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People's conference on climate change in Bolivia

Peter Carter and Julie Johnston

We are recently back on Pender Island from an amazing time spent in the delightful Bolivian city of Cochabamba—with good news. For those of us who are determined to leave today's children a planet with a future, there is now good reason for feeling hopeful.

We can have some real influence by supporting the agreement that came out of the first World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (April 19–22) as well as Bolivia's UN climate position. This is a chance to work for a habitable planet, one which we can be proud to tell our children and grandchildren about.

The People's Conference on Climate Change was hosted by the Bolivian government in response to the abject failure of the UN Copenhagen Climate Conference of December 2009.

We went to Bolivia because of the Bolivian government's submission to Copenhagen—the first and only submission from any nation—which meets the requirements of ethical and scientific integrity on global climate change. We were even interviewed about this on a regional Bolivian TV station!

The Bolivian Conference

The People's Conference was an amazing success in every way. The Bolivian government had prepared for up to

15,000 participants and we expected that only half that number might attend. As it turned out, the Universidad del Valle in Cochabamba was packed with 35,000 participants from 140 countries. A delegation of over 50 attended from New York City. Much to our surprise, the event progressed without a hitch in a delightfully relaxed and productive manner. Seventeen international working groups worked hard to develop the consensus statements that were integrated into the People's Climate Agreement.

The contribution of Canadians at the conference was considerable. And among those accompanying Bolivian president Evo Morales (pronounced AY-vo) on the May 7 follow-up presentation of the People's Climate Agreement to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in New York, was

Canada's Maude Barlow.

What is the connection between indigenous president Evo Morales, Maude Barlow and global climate change? Simple: climate justice with respect to future public water and food security. Global climate change on all continents means there will be more droughts, heat waves and floods.



In New York, Maude Barlow said, 'The message from social movements and governments in Cochabamba was loud and clear that we need urgent climate action that respects the rights of Mother Earth.'

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Island Tides, Box 55, Pender Island, BC, Canada. Phone: 250-629-3660. Fax: 250-629-3838.
Email: islandtides@islandtides.com. Website: <http://www.islandtides.com>

The People's Agreement will be submitted to the UN Climate Change Conference (COP16) at the end of November in Mexico.

UN Framework Convention Submission

On April 26, the Bolivian government also forwarded a submission on the outcome of the conference to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat. The submission includes the following highlights with respect to climate targets, together with a proposed revision to the world's economic model to allow today's atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations to return to safe levels for all future generations and planet Earth.

It states that 'a system of unfettered and unregulated markets has resulted in prioritizing the extreme competition for profits and growth, and that this has separated humanity from nature, establishing a logic of domination over it, turning everything into a commodity: water, earth, the human genome, the ancestral cultures, biodiversity, justice, ethics, rights of peoples, and life itself.'

It advocates 'a development model that is not destructive or based on unlimited growth, recognizing that countries need to produce goods and services to meet the basic needs of its population, but by no means can continue on the current path of development in which richer countries have a carbon footprint five times larger than the planet can bear.'

It urges 'all Parties to cooperate for enhancing and promoting a supportive and just international economic system and architecture, including the global international trade system that would lead to sustainable development.'

On a shared vision for long-term cooperative action, the submission calls for developed countries to 'take the lead and strive towards returning greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to well below 300ppm CO₂ equivalent with a view to returning concentrations to levels as close as possible to pre-industrial levels in the longer-term, and to limit the average global temperature rise to a maximum level of 1°C with a view to returning temperatures to levels as close as possible to pre-industrial levels in the longer-term.'

It states that 'all Annex I Parties to the Convention [developed nations] shall, in accordance with their

commitments of Article 4.2 of the Convention, undertake ambitious national economy-wide binding targets for quantified emission reduction commitments of at least 50% of their domestic greenhouse gas emissions during the period 2013 to 2017 and by more than 100% before 2040, compared to their 1990 levels, and adopt policies and actions accordingly.'

The comprehensive People's Climate Agreement also reaffirms all the specific obligations on industrialized nations, agreed upon under the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These nations have practically ignored all of these commitments for over 15 years, instead protecting the deadly globalized growth of the fossil-fuelled greenhouse-gas-polluting world economy, and not the future of humanity and life on Earth.

Doing Nothing Is Not An Option

As was recognized by the Cochabamba Climate Conference, we are now in a state of dire global climate emergency. The combined global land and ocean average surface temperature for March 2010 was the warmest on record—US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

It is a long established fact of greenhouse gas science that 20% of all carbon dioxide emissions will last in the atmosphere for 1,000 years, heating the surface of the planet and acidifying the oceans.

Today's global temperature increase will double, even if global emissions were to be cut starting today. That means that the most climate-change-vulnerable populations are today condemned to declining water availability and food production. That is a huge crime against humanity.

With the USA and Canada leading the continued sabotage of a new binding and effective UN climate treaty, computer climate models show us on course for the catastrophic tripling of today's temperature increase (over 2°C) before 2050. At that temperature increase, the agricultural climate models have Canadians as well as Bolivians suffering losses to their water security and food production.

(See <http://pwcc.wordpress.com> for more information.)