

A Quaker response to the crisis of climate change

The crisis of global climate change represents a supreme test of humanity's collective wisdom and courage. Our immoderate use of the Earth's resources violates the entire biosphere, threatening the lives of millions of people and the habitats of thousands of species. Many of the poorest people are already suffering a changed climate; they are asking us all to act.

How has humanity produced this crisis? Our faith response is that prevailing social values have obscured what it means to live authentically on this Earth. In rich European countries we consume more than we need within an economic system that divides us as a society; in much that we do, we cause harm to the planet and each other without enriching our lives.

The Earth is God's work and not ours to do with as we please. We recall Gandhi's saying, often quoted by Quakers: 'Live simply that others may simply live'. As a Quaker community, we do try to live what we believe, guided by the values of simplicity, truth, equality and peace. Too often we fall short of honouring them. Climate change is challenging us to ask anew what our faith leads us to do.

As individuals and as a community, we are now making the difficult decisions and plans necessary to limit our ecological impact to a sustainable level. With encouragement from one another, we are progressively reducing our reliance on non-renewable resources while stepping up our campaign for wider social change. As a small religious society, we take heart in belonging to a community of faith groups and others working towards the same goals in a hopeful spirit.

We gladly take up our responsibility and call for unprecedented international cooperation to enable the large cuts in global emissions which are required. This will be a difficult road to travel but we are prepared to support decision-makers in taking the radical steps necessary. We appreciate progress made and uphold decision-makers as they navigate conflicting priorities, yet we challenge them to hold faith with the goal and not bend to short-term expediency.

An inequitable global agreement on climate change could lead to forced migrations and serious conflict. Any agreement must put the world's poorest first; it falls to richer countries to bear the greater burden of responsibility for change. The goal is achievable but priorities will need to change: currently, the majority of states commit more resources to warfare than to tackling climate change.

Where we see crisis, we also see opportunity to remake society as a communion of people living sustainably as part of the natural world. By leading the simpler lives of a low-carbon society, we draw nearer to the abundance of peace, freedom and true community. Our faith in common humanity gives hope; love, rather than fear, can still lead us through this crisis.

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