

Declaration of the Leaders of Climate Communities from Asia, Africa and Latin America

At the UN Climate Summit, Copenhagen
(16 Dec 2009)

Right at the outset let us declare that we are not here to demand anything from the global political leaders who have gathered here in Copenhagen to negotiate their solutions for the Climate Crisis. We—the grassroots communities in the forests, the women, small farmers, pastoralists, nomads and fisher communities—are resource-rich in our own right. We know how to use our resources wisely as we are the centers of ecological knowledge. Therefore there is nothing that you can give us to combat the climate crisis. On the other hand, if you want to reclaim life on this planet, it is you who have to demand this strength from us.

We want to register our strongest protest against the shutting out of our voices from the Climate Convention you are holding here in Copenhagen. This is unprecedented in the tradition of UN's international conventions and already creates deep doubts in our minds on the intent of this meeting. Your negotiations are a farce and you will arrive at a solution that has already been predetermined by you who have not lived and loved the earth and its resources as we have.

In this process you have openly shown how undemocratic this process has been. Without bringing in the voices of the 'climate communities' like us, the decisions that you take will never be legitimate. We want to make it clear to you that the decisions taken without our involvement will not be binding on us, who represent the majority of the people who walk this earth and who live with nature on a day-to-day basis with our lives depending on climate and its changes.

Unlike you, it is the community leaders of the world who have shown real courage and vision by organizing people across their own countries to come out together to share, talk and engage with the global climate debate. We invite you to take inspiration from the wisdom that has emerged from the ground in defining the text that you will bring out of the Copenhagen Summit, and we offer you our own text for your climate change convention. Use this as the basis of your agreements if you want to retain life on earth:

Our Identity

We, the people of this planet from the mountains, coasts, forests, deserts, plains and plateaus of this vast and rich earth—who have lived with nature for millennia, whose farming, fishing, forestry and pastoralism have been seen nourished by Mother Earth—have today decided to articulate more strongly, more clearly and more loudly our issues, concerns, and solutions to the climate crisis.

We are of the firm view that our bonding with nature, our respect for it, and the way we have learnt from our forefathers to live in harmony with it, shows us many ways of dealing with the projected problems of climate change such as higher temperature, scanty and erratic rainfall, ill health and malnutrition. In our discussions with each other in Copenhagen, outside the confines of the intergovernmental negotiations, we have rediscovered our strengths which spur us to assert that the world needs to recognize these as the foundation of our capacity to combat the climate crisis.

Our Strength

1. The great plant and animal biodiversity in the Global South, including edible, medicinal, domesticated, and wild varieties which we have inherited and protected for millennia on our farms, in our forests and our seas, and with whom we have a relationship of mutual care and respect are our greatest resource. As a community, we

have been able to bond together to face the threats posed to the environment by the current climate change. We have the understanding that we the 'Children of the Soil' cannot survive without our land and our seas, our good mother-earth, because she is an integral part of our life, livelihood and dignity. Our forests, coral reefs, sand dunes protect us from natural calamities, give us food, fodder and other livelihood options, and offer shelter to a large number of species with whom we share the earth. We have been living with the problems of cyclones, water-logging and salinisation for years, and we have the knowledge to anticipate and adapt to their adverse impact. Our Community cohesiveness and social bonding are still alive with us and can help us to take collective actions to confront the climate crisis.

2. It is our profound belief that the rich ancestral knowledge that we have been bequeathed, can guide us to combat the current climate crisis. This centuries-old community knowledge has enabled us to nurture our flora and fauna in the forests. As fishers, we are unswerving in our obedience and respect towards the heritage given by our forefathers through the practice of complete ecological harvesting, which does not muddle the balance of coastal flora and fauna. As fishers, we are unswerving in our obedience and respect towards the heritage given by our forefathers through the practice of complete ecological harvesting, which does not muddle the balance of coastal flora and fauna.
3. Our heritage of seed saving and exchange, and the knowledge associated with it is an invaluable asset in our engagement with climatic factors. Our traditional seeds can withstand the climate crisis, and our cultural

practices for preservation of seeds and flowers, forever adaptive to the needs of the hour, can nourish them even in adverse circumstances. We are the proud conservers of valuable genetic and ecological varieties of aquatic flora and fauna, which provide us food and means of survival and dignity as fisher-folk.

4. Our agriculture is nonpolluting, self-regenerating, least energy demanding, and is based on ecological principles. Our cropping system, in its pristine diversity, not only feeds us with diverse foods but also comforts us with its capacity to retain the richness and fertility of our soils. The organic system which has been the hallmark of our farming for millennia provides us with safe and nutritionally rich food.
5. Our forests protect us from natural calamities, give us food-fodder and other livelihood options, and offer shelter to a large number of species with whom we share the earth.

Our Demand

We demand that the global communities recognize these great community assets of ours and initiate actions. The actions we demand from all concerned, particularly the developmental agencies, locally, nationally and globally are the following:

1. Recognize the diversity and integrity of our farms, livestock, forests and seas as civilizational assets and do not do anything to disturb them. Declare officially that these are fundamental in our fight against the Climate Crisis;
2. Endorse the multifunctional, ecological, and diverse agriculture we practice as the greatest defense against climate change. Considering the rich practices and knowledge that we bring to agriculture, we urge that our communities be declared as ecological communities and

by law, prohibit chemical fertilizers and pesticides from our region. In order to further promote this form of agriculture, calculate and provide carbon credit to our form of agriculture and let our communities benefit from them. We demand that the ecological and diversified agriculture we practice be declared as the most viable and suitable strategy to adapt to and mitigate climate crises. Initiate policy measures to prevent mono-culturalisation, and protect and promote these multi-level diversities in our crop, livelihood, food, and culture;

3. Respect pastoralism and mobility as distinctive sources of cultural identity, integrity, and rights. Empower Pastoralists in the management of existing protected areas and recognise their customary territories as community conserved areas (CCAs) when so demanded by the Pastoral peoples. Recognise the crucial role of indigenous knowledge and the capacity of pastoralists and all other indigenous communities to conserve biodiversity in full compatibility with pastoral livelihoods;
4. Recognise that the traditional fishers are the stewards of the coast and waters. Our communities have historically lived on the edge of the water and land; governing its resources, using methods handed down to us by our forefathers. To carry out our work, we daily risk our lives, against vagaries of wind and currents. The climate crisis has aggravated our risks. For us, this crisis is not in our future scenario, but in the reality we are already living. It has made our livelihood more insecure. Current government policies and economic paradigms that have promoted unplanned and rampant development, and the greedy extraction of resources from our ecosystems, have not been viable and sustainable; and

5. Honour each one of our community members and Frontline Warriors against Climate Change and enact policy measures to provide them with incentives to practice and promote this diversity.

Signed: Coalition of Climate Communities

- Baiga Community, Chattisgarh, India
- Bhils and Bhilalas, Madhya Pradesh, India
- Chakhesang Nagas, Nagaland, India
- Women Dalit Farmers, Andhra Pradesh, India
- Dalit Farmers, Tamil Nadu, India
- Dongria Kondhis, Niyamgiri Hills - Orissa, India
- Jele, Chashi and Moule, Sunderbans - West Bengal, India
- Kaunta, Khatia, Pandra and Lolia, Orissa, India
- Maldharis, Gujarat
- Parava, Muthurayar and Nadars, Tamil Nadu
- Santhals, Jharkhand, India
- Movimiento Ciudadano Frente al Cambio Climatico (MOCICC), Peru
- Niger Delta Women's Movement for Peace and Development, Nigeria
- ACTWID, Cameroon Rural Women's Movement
- Ghana National Youth Coalition on Climate Change (GNYCCC)
- Ekta Parishad
- People's Coalition of Climate Communities
- Global Call to Action Against Poverty

The Coalition of Climate Communities is a spontaneous platform that represents the hope and anguish of grassroots leaders attending the UN Climate Summit at Copenhagen (Dec 2009) – and their resolve that grassroots communities need to be the protagonists and not the exhibits of the global debate on climate change.