



## Jews and the Climate Emergency: Building a United Front

The climate emergency affects everyone. It threatens our world and our future. Turning climate change around can only be accomplished through broad-based coalitions that cross all lines of division including: racism, classism, sexism, Anti-semitism, Islamophobia, ageism, LGBTQ oppression. Jews can and need to be an integral part of this coalition.

The origins of the Jewish people are inextricably connected to the natural world, including a commitment to ethical relationships with the land, animals, and all peoples. However, in the different lands and time periods in which Jews have lived, we have been targets of genocide, prohibited from owning land, and exiled from our countries. As part of the climate justice movement, Jews can reclaim our relationship to land in cooperation with all the world's peoples.

As a people now spread over all of the earth, Jews are of all races and

ethnicities. Jews are Mizrahi, Sephardi, Ashkenazi; we are religious and secular. Jews are white, people of color and indigenous, young and old, of all class backgrounds. Jews are a people of broad diversity who have survived genocide and exile and carry intergenerational trauma. Jews can heal from this trauma and build greater unity amongst our own people. As we build unity, we will be better able to support and follow the leadership of frontline communities, including poor people, people of color, indigenous and tribal peoples within the climate justice movement.

Anti-Semitism<sup>1</sup> is the institutionalized mistreatment of Jews and the singling

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<sup>1</sup> While the term anti-Semitism is not precise (there are also Semitic peoples who are not Jews), it is the term that has been widely used to refer to the specific oppression directed against the Jewish people.



out of Jews for blame for many of the world's problems. Jews have been continually scapegoated to protect the interests of the ruling classes. Although anti-Semitism inflicts terror and violence against Jews, it is aimed at all working people: historically, anti-Semitism has divided the working class and diverted them from organizing effectively to secure equal access to the world's resources.

The timing of the current rise of anti-Semitism is not random. It is occurring when income inequality is at a high. Unions have less power, neo-fascism<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Neo-fascism is an ideology and political culture that includes ultra-nationalism, white supremacy, authoritarianism, male domination, xenophobia, opposition to immigration, and the strategic erosion of basic democratic rights of citizenship, voting, independent press and judicial system, enacted through violence, intimidation, cult of personality and propaganda.



*Sustaining All Life* (SAL) is an international grassroots organization working to end the climate emergency within the context of ending all divisions among people. *United to End Racism* (UER) is a group of people of all ages and backgrounds, in many different countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal. UER and SAL are projects of and use the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from the emotional scars of oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging emotional release, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved. Re-evaluation Counseling currently exists in 95 countries.



[SustainingAllLife.org](http://SustainingAllLife.org)



[UnitedToEndRacism.org](http://UnitedToEndRacism.org)



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is rising, immigrants and other groups are being attacked. In these increasingly desperate economic and climate conditions, feelings of anger and betrayal among working people can be diverted into a search for scapegoats. Working class people need information on how anti-Semitism operates in order to recognize it, speak out against it, and prevent it from dividing our movements—including the movement to restore our environment.

In many progressive movements, issues around Israel have become divisive. Criticism of the policies of the Israeli government towards the Palestinian people is not anti-Semitism. But singling Israel out for blame for the complex difficulties in the Middle East can be an aspect of anti-Semitism and can play an

unnecessarily divisive role in liberation movements globally. It is important to have climate activists understand how anti-Semitism operates so it cannot be used to derail the climate justice movement.

Jews can and must bring our long history of progressive organizing to the climate justice movement. Anti-Semitism has in the past led many Jews to remain invisible as Jews in our movement activism. It is crucial now for Jews to be fully active in climate justice work, visible as Jews, and fighting alongside all other oppressed groups.







## The Work of *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism*

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—and some very large changes in our economy and the lives we live are needed for this to happen. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis cannot be resolved without ending racism, genocide toward Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on people targeted by these particular oppressions. Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of both climate change and racism.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression, and especially racism and classism) between nations and between groups of people, (2) widespread feelings of discouragement and powerlessness, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the escalating damage to the earth's climate, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of our economic system. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these and other issues.

### **The role of oppression**

The economic and political forms of our societies demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the earth. This results in exploitation and oppression. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) target everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we tend to act toward others in ways that repeat the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the mental and emotional damage done to humans is the result of this passing on of hurt. Though humans are vulnerable to acting in oppressive ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a human has been

hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

### **The importance of healing personal damage**

The mental and emotional harm done to us by oppression and other hurtful experiences interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the climate emergency. People would not cooperate with a society that exploits people and damages the environment if they had not first been hurt.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other damaging behavior is not quick or easy work. Many of us resist this work. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the damage done to us by oppression. Some of us assume that we will never be free of this damage.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts and address barriers to effective organizing. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. By releasing distressed feelings in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.



Sustaining All Life



**For more information, see:**

[www.sustainingalllife.org](http://www.sustainingalllife.org) or [www.unitedtoendracism.org](http://www.unitedtoendracism.org)

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