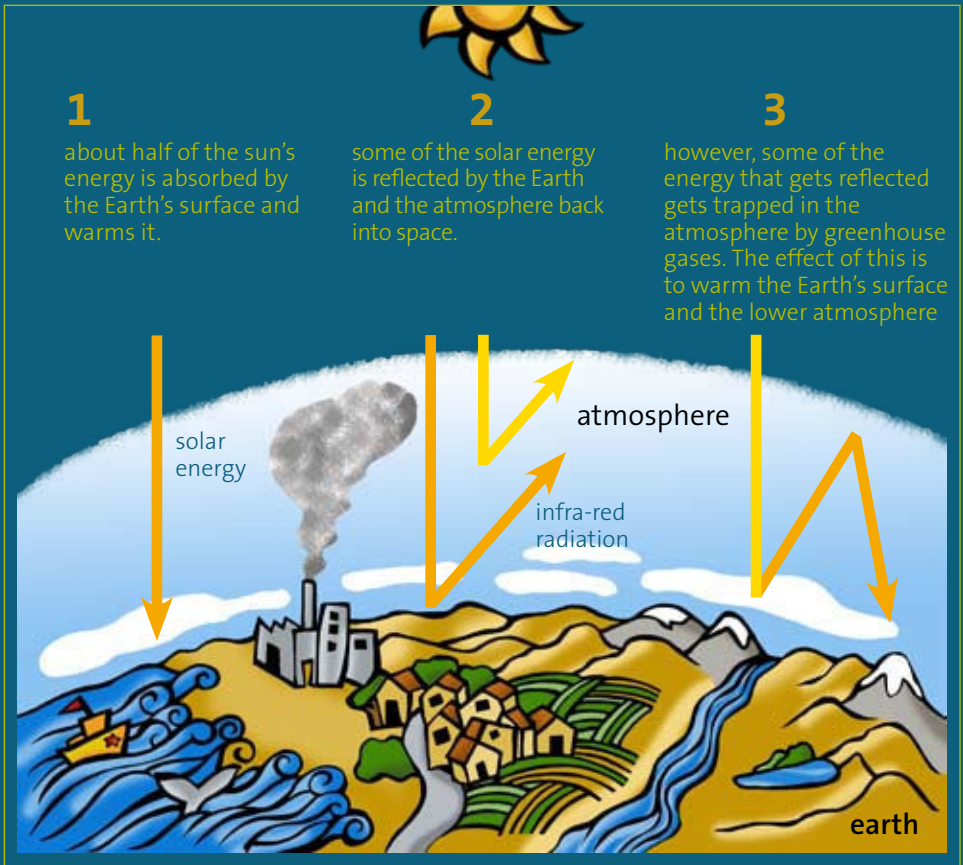
Friends of
the Earth
International

what is climate change?

Have you noticed that the weather is changing? How does this affect you? Throughout history people around the world have faced the impacts of extreme weather, like hurricanes, droughts, heavy rain, and extreme cold or hot temperatures. Some people, particularly poorer communities in different parts of the world, have suffered greatly because of these events. Extreme weather causes flooding, mud slides and droughts, as well as food shortages, the destruction of homes and farms and workplaces, increased diseases and loss of life.

Extreme weather is part of nature's cycles - the natural changes in the Earth's climate - and there is little we can do to stop it, besides organizing our societies to protect the people who are most vulnerable. But research by scientists now shows that human activities around the world are dramatically increasing the chances that this extreme weather will occur even more frequently and with even greater intensity.

The majority of scientists who study the Earth's climate now say that the climate is definitely changing, and that this change is extremely dangerous and is caused by human activities.



what causes climate change?

Man-made climate change is caused by large quantities of greenhouse gases getting trapped in our planet's atmosphere. These gases trap heat from the sun, which causes the overall temperature of the atmosphere to increase and interferes with the Earth's natural weather patterns.

Greenhouse gases are created by many of the activities that are part of how people live in industrial societies, such as:

- Burning fuels like coal and gas for homes, hospitals, factories and schools.
- Burning petrol to run cars, buses, aeroplanes and machines used on farms.
- Growing crops on very big farms and plantations that use chemical fertilisers and are far away from where the food gets eaten.
- Destructive logging of forests (which naturally help to prevent climate change) to produce timber or for plantations to grow crops like those used for agrofuels
- Consuming products that are produced very far away from the countries where they are used.

In summary, climate change is caused by a type of "development model" - a way of organising our societies that relies too much on polluting fuels like coal, oil and gas, and which destroys the natural environment.

There are big differences in the responsibility for causing climate change between countries and between social groups, including between rich and poor. Rich industrialised countries like the United States, Japan and countries in Europe are responsible for three quarters of the total amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, while they are home to only 15 per cent of the world's people. Poorer countries like those in Africa have had a much smaller role in causing the problem of climate change. The idea that those who have the most responsibility for causing climate change should take the greatest action to solve the problem is called 'climate justice'.



Sasol's Secunda plant in South Africa

©groundwork

impacts on people, communities and livelihoods

Climate change is increasing the occurrence of extreme weather and is already having a big impact on people and communities around the world. Already every year climate change causes 300,000 deaths directly and leaves hundreds of millions of people seriously affected by problems like droughts, food shortages, and flooding. However, it is very likely that things could get a lot worse if our governments don't take urgent action now.

It has also been proven that climate change will affect people around the world in different ways. We know that communities who live in poorer countries, in unsafe places such as flood plains or coastal areas, or in places with bad housing conditions could face much worse impacts compared to people in wealthier countries and places.

And it is also possible that, if urgent action isn't taken, the climate will change irreversibly and catastrophically - a disastrous possibility called 'catastrophic climate change'.



Women wash clothes in the flood-waters at an internally displaced persons camp in Arare, Somalia

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climate change and Africa

Africa will suffer a greater share of the impacts of climate change compared to other regions of the world. It will face more severe droughts, food shortages and floods if we don't manage to prevent catastrophic climate change. Scientists tell us that, without dramatic action, climate change could mean:

- Loss of half of Africa's crop yields by 2020.
- Tens of thousands of people across the continent displaced from their homes and forced to become climate refugees.
- Problems accessing water for up to 250 million more people in Africa by 2020, and up to 600 million more by 2050.

the need for action by governments

Governments around the world have already recognised that climate change is a big danger and that they must do something about it. In 1992, world governments came together and signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This international agreement recognises that climate change is a major threat to people. It also recognises that rich countries, who have done the most to cause the problem through their overconsumption of the world's resources, should take the lead in solving it, as well as providing finance to poorer countries as repayment of what we often call their "climate debt".

Climate debt is the debt rich countries owe because of the big role they played in causing the problem of climate change, a problem which affects poorer countries and communities the most.

Indigenous villagers marching at the march of the Campesinos



the failure of governments

Although this agreement to stop climate change was made over 20 years ago, governments have done very little since to tackle the problem and stop it getting worse. And time is running out. The scientific research shows that if we don't take urgent action in the next few years, it will be too late and dangerous tipping points will be reached.

Worse still, it looks like governments are starting to undo the little progress that has been made. At the climate talks in Durban, South Africa in December 2011, the 17th annual meeting of governments on climate change (called COP 17), some powerful countries like the United States, Australia, Japan and countries in Europe want to:

- Break up the agreement that says richer countries should do the most to tackle climate change and help poorer countries to take action to minimise the problems it causes.
- Introduce dangerous new policies like more carbon trading (trading in the right to pollute) and trading pollution for forests through REDD (Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation). Carbon trading increases the risk of catastrophic climate change and harms communities and livelihoods.

why governments are failing: corporate power versus people power

The reason that governments have failed so far to make progress on the urgent change we need is because there are some very powerful people and organisations who don't want these changes to happen. Many of them make a lot of money from activities that cause climate change like mining coal, oil and gas; owning very big farms and plantations; flying aeroplanes; making cars, chemicals and steel; and buying and selling the right to pollute.

But together they should not be more powerful than the millions of people and communities around the world who will face food shortages, homelessness, poverty, problems getting the basic things they need to survive, and even death if we don't stop climate change from getting worse.

The main reason why governments are failing to tackle climate change is the same reason why they are failing to provide enough jobs, hospitals and schools: they are too focused on looking after the interests of a small number of powerful people and corporations and are not concerned enough with the interests of the majority of people.

the solutions

Solving the problem of climate change means we need to change the system. We need a big transformation in the way people live in industrial societies and to protect the ways of living which have a smaller impact on the natural environment. It means that we must:

- **Demand that our governments prioritise the interests of the people and communities** over those of corporations and their profits, and create new rules to make sure they do.
- **Demand that countries, companies and wealthy people** who produce lots of pollution take action to reduce this pollution.
- **Leave the coal, oil and gas in the ground** and make sure that everyone can afford to fuel their homes, transport, schools, hospitals and workplaces with clean 'renewable' energy.
- **Stop cutting down forests** and protect the rights of communities who live in them.
- **Change the way we produce and access food**, so that more people are able to grow and consume good, affordable food which has been grown locally and in a way that protects the natural environment.
- **Strengthen public transport systems and help provide more good jobs** close to where people live so that they have to travel shorter distances to work.
- **Take more care of natural resources** by empowering the communities who rely on them most directly.
- **Make sure everyone gets what they need to have a happy healthy life**, while at the same time ensuring that we are not using too much and that we are re-using and recycling wherever we can.

our climate - our say

how do we tackle it?

To stop catastrophic climate change and build a better world where people are safe and well and their incomes and livelihoods are secure we need:

- Urgent action and commitment by all governments, especially those of rich industrialised countries, to make these big changes in the way our societies work and how we use resources from nature
- Rich countries to repay their climate debt and provide money to poorer countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America so that they can make these transformations happen too
- To put the interests of people, communities and workers at the heart of decision-making on how this transformation happens and ensure that our voices are heard and any changes that happen respect our rights and livelihoods.

what you can do

We need governments to hear the voices of the poor and ordinary people and communities when they meet in South Africa in December and beyond. The best way to do this is to organise together because if we speak together we will have a better chance of being heard. There are many ways that you can get involved. You can:

- **Organise a meeting** with people who live and work in your community to spread the message for climate justice and plan some actions you can take together to help make this happen
- **Write to your elected representative** and ask the government to stand up for strong action on climate change and not be bullied by corporations or the governments of rich industrialised countries
- **Spread the message for climate justice** by text message or online by social media like Facebook and Twitter
- **Join a protest** outside a local government office or a local factory or plant that is causing lots of pollution and harming the local community
- **Join a local organisation or group** that is campaigning for climate justice, or even start one if there isn't one already that you can join.

*Waste pickers marching
for their right to work
in Pietermaritzburg,
South Africa*



about Friends of the Earth International

We are the world's largest grassroots environmental network, uniting 76 national member groups and some 5,000 local activist groups on every continent. With over 2 million members and supporters around the world, we campaign on today's most urgent environmental and social issues. We challenge the current model of economic and corporate globalization, and promote solutions that will help to create environmentally sustainable and socially just societies.

Contact the Friends of the Earth member group in your country and get involved www.foei.org



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