

## The Time to Act is Now

### A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change

May 14, 2015

---

Today we live in a time of great crisis, confronted by the gravest challenge that humanity has ever faced: the ecological consequences of our own collective karma. The scientific consensus is overwhelming: human activity is triggering environmental breakdown on a planetary scale. Global warming, in particular, is happening much faster than previously predicted, most obviously at the North Pole. For hundreds of thousands of years, the Arctic Ocean has been covered by an area of sea-ice as large as Australia—but now this is melting rapidly. In 2007 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) forecast that the Arctic might be free of summer sea ice by 2100. It is now apparent that this could occur within a decade or two. Greenland's vast ice-sheet is also melting more quickly than expected. The rise in sea-level this century will be at least one meter—enough to flood many coastal cities and vital rice-growing areas such as the Mekong Delta in Vietnam.

Glaciers all over the world are receding quickly. If current economic policies continue, the glaciers of the Tibetan Plateau, source of the great rivers that provide water for billions of people in Asia, are likely to disappear by mid-century. Severe drought and crop failures are already affecting Australia and Northern China. Major reports—from the IPCC, United Nations, European Union, and International Union for Conservation of Nature—agree that, without a collective change of direction, dwindling supplies of water, food and other resources could create famine conditions, resource battles, and mass migration by mid-century—perhaps by 2030, according to the U.K.'s chief scientific advisor.

Global warming plays a major role in other ecological crises, including the loss of many plant and animal species that share this Earth with us. Oceanographers report that half the carbon released by burning fossil fuels has been absorbed by the oceans, increasing their acidity by about 30%. Acidification is disrupting calcification of shells and coral reefs, as well as threatening plankton growth, the source of the food chain for most life in the sea.

Eminent biologists and U.N. reports concur that “business-as-usual” will drive half of all species on Earth to extinction within this century. Collectively, we are violating the first precept—“do not harm living beings”—on the largest possible scale. And we cannot foresee the biological consequences for human life when so many species that invisibly contribute to our own well-being vanish from the planet.

Many scientists have concluded that the survival of human civilization is at stake. We have reached a critical juncture in our biological and social evolution. There has never been a more important time in history to bring the resources of Buddhism to bear on behalf of all living beings. The four noble truths provide a framework for diagnosing our current situation and formulating appropriate guidelines—because the threats and disasters we face ultimately stem from the human mind, and therefore require profound changes within our minds. If personal suffering stems from craving and ignorance—from the three poisons of greed, ill will, and delusion—the same applies to the suffering that afflicts us on a

collective scale. Our ecological emergency is a larger version of the perennial human predicament. Both as individuals and as a species, we suffer from a sense of self that feels disconnected not only from other people but from the Earth itself. As Thich Nhat Hanh has said, “We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness.” We need to wake up and realize that the Earth is our mother as well as our home—and in this case the umbilical cord binding us to her cannot be severed. When the Earth becomes sick, we become sick, because we are part of her.

Our present economic and technological relationships with the rest of the biosphere are unsustainable. To survive the rough transitions ahead, our lifestyles and expectations must change. This involves new habits as well as new values. The Buddhist teaching that the overall health of the individual and society depends upon inner well-being, and not merely upon economic indicators, helps us determine the personal and social changes we must make.

Individually, we must adopt behaviors that increase everyday ecological awareness and reduce our “carbon footprint”. Those of us in the advanced economies need to retrofit and insulate our homes and workplaces for energy efficiency; lower thermostats in winter and raise them in summer; use high efficiency light bulbs and appliances; turn off unused electrical appliances; drive the most fuel-efficient cars possible, and reduce meat consumption in favor of a healthy, environmentally-friendly plant-based diet.

These personal activities will not by themselves be sufficient to avert future calamity. We must also make institutional changes, both technological and economic. We must “de-carbonize” our energy systems as quickly as feasible by replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy sources that are limitless, benign and harmonious with nature. We especially need to halt the construction of new coal plants, since coal is by far the most polluting and most dangerous source of atmospheric carbon. Wisely utilized, wind power, solar power, tidal power, and geothermal power can provide all the electricity that we require without damaging the biosphere. Since up to a quarter of world carbon emissions result from deforestation, we must reverse the destruction of forests, especially the vital rainforest belt where most species of plants and animals live.

It has recently become quite obvious that significant changes are also needed in the way our economic system is structured. Global warming is intimately related to the gargantuan quantities of energy that our industries devour to provide the levels of consumption that many of us have learned to expect. From a Buddhist perspective, a sane and sustainable economy would be governed by the principle of sufficiency: the key to happiness is contentment rather than an ever-increasing abundance of goods. The compulsion to consume more and more is an expression of craving, the very thing the Buddha pinpointed as the root cause of suffering.

Instead of an economy that emphasizes profit and requires perpetual growth to avoid collapse, we need to move together towards an economy that provides a satisfactory standard of living for everyone while allowing us to develop our full (including spiritual) potential in harmony with the biosphere that sustains and nurtures all beings, including future generations. If political leaders are unable to recognize the urgency of our global crisis, or unwilling to put the long-term good of humankind above the short-term benefit of fossil-fuel corporations, we may need to challenge them with sustained campaigns of citizen action.

Dr James Hansen of NASA and other climatologists have recently defined the precise targets needed to prevent global warming from reaching catastrophic “tipping points.” For human civilization to be sustainable, the safe level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is no more than 350 parts per million (ppm). This target has been endorsed by the Dalai Lama, along with other Nobel laureates and distinguished scientists. Our current situation is particularly worrisome in that the present level is already 387 ppm, and has been rising at 2 ppm per year. We are challenged not only to reduce carbon emissions, but also to remove large quantities of carbon gas already present in the atmosphere.

As signatories to this statement of Buddhist principles, we acknowledge the urgent challenge of climate change. We join with the Dalai Lama in endorsing the 350 ppm target. In accordance with Buddhist teachings, we accept our individual and collective responsibility to do whatever we can to meet this target, including (but not limited to) the personal and social responses outlined above.

We have a brief window of opportunity to take action, to preserve humanity from imminent disaster and to assist the survival of the many diverse and beautiful forms of life on Earth. Future generations, and the other species that share the biosphere with us, have no voice to ask for our compassion, wisdom, and leadership. We must listen to their silence. We must be their voice, too, and act on their behalf.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b> <i>(included for identification purposes only)</i>
Mr. William Aiken	Soka Gakkai International-USA
Dr. Tatsushi Arai	Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research
Dr. Asoka Bandarage	
Ms. Kristin Barker	One Earth Sangha
Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi	Buddhist Global Relief
Mrs. Debra Boudreaux	Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation
Dr. Tara Brach	Insight Meditation Community of Washington
Hon. Richard Brown	Soka Gakkai International-USA
Dr. Grace Burford	Prescott Insight Meditation Sangha
Dr. Hugh Byrne	Insight Meditation Community of Washington (IMCW)
Rev. Joshin Byrnes	Upaya Zen Center
Rev. Myokei Caine-Barrett	Nichiren Shu Order of North America
Mr. Krishna R. Chakma	Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh
Ven. Shinge Sherry Chayat	Zen Studies Society and Zen Center of Syracuse
Mr. Vincenzo Cursio	World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates
Mr. Khiet Dang	Giac Hoang Temple, Washington, D.C.
Ven. Lama Surya Das	Dzogchen Center
Rev. Michelle Dunson	Buddhist Council of New York
Dr. Trudy Goodman	Insight LA
Mr. Daniel Hall	Soka Gakkai International-USA
Rev. Sangwon Hwang	Won Buddhism
Rev. Earl Ikeda	BCA, New York Buddhist Church
Rev. Noriaki Ito	Higashi Honganji Buddhist Temple
Dr. Christopher Ives	Stonehill College
Dr. Jane Naomi Iwamura	University of the West

Rev. Martin Janowitz	Shambhala International
Ms. Jennifer Kim	Shantideva Meditation Center
Dr. Sallie King	James Madison University
Rev. Shumyo Kojima	Zenshuji Soto Mission / Soto Zen
Dr. Jack Kornfield	Spirit Rock Center
Mr. Peter Kovach	Insight Meditation Community of Washington (IMCW)
Dr. Kenneth Kraft	Lehigh University
Ms. Lisa Kring	Insight LA
Dr. Lorne Ladner	Guhyasamaja Center, FPMT
Rev. Taigen Dan Leighton	Ancient Dragon Zen Gate, Chicago
Mr. Lou Leonard	World Wildlife Fund & One Earth Sangha
Mr. Hanford Lin	Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation
Ms. Katie Loncke	Buddhist Peace Fellowship
Ms. Martine Miller	Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers
Dr. Willa Miller	Natural Dharma Fellowship
Mr. Timothy Moraca	IMCW & MPG-Annapolis
Rev. Toshikazu Nakagaki	Buddhist Council of New York
Dr. Mohan Nirala	Indian Buddhist Vihara - Accokeek
Ven. Sunyananda Dharma	Dharmakaya Buddhist Association
Ven. Suwed Pathammavong	Meditation Center of DC
Ms. Deirdre Peterson	Village Zendo - NYC
Ven. Sophouns Pheach	Wat Jotanaram
Ms. Sierra Pickett	Buddhist Peace Fellowship
Dr. Ronald Purser	Korean Buddhist Taego Order
Ms. Sue Quinn	NACOLE
Mr. Rajeev Rauniyar	Guhaya Samaja
Mr. Richard Reoch	Shambhala
Hon. Gretchen Rohr	Insight Meditation Community of Washington
Rev. Hozan Alan Senauke	Clear View Project
Ven. Miaohsi Shih	Fo Guang Shan Hsi Lai Temple
Dr. Judith Simmer-Brown	Naropa University and Shambhala
Rev. Gregory Snyder	Brooklyn Zen Center
Mrs. Sylvie Jinchou Sun	Buddhist Global Relief
Ven. Losang Tendrol	Guhyasamaja Buddhist Center
Ven. Raungrit Thaitae	Wat Thai DC
Dr. Sovan Tun	Cambodian Buddhist Society, Inc.
Ven. Katugastota Uparatana	Maryland Buddhist Community
Ven. Phap Vu	Blue Cliff Monastery, NY - Thich Nhat Hanh
Ms. Thanissara Mary Weinberg	Chattanooga Insight / Dharmagiri South Africa
Dr. Duncan Williams	University of Southern California
Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams	Center for Transformative Change
Mr. Larry Yang	Spirit Rock Meditation Center, East Bay Meditation Center
Ven. Nan-Jun Yu	Dharma Drum Mountain/Chan Meditation Center