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Global Climate Justice Youth Speak Out

# At the COP

## Global Climate Justice Youth Speak Out

Interviews compiled from young global climate justice activists by

[www.climatejusticeproject.com](http://www.climatejusticeproject.com)

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# ACRONYMS

CLIC - Coalición Latinoamericana por la Clima

CJN! - Climate Justice Now!

COY - Conference of Youth

COP - Conference of the Parties

GYEM - Ghana Youth Environmental Movement

IICAT - The International Institute of Climate Action & Theory

IPCC - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

NGO - nongovernmental organization

UKYCC - United Kingdom Youth Climate Coalition

UNFCCC - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

WTF - Where's the Finance?

YOUNGO - Youth nongovernmental organization

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE EDITORS WISH TO THANK EVERYONE who shared their time, energy, and passion for climate justice to make this work possible. We present a small glimmer of the wisdom of youth climate activists in this book and hope to share much more in the months and years to come.

First and foremost, of course, we thank all the activists whose words are the heart of the book. We have learned so much from you! Our wonderful transcribers, almost all of them undergraduates at the University of California, Santa Barbara, put in countless hours of service into preparing the audio interviews into word documents: Carla Arciniega, Cristina Awadallah, Hannah Berman, Abigail Bernal, Stephanie Del Toro, NhuMai Do, Nia Evans, Paige Gankema, Codi Hale, Holly Higgins, Julia Lara, Jennifer Melo, Marcelo Mendez, Citlaly Negrete, Ashley Sneary, and Gaelen Vasquez. Thank you!

Those who edited each contribution, including Anjana Ramkumar, Christina Orzechowski, and especially John's mum, Ramona, who tirelessly put her love of language into the final product.

The members of the Climate Justice Project group who joined us in Warsaw for two crazy weeks in November 2013 shaped and made this project possible: Ben Liddie, Natasha Weidner, Emily Williams, and Richard Widick. Special thanks to Ben, Natasha, and Emily, for conducting some of the interviews, holding the camera when Summer couldn't, and making connections to the activists in these pages.

John wants to add a special note of thanks to Corrie, who did so many of the best interviews, and Summer, whose camera work and typesetting of this entire book are things of beauty.

# INTRODUCTION

WE STARTED TO DRAFT THESE WORDS the same day as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released the final document of its Fifth Assessment Report. Those of you who are reading this probably need little reminder of the state of crisis in which the world finds itself, a crisis marked by a precarious global economy, governments characterized by corporate influence and inaction, and cultures where violence is embedded in everyday life, from sexual assault to global warfare.

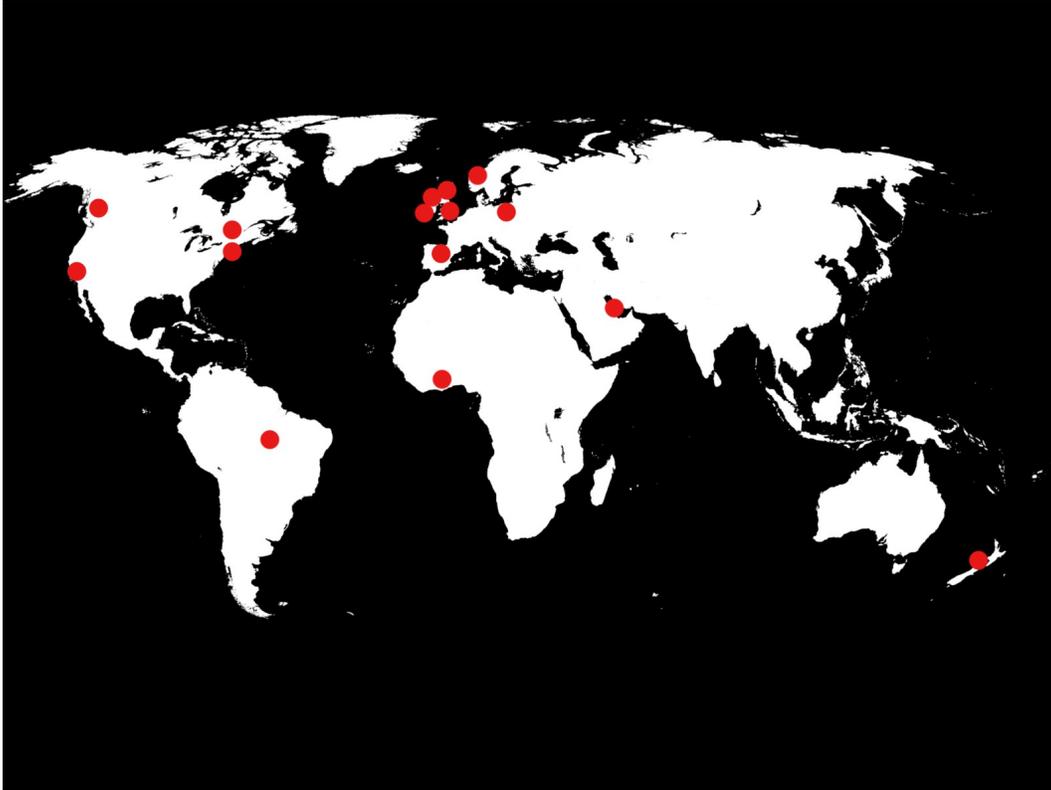
This gloomy reality is now exponentially worsened by climate change. To avoid some of the most catastrophic effects of climate change, we need to leave four-fifths of the planet's known fossil fuel reserves in the ground. Forever. We have changed the planet so much from the benign climate that marked the rise of the species as to constitute a new geological epoch, named the Anthropocene. We have created a world where the majority of the population and life itself lacks the fundamental conditions for dignity. But we can recreate it too.

Into this dramatic moment has come a glimmer of hope, and that is what our "book" is about. This work is not ours, in fact. It is the work of the young activists whose words and images grace its pages. It is an ongoing work that belongs to all of us, and it is in that spirit that we offer it and invite all to continue to write the story of climate justice that is now the most important one in the world.

*John Foran, Corrie Ellis, Summer Gray*

Santa Barbara, California, November 2014

## CONTRIBUTORS



● **Reem al-Mealla** is a young Bahraini marine and conservation biologist who has worked on various conservation and environmental research projects involving intensive field work in South Africa, Madagascar, Indonesia, and Bahrain. She was awarded the Abel Imray Prize for the outstanding environmental project of 2010 from the University of Essex and is the author of the book *Resource Partitioning in the Indo-Pacific*, which was published in 2011 by Lambert Academic Publishing. Reem's interest in climate change was sparked after witnessing the impacts of climate change on various ecosystems during her field research which has led her to becoming one of 20 founding national coordinators of the Arab Youth Climate Movement spread across the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. Coming from a region often titled a "diamond in the rough," her passion for research, conservation, education, and knowledge transfer is endless. She believes that youth are capable of achieving unimaginable things when given the necessary tools and skills to venture out towards shaping the world we need. Therefore, she dedicates a lot of her time towards knowledge transfer and working with youth to sow the seeds for a more sustainable tomorrow. As the world is coming together to define the Post-2015 Agenda towards a Sustainable World, most countries, especially in the Arab region, do not have the environment in their top list of priorities even though it is known that the quality of human life and health is a reflection of our surroundings. Through her work Reem is determined to make the necessary shift in the region to bring environmental protection and conservation into the priority list.

● **Anjali Appadurai** is connected to land in South India, British Columbia and the American South-west. Her motivation to protect human rights came early, and she has been an active communicator and campaigner in the international youth climate movement. Specializing in the intersection of international climate politics and social movements, she began this work with the youth organization Earth in Brackets which aims to translate political processes to civil society around the world. The personal is political, and Anjali is interested in how the enemy lives in our minds and hearts. With [Earth] she explored the question of how to tell the story of climate justice in a way that re-frames the values we want to live in accordance with. This inquiry got her interested in working with the media, which she thinks of as a powerful tool and a fickle lover. She enjoys diving into the study of power, ideology and societal narratives through strategic communications and media work, an interest galvanized by her work with [Earth]. Anjali currently organizes with the Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice, an international coalition of people's movements around the world taking action on energy. She is also co-founder of the online political platform Tipping Point Collective, which launched in November of this year. She has been writing about international climate politics and the youth climate movement for several years.

● **Marco Cadena** is an environmental justice activist, climate justice communicator, and movement coordinator with wide experience in mobilizing activists on the regional and international levels. He has worked with PUSH Europe, Young Friends of the Earth, and Reclaim Power. He was a very active civil society organizer at the last two COPs, working in various communications capacities, for Climate Justice Now!, among other organizations. He lives and works in London, and he tweets [@MarcoCadena99](#).

● **Louisa Casson** is an organizer with the international team of the UK Youth Climate Coalition, working to strengthen networks of young campaigners across Europe and support youth groups engaging with the UN climate talks to amplify the voice of youth in climate change decision-making processes. She also works at the environmental think-and-do tank E3G in London to support civil society engagement with European climate and energy politics. As part of this, she encourages and co-ordinates interventions from groups in the UK including environmental and development NGOs, youth networks, progressive businesses, and campaigning organizations to call for strong climate leadership from the EU. Working with the International Youth Climate Movement since 2012, she has run capacity-building workshops for youth activists, coordinated actions and digital communications at UN climate conferences, and advocated for greater opportunities for youth participation in global multilateral processes. She is now working on establishing a rapid response campaigning network with Push Europe to enable louder, smarter and better-connected youth political campaigning across Europe. She particularly enjoys running, training workshops, and outreach events with young people in the UK as a way of injecting fresh perspectives into her campaigning and empowering young people to make a difference. She is keen to promote learning-by-doing and sharing lessons learnt through global youth-run initiatives like COP In My City. Louisa earned her bachelor's degree in French and English literature at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, in 2013, and tweets [@LouisaCasson](#).

● **Bryna Cofrin-Shaw** is a Brown University student in the class of 2014. She is a member of Brown University's Climate & Development Lab, a think tank focused on the UNFCCC climate change negotiations, specifically the 48 Least developed Countries, Latin America, the US, and civil society. Her research has primarily related to issues of gender equality and women's vulnerability, as well as studying the access and influence of civil society within the UNFCCC. In 2011, she spent the summer biking through New Hampshire

as an intern for New England Climate Summer, and that same year was one of over 1,000 individuals arrested in the Keystone Pipeline protest at the White House. She spent the fall of 2012 working at Ecuador's Ministry of Agriculture, studying sustainable agricultural practices and leading a program to install gray-water recycling systems in rural communities. Bryna is most interested in how the threat of climate change is presented in literature, the arts, and education, and how civilization's changing relationship to the environment manifests itself in social, political, and natural histories. She is graduating from Brown in December 2014, and is currently working on a thesis that combines her own fiction with an analysis of contemporary literature's approach to climate change. She imagines a future when bringing an end to exploitative capitalism is not viewed as radical, and when all of the Earth's resources, including its people, are valued as finite. When not studying climate change, Bryna plays Ultimate Frisbee and writes and performs in a sketch comedy group. She is also an avid cyclist and bike tourer, interested in working to make the US more sustainable by improving bicycle transit and non-emitting forms of transportation.

● **Antoine Ebel** is a 23 year-old student of public administration from Paris, very active in the innovative student organization CliMates. He is currently in a gap year, interning in both the French delegation in charge of preparing for the Paris COP 21 conference in December 2015, and in an organization that defends the interests of cleantech startups and small and medium businesses. He is passionate about environment and climate issues, and convinced that this generation has an enormous part to play in building a sustainable future for themselves.

● **Corrie Ellis** is a graduate student pursuing a Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara and an activist with 350 Santa Barbara. Corrie's research centers on gender, social and climate justice, labor, and development. Her previous work analyzes gender inequalities in care work and employment in the context of fair trade rose production in Ecuador. With climate change now the most overarching social justice issue of our time, Corrie is excited to be transitioning to work focused on alternative visions and justice within this realm, planning a dissertation focused on how U.S. women and men activate and organize as anti-extraction activists. She feels privileged to have engaged in activism and research on the youth climate justice movement at the U.N. climate summit in Poland in 2014. She is continually inspired by her fellow youth and youths-in-spirit, who are creatively moving us all in the direction of a society that supports *everyone's* right to enjoy each other and our environment.

● **John Foran** has taught Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara since 1989. His books include *Fragile Resistance: Social Transformation in Iran from 1500 to the Present* (1993, get it free [here](#)) and *Taking Power: On the Origins of Third World Revolutions* (2005). Since attending the COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009, he has taken constant inspiration from the global climate justice movement, which he teaches, researches, and speaks about whenever he can (he has been accused of talking about nothing else). Foran is engaged in a long-term participatory action project with the global climate justice movement, and with Dr. Richard Widick, he also co-directs the International Institute of Climate Action & Theory ([www.iicat.org](http://www.iicat.org)) and is a founding member of the Climate Justice Project. He is also active in the Green Party, 350.org, and System Change Not Climate Change. He has written and writes for a number of on-line publications about these struggles (see his work [here](#) and [here](#)).

● **David Gawaith** was born and raised in Wellington, New Zealand. He completed a BSc with honors which focused on the effects of climate change on water resources in southern New Zealand. In 2014 he

changed the focus of his research to look at the social and economic implications of changes in water resources, and is currently working on a Master of Arts thesis looking at the vulnerability of communities in the Himalayas to water stress caused by climate change: "Like most university postgraduates, I believe my line of research covers one of the most important issues of the 21st century. Having recently returned from field work in the mountain communities of Nepal, the implications of climate change have a very human face to me." In 2012, he was part of the "Our Far South" project, exploring issues facing the Southern Ocean and Antarctica. He has since been involved in an outreach program, delivering presentations to schools focusing on the issue of climate change in both Antarctica and Nepal. More recently, he attended COP-18 in Doha as part of the New Zealand Youth Delegation. While this experience was "at times frustrating and saddening, it has strengthened my resolve to address the issues of climate change. From my experience, those involved in the multilateral process want to see progress on these issues, but they lack the courage to lead on this without a strong mandate from those who elect them. I hope to assist in providing this mandate."

● **Summer Gray** is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at UC Santa Barbara with research and teaching interests in environmental sociology, development, and cinematic sociology. She is currently studying the human dimensions of sea change by focusing on the construction of seawalls throughout the world, and is especially interested in the Maldives. Gray's short films on youth climate activism and related topics can be seen [here](#) and her short documentary on the Maldives, [Gone Before the Wave](#), will be available soon. She tweets [@veranogris](#).

● **Ben Liddie** did his undergraduate degree in Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he pursued a focus on queer theory, radical social change, and the environment. He is passionate about cultivating awareness and understanding of climate justice issues in his community and beyond. Ben is especially interested in networking with and mobilizing other youth activists interested in subverting the power structures, ideologies, and discourses that prevent a just climate from being actualized.

● **Silje Lundberg** first engaged with environmental work at the age of twelve, in her home town of Harstad in the north of Norway. From that point on she dedicated all her time to volunteer for Young Friends of the Earth Norway to fight the oil industry and its expansion further north on the Norwegian continental shelf. When she finished high school she moved to Oslo to work at the main office of Young Friends of the Earth Norway. During a period of one and a half years she worked with engaging youth, climate change education at secondary schools and high schools all over the country, and the establishment of new local groups in Young Friends of the Earth Norway. She then was elected a board member of Young Friends of the Earth Norway in 2009, a position she held until she was elected chair of the organization in 2012. In 2009 she organized the delegation of 100 Norwegian youth at the COP in Copenhagen, and participated as a delegate inside the negotiations from 2010 to 2013. In 2013 the organization won its case against the oil industry to preserve pristine areas in the high north of Norway, and was awarded the Sophie Legacy Award for their work against dirty energy and for mobilizing youth all over the country. In 2014 Silje stepped down as chair of Young Friends of the Earth Norway and moved back to the north of Norway to continue to work for the preservation of the areas in the north from the oil and gas industry. She now studies biology at the Arctic University of Tromsø and does volunteer work for Friends of the Earth Norway and The Peoples Action Against Oil Drilling.

● **Jamie Peters** started his work in climate change following an MSc thesis in Science, Technology and Sustainability at the University of Strathclyde in Scotland. At university he managed a climate change project aiming to reduce the footprint of students, and won the Scottish Green Award as the Best Green Campaigner in 2011 for leading behavior change projects throughout Scotland. In 2010 he joined the UKYCC (United Kingdom Youth Climate Coalition) delegation to the COP 17 UN climate talks in Durban, South Africa. Since then he has served as Scottish Coalition Officer and Co-Director for the UKYCC UK Programmes, building UK campaigns to push for climate action and justice at a national level, and designing strategy and campaign delivery for climate change focused campaign on the UK General Election. He has worked in Glasgow with communities and young people on climate change education and sustainable living, engaging young people in adopting more sustainable lifestyles, working to increase cycling, local food produce, and delivering carbon emissions reduction and community engagement targets in East End of Glasgow. Most recently he has been coordinating activities of a project team working on Glasgow Future Cities which aims to integrate the city's information systems, use data in a meaningful way, and lessen the environmental impact that the city has.

● **Raquel Rosenberg** is co-founder and general coordinator of Engajamundo, a youth-led organization that aims to inform, empower, and engage Brazilian youth in international fora related to climate change, social development and gender issues. She was at COP19 in Warsaw and 2014 Intersessionals in Bonn, where she was part of Brazil's official delegation and participated directly in Article 6 negotiations. As part of her advocacy/lobbying, it was ensured that civil society and youth were able to give feedback to the Secretariat on the guidelines of Article 6 National Focal Points. Raquel leads Engajamundo in youth-empowering workshops in all five regions of Brazil, debating major climate issues, their causes and consequences, and proposing solutions. She has spoken in meetings at Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs; in lectures to labor unions and grassroots movements; press conference and side events at COP19 and 2014 Bonn intersessionals; and at UNF's Google Hangout for International Youth Day 2014.

● **Nathan Thanki** is from Belfast, Ireland, but has lived in Australia, Sudan, Canada, Solomon Islands, and the US. He is now based in Lima, Peru where he is supporting Peruvian movements and organizations as they prepare a People's Summit on Climate Change and a People's March during the UN negotiations in December 2014. Nathan has been involved in environmental justice activism since 2011 through Earth in Brackets, a student collective that he helps coordinate, and has reported from multilateral governmental and civil society processes such as UNCSD, UNFCCC, CBD, and the World Social Forum. Inside the negotiations, Nathan has been an active member of several informal coordination networks as well as the Youth constituency, YOUNGO. He has worked for Third World Network (TWN) to conduct research into the landscape of multilateral finance for climate change adaptation, economic costs of climate change impacts, traditional adaptation technologies in agriculture, and the scope and spread of climate change research centers. However, Nathan does not just follow the official process. Since its founding in 2012 he has served as a member of the Coordinating Committee for the Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice, through which he has worked on Reclaim Power! – a month (2013) and a week (2014) of coordinated global action on energy. He has also worked on grassroots campaigns with Friends of the Earth in Belfast. As the son of (Northern) Irish and (East-African) Gujarati parents, issues of migration, conflict, and identity also interest him deeply, and cannot be separated from his activism around climate change. For Nathan, the struggle for climate justice goes far beyond emissions reductions and intersects with struggles around energy, land,

food, water, inequality, rights, and development. In short, he says, it cuts across many issues and forces us to ask the most basic political question: how do we want to live together on this planet?

● **Juan Vazquez** was born in Mexico City and moved with his family to Montreal, Canada, where he had lived for the past fifteen years. He works for the National Bank of Canada as a Financial Services Senior Representative, is a professional Homeopath practitioner from the Montreal Institute of Classical Homeopathy, and continues his studies at the Naturopathic School of Quebec. Juan is also a meditation teacher and volunteer for Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual Organization as well as Youth Coordinator for BK Environment Initiative. Juan has shown a genuine and deep interest in a new field of studies between spirituality and the environment and how to explain this to others. His interest in the environment started in synchronicity when he began his career in alternative medicine and joined the Brahma Kumaris. The sacred link between spirituality and the ecology created a profound shift of consciousness, giving him a new vision on how to perceive and engage with life in wholeness; hence, in the last five years, this new awareness inspired him to create several green organizations as well youth programs with a spiritual perspective such as *Eco Shanti*, which is a unique project created with the aim of inspiring the youth about how values are at the foundation of any profound sustainable lifestyle and *Om Cafe*, a project dedicated specially for the International year of youth. These programs have taken place in different countries all around the globe. He has also participated as youth representative for the BK Environment Initiative in the last four UN Conferences on Climate Change as well as the RIO+20 Conference on Sustainable Development. He is locally involved with Transitions Network a grassroots organization and he is part of the International core team for the next Conference of Youth COY10 that will take place in Lima, Peru.

● **Natasha Weidner** is a graduate of the Environmental Studies Program at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where her thesis examined sustainable development projects in Cuba. She has been involved in climate activism since 2009, when she attended the United Nations COP15 Climate Summit in Copenhagen as an accredited observer. Born and raised in San Francisco, California, her interests include sustainable agriculture, environmental education, radical social change, and Latin dance. She was voted best dancer in Warsaw by some of her Climate Justice Project partners.

● **Sylvia Yirenkyi** is a young climate activist in Ghana giving a new face to the male-dominated sector. She pursued her BSc in Natural Resources Management at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) where her passion to ensure a sustainable environment was ignited. With a thesis on government's management of climate change impacts, she investigated the gap in the management of climate change and decided to be part of the solution. She has since worked for the NGOs Water Research Institute and the Food and Agriculture Organization (UN FAO), Rome, Italy as a Natural Resources Consultant. Sylvia then joined the Ghana Youth Environmental Movement (GYEM) and became a solid part of GYEM's success story where she worked in the position of Finance and Business Development team lead and after some months became the Co-Director. She was part of the team that reviewed Ghana's Forest and Wildlife Policy and the composition of Climate Smart Agriculture manuals by the FAO. She also drafted the Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS) manual on Community Seed Bank Creation. She's the focal point for Zero Carbon Africa in Ghana, a Board Member of Earth Child Institute-Ghana and volunteers for the Ghana Girl Guides Association because of her love for children and passion to see the younger generation joining to solve social issues. Sylvia was part of the team that successfully organized Global Power Shift in Ghana to create awareness for renewable energy and pressure government to give up plans on establishing

a coal-powered plant. Sylvia believes that youth should be more involved and interested in the global crisis of climate change and that the younger generation holds the key and solutions to the current challenges in the world.

● **Leehi Yona** was born in Ramat Gan, Israel, and grew up in Montreal, Canada. After completing a Diploma of Collegial Studies in Arts & Sciences with a Third World Studies Certificate at Marianopolis College in Québec, she now attends Dartmouth College, where she is pursuing her undergraduate studies, double majoring in Biology and Environmental Studies, and minoring in Public Policy. She is deeply passionate about the intersection of science, policy, economics, health, and society as they pertain to climate change and climate justice. At the age of eighteen, Leehi was unanimously elected to the Board of Directors of the Green Coalition – a Montreal-area green and blue space conservation organization – and is still currently serving as its youngest Board member. She went on to found the Green Schools Coalition of Montreal, an alliance of the student leaders of environmental clubs and organizations in elementary and high schools in the region. She has attended the COP18, COP19, and Rio+20 United Nations climate conferences, as well as the United Nations Commission on Social Development, where she also co-led a youth delegation. She will be on the SustainUS youth delegation to COP20 in Lima, Peru this year. Domestically, she also helped organize PowerShift Canada in 2012 and PowerShift USA in 2013. In 2014, she served on the national core team for XL DISSENT, a youth-led act of nonviolent civil disobedience against the Keystone XL pipeline, and conducted independent research on intersectional climate change in Israel. She is also a lead organizer of the Divest Dartmouth fossil fuel divestment campaign. She will be conducting research on Canada's Arctic Council Chairmanship as a James O. Freedman Presidential Scholar at Dartmouth this upcoming year.

“This is our opportunity”



# REEM AL MEALLA

The Arab Youth Climate Movement



*Photo by Jihad M'nasria*

# REEM AL MEALLA

Warsaw COP 19 – November 15, 2013

Interview by John Foran, with Corrie Ellis and Natasha Weidner

Transcribed by Citlaly Negrete

*Reflect on your personal journey, your life journey, and what brought you here to COP19 and with that you can go back as far as you like to how these things became important to you and how that developed over time.*

Looking back at the past couple of years, it's quite interesting when I take the time to reflect on how I'm here today. When I was much younger, I was already interested in the environment and the one thing I used to love was the sea. I used to go to the beach and it was always a way for me to kind of clear my mind, take all, any negative thoughts away and I thought, "Well I have about three years left until I finish university," and everyone always has that big question: What are you going to do? And I thought, "Okay, I'm not the kind of person who wants to get stuck in a building" – I really get frustrated sitting at the table, basically a desk. I like new things, like it has to be adventurous every day and I thought, "Okay, how come my options are very limited here? It's very difficult to think of something."

Ironically, that was the year when *Free Willie* came out and I was just like "Wow! I want to do that!" and then my mom was like "Yeah, very nice, Reem, very nice," cause when I was six and seven I used to tell my parents that I'm going to grow up and become an astronaut and my dad always said "You're either up there or down there, can't you just stay on the surface?" and I said "No, no, no, seriously I've made up my mind, I'm not going to be an astronaut anymore I'm going to be a marine biologist," and my dad said "I don't think we have any marine biologists." So, I called up the national fisheries department and I said "Yeah, I'd like to be a marine biologist." It was quite funny because the receptionist who picked up the phone went "Um, where are your parents?" I remember thinking "Well, what kind of question is that? I'm fifteen, like my parents have nothing to do with this! I'm calling and I have an inquiry and I expect you to answer my question." And he just said, "Oh we don't have any girls doing any such things." I was just like "What?!" Anyway, I hung up and went to my dad and said "Dad, he just said this," and he said, "Yeah, well, I told you, you know we don't have any marine biologists," and I said, "Well, things are going to change, I am going to go do this."

I finished school and I was trying to look for a degree in my country, the thing is in Bahrain we don't have any degrees that have to do with the environment at an undergraduate level; you just study biology, that's it. When I graduated we didn't even have a master's degree in environmental science or anything like that so it's not like I could do biology and once I was done I knew I could go into environmental science or ecology or marine biology. So I had to go abroad. I still remember trying to find funds to go abroad and study and it was really tough but I managed to pull it together with my parents' help, and I went to England where I did my marine and biology degree. During my fourth year, I actually had to do a climate change module as part of my degree, which ironically was the year the negotiations happened in Copenhagen and an assignment of mine was to follow the negotiations and basically write up a report. And I went "Oh! This is bigger than I thought it was!" That particular year the university took us to Indonesia to train, to conduct

underwater surveys so it was more field-based, and when we went there it was based in a national park and some people were studying coral bleaching, and climate change impact, and a lot of the people there were heavily reliant on the reefs for their living. It just hit me how big this is, it was much bigger than I ever thought I would get myself into.

So when I finished my degrees I went back home and thought, "Right. I need to start something now," and then I realized that since the environmental scientists in the country are very few and each had a different interest, which made things difficult. At the time when I got there I just thought, "Okay, I'm sure there are people somewhere doing their degrees but there's no platform to get us together so how are we supposed to do anything? How are things going to change?" And it was very frustrating because it was that feeling that you were alone and every time you go somewhere you just hit the wall and bounce back.

Then a year later I met my colleague (Tariq Al Olaimy), who two weeks later sent me a link that says, "There's a call to get Arab youth together to start a movement; they just need people to do it. Maybe we should apply," and I said, "Yeah, okay." I didn't really have much faith but felt it wouldn't hurt. I still remember thinking, "I'm not going to bother, the application form is just too long and I hate writing and there are all these questions to answer." Two hours before the deadline, I thought "Hmm, maybe I really should do this." And then I was just sitting there and my mother was looking at me and she said, "Just do it! You're staring at your computer, just do it!" and I was just like "Fine!" And I did it. Three weeks later we were short-listed. A week and a half later we were on a plane to Egypt. Next thing I know, we're at a campsite because there wasn't enough funding to pay for a hotel so we camped. Of course, why don't you build your movement in a tent? Typical Arabs, literally. So, we're staying in tents, we had around twenty youth from around fifteen countries – not all of them made it. There was someone from Syria, and on her way to the airport she got injured in the clashes, was hospitalized, and we were all waiting for her at the airport. The Libyan guy we were also waiting for at the airport never showed up. We later found out that the airport in Tripoli was shut down for an emergency that they had.



*Front of climate march in Doha, December 2012. Photo: Marina Flevotomas*

Nevertheless, it was an amazing meeting, we only had five days together and this was about eight weeks before COP 18. We were like “COP 18 is happening in an Arab country in the Arabian Gulf, and there’s never been an Arab youth presence. We have to go there! This is our opportunity in our region and there will be people from all over the world and you’ve got youth from all over the world, we have to be there!” So eight weeks of organizing everything, very stressful, but like my dad says, “We’re Arabs, we always do things last minute.” So we managed to get people there. We managed to put things together. We managed to train ourselves. It was filled with challenges because we’ve never been through this process; no one has ever talked to us about international negotiations. Some of us had a bit of background say, but a module is not going to teach you about years of negotiations and whatever comes with the negotiations. Looking back at that year when I did my climate module, I never imagined all these things would happen. I went on a big climate march in London called The Wave, basically in support of the Copenhagen movement, and I remember it was my first climate march as well. I thought, “This is exciting and all these people have come together to demand climate action. And you just...and I thought I’d always be engaged following the negotiations from outside. I never in my life thought I might one day be on the inside, because I never even thought about how I could get inside. The next thing I know the Arab Youth Climate Movement was established and then we were there and I’m really happy that it has spread. We’re there now in over sixteen countries in the Middle East, and we’re very, very proud.

*Great journey story! I’m interested in how the group has kept together in the last twelve months.*

After COP eighteen, we all went back to our countries. We work on a regional basis, but also we concentrate more on the national scale because we rely on grassroots initiatives and every country is different. The Middle East is such a diverse region, especially when in its topography – you’ve got mountains, for example, in Lebanon but as you move to the east to places such as Bahrain or Qatar you encounter drier desert areas. Despite these extremes even the most climatically extreme region such as ours still harbors mangroves and coral reefs. What’s interesting for me as a marine biologist, is that recently I was in a coral reef workshop in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, and they were basically talking about how important the Gulf area is, because the reefs there are facing some of the harshest climates on the planet and no one understands it. They were saying if they can figure out how these ecosystems work and how they adapt, they can predict how the rest of the world is going to adapt. But no research has ever really been done focusing on climate change impacts in the region. One of the things we’re concentrating on at the moment is starting national initiatives. So, I’m going to focus more on Bahrain and then spread to the rest of the region.

In Bahrain when we returned, we thought “Okay, we got the youth together, we had to recruit from scratch basically, and people came from many different backgrounds and we asked, “Okay, as Bahrainis, what are the top three priorities that you would like to work on in connection to climate change? The top three things are: agriculture, because it has to do with food security; health, because of the impacts of climate change – for example Bahrain has more dust storms than it ever had before so people have a lot of lung problems and respiratory diseases; and lastly, World Heritage sites – a lot of people said, “We want to preserve our heritage.” The thing is that the world is developing so fast today that cities are starting to look like each other everywhere you go. People are losing that cultural touch, that heritage touch, that architectural touch. So you walk around in an Arab town nowadays and you very rarely feel you’re there. I know when I walk around in Dubai, for example, with all the skyscrapers you really feel like you’re in New York. Where is that Arab touch to it? That Arab character? I miss that and other youth miss that as well. We’re really blending in but

we forget even our culture; we forget our heritage. Sometimes I hear my parents talking about things and I say, "Really that comes from our culture?" Yes it does, and we shouldn't lose that.

In Bahrain we have a World Heritage site, which is the Bahrain Fort; it's a very unique site, and we approached the Ministry of Culture. The Bahrain Fort is by the sea, so you have the marine life, and then you've got the archeological site – it's surrounded by agricultural land, the site is absolutely stunning! So we went there and we said, "Okay, it's made up of all natural surfaces: you've got sand, stone, and mud and things like that, and we've got a dry climate and as it gets hotter and hotter it will crack without regular maintenance!" So the government has to constantly try and maintain it and renovate it on a constant basis, which will cost a lot of money. So we approached them and said, "This is what we're working on; this is what we're concerned about and this is how we link climate change to the World Heritage site – the change in soil composition, the sea tides, and other characteristics will also change. And they said, "That's very interesting; we haven't thought about it before." So their team is putting together a management plan for the Fort and they were very, very cooperative. We actually met some of the archeological consultants that are writing the management plan and we told them, "This is our concern and this is what we think," and they were happy we were there. The management plan didn't have a climate change section, and now it does, and we are actually the first country in the region to establish a climate change section in our World Heritage site. For us to do it as youth, it's a big achievement, and for the Ministry to actually accept that is also amazing, so it gives us that hope that we can do something about it. We don't have to wait for these negotiations to do something about it, you know, it gives you that hope that you could do something. So that's one of the things we are doing; we are also working on agriculture. We have an agriculture team; everyone's really interested in it; we went to meet the farmers and asked what the problems are. We identified water scarcity and problems such as agricultural waste management, and disease and pest control as the top three challenges our local farmers face currently. So we are working to find sustainable solutions and ways to help them adapt that can be implemented in a way that each farm can be more sustainable and run by itself without any help.

The same goes for the health movement; we've actually gotten in touch with our medical schools, and we asked, "How many of the students do research on climate change?" and they said "Well, we don't have that," and we said, "Perhaps they should start?" The response has been positive: "Yeah, we've never thought about it, now that you've brought it up, well maybe now we should talk about it." And we were like "Yes!" So that's what they're doing now, they're in the process of introducing that concept and even the students said, "We never thought about it." We're getting there, it's a slow process but this thing was all done in a year. That's amazing, you know when I think about it, we're so lucky!

**WE WENT FROM TWO, TO THREE, TO FOUR,** and now we're about seventeen people working in Bahrain. Seventeen is a lot of people. We don't need one hundred people, we just need those few people who care; really that's all you need. You can create that change, and people always say, "Yeah if we only had the funding, if we only had the funding," but when we think of it we didn't have any money, we still don't. Everything we do is without funding, do you really need funding to gather people? No, you can just sit in the park. That's what we do, sit in the park and have a chat. Do you really need funding to have an event? Not really, you can just tell people to come to the beach and then have some stuff going on there and that's exactly what we do.

So we started with nothing, yet we were able to build it, and we haven't had that need to have all these funds. The only times we do need the funds is like to come here (COPs) or when we need someone to come

to help train us or conduct capacity building workshops. Yes, we do need it for that. So far we haven't been able to get the funds to get people to help, but we have been able to get funds for two people to come here.

*And now what is the person who you started the movement with doing here?*

Tariq is a Negotiator Tracker and is on the Adopt-a-Negotiator program and also we have both been asked to be part of a team who are currently writing a climate policy paper to be submitted to the Arab government delegations from members of civil society. So we've spent the past couple of months doing that. So, hopefully the paper will be out soon with suggestions on how to get a good climate deal. Whether they take it or not that is their decision.

*Who's in the Arab government delegation? It's a group of countries?*

Yes, we've got all the members of the Arab League, such as Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya (all North African Arab countries); we've got Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, the UAE and Saudi Arabia (members of the Gulf Cooperation Council). We've also got Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Syria. So, we've got quite a collective to work on "The Arab Climate Strategy Policy Paper."



AYCM, Doha COP 18. Photo: Sarah Rifaat

*And so what is your special angle here? What is your special task?*

I am following the negotiation with a special interest in REDD+, adaptation and also the gender issues mainly because I am one of the very few women in the environmental sector in Bahrain. I would like to see more people, more girls that go into this and give them opportunities to actually get in. In Bahrain we're lucky, women do have opportunities to get into positions and actually we have more women leaders than men in Bahrain, but when it comes to sciences like climate sciences we literally have very few, maybe two or three. That's not good, and there's a huge generation gap and that worries me when it comes to the Arab world; it's a problem that we're facing. There are people who have been there for over twenty years and no

one younger, so how are they supposed to pass on all their experiences and all their knowledge and everything they've gathered in the years they've been there? We don't have that and that's actually a very bad position to be in, because they are very experienced and it would be nice to learn from them.

*How many in your group are women?*

Actually we're very well balanced, maybe one extra. So it would be about nine females.

*So, both of you are following pretty closely the negotiations? How are you able to do that?*

The thing is this year has been a bit frustrating because every time we go somewhere the meetings are closed, but we do try to attend the open plenary and sessions that are open or meetings that are open and in addition to that we try and speak to the negotiators. We actually established a good relationship with them last year in Doha. When we got to Bahrain we kept in touch with them; we'd update them on what we're doing and we would always say, "If you need anything, let us know." We were very lucky because Tariq got the opportunity to go to Bonn to follow up on the Bonn Intersessionals as well. He was still following it there and we were following it at home, but we don't really know what the plan is for the government delegation.

*The plan is your paper?*

Yes, I hope so!

*They should be letting you into everything.*

I really do hope so, but it would be interesting to know since they have said they are looking forward to 2015. Last year when we were asking them if they were going to pledge or not, they said no. They said they're not going to pledge in COP 18 because they're still working on their plan for economy diversification, and they're still working on what's going to be feasible or not. But what was interesting to know was that they were doing a lot outside of the negotiations, so they're not bringing anything to the table, but outside they are doing a lot in terms of mitigation measures that are being taken. They are trying to set up feasible adaptation measures, which is why a lot of current studies are trying to relate to climates that are very similar to Bahrain, and what would work and wouldn't work. The thing is because we have that huge lack of data, we're not sure what would work. So if you lack that knowledge, how are you supposed to have a plan? And what I've found at the moment, which includes us as well, is we are collecting that data, we're having a more clear idea of how we can go forward with that. They did say that by 2015, they would have to come with a plan. So we'd like to know what the deal is by the beginning of 2014 because otherwise it's just going to be too late.

*Well if you're collecting the first data, you've got power.*

I'd like to think that.

*And do you have an even closer relationship with your own government's team here?*

Yes, it's nice to see the same familiar faces and they know what we're doing here, and it's nice that they take the time to stand with us for five minutes and have a quick chat.

*Is there an Arab youth climate movement here as such? People from different countries...*

Yes, we have the delegation from Morocco, Tunisia, Syria; we have an Egyptian delegation as well. Unfortunately, like other delegations at COP, this year, a lot of people's visas were rejected so a lot of people could

not come even though we did get accreditation. So we don't have anyone from Sudan, Libya, or Palestine, which is quite disheartening, because we're like "Come on guys, why shut us out, why?"

*Why, indeed.*

It's honestly a question: why? I don't know. I think in Doha it was a bit open and fair in terms of it catering for everyone. Why are we being rejected here? I know a lot of other delegations were refused as well after their visas were rejected. It's quite sad; it's quite disheartening. We were given accreditation, obviously we faced the same thing with all other NGO's really with the cap, you know, the numbers which everyone is suffering from, which is fair enough. But we have the funding; all the supporting documentation stated that we had gotten everything. It did state that we were coming here to the UN F triple C, we got a formal letter saying that we have accreditation for these people and...

*And with all of that some people didn't get visas from the government of Poland? Wow!*

And in Bahrain we don't have a Polish consulate or an embassy. One of our members had to travel to Kuwait, a neighboring country, to get her visa - it's not easy. You have to pay more money to actually travel to another country, and then your overnight stay, and your flight back the next morning is expensive.

We had our first regional meeting this year in Lebanon, actually, four weeks before the COP, and it brought together most of the national coordinators and new members for some capacity building. We were able to discuss this coming COP and the results from the last COP and what we wanted to do here, to see how far we've come, and what the national chapters have done. It was a good chance for the new chapters to meet everyone face to face rather than through emails or through Facebook groups; it's nice to see people face to face. So you know, that was good, and it also helped organize and secure funds for this meeting, so it was good. We are hoping for this to be an annual thing because as a region we need to get together from time to time just to find solutions for any issues that have come up, review and assess our work, put together our regional strategy for work. Nationally we work independently and it's difficult to solve things purely over email. Sometimes you need the training and sometimes it's difficult to fly people over at certain times, so it's easier to just get everyone you need and try to arrange that one week and tell them, "This is what you need to do, we're giving it to you, now go and pass it back to the rest of your teams."

*Who are the new members? What countries?*

Because Syria was not there last time, we had a person also bring forward the interest to start it up. We had Tunisia, which we didn't have before, so that was nice. We got in contact with someone who wants to start the movement in Yemen, so it's absolutely fantastic. Those are the three countries that came in the last couple of months. Even from countries with political instability, youth are actually thinking about climate change and not what's happening, you know, on the roads every day. That's absolutely amazing.

*And they're there because you formed, I mean they can see that you're there...*

We have that platform, yes.

*How about being very active in the YOUNGO meetings?*

At the moment we do attend meetings; the thing is that we've never really had positions before so we're formulating those positions. For instance, a couple of days ago, somebody asked, "What's the Arab youth position on intergenerational equity?" And we said, "Well, we don't really have a position because we've

never really had the chance to sit down and do it.” Last year it was more about exploring what the COP is about, more about how it all works, how do you get things across, who to speak to, who are the focal points, you know and things like that. This year we’re concentrating on maintaining our relationship with the delegations, but at the same time establishing our positions, if someone says they want the AYCM position on intergenerational equity

*Have you been working on that?*

We’ve been working on that at the moment and that’s good because you have people together and it’s easier to have that dialogue: “Well, what do you think?” So that’s what’s been going on the last couple days.

*In fact you might have some unique insights because you work more closely with national delegations than most of these organizations have the opportunity to.*

Exactly.

*Did you go to the Conference of Youth that was held just before this COP began?*

No, we didn’t manage to get our visas on time.

*I’m turning to my colleagues to see if they have any questions.*

*Corrie Ellis: First of all, do you call yourself an activist?*

I would be an activist, but at the same time I’m just a human being trying to make sure that we are able to actually have a safe future. Not just say, for me, as a human being, but for all beings on this planet. You want to go out and actually think, “Okay, it would be nice to go on holiday hiking in the forest,” where you just think, “With everything happening, all these trees are not going to be here anymore.” I would say I am a climate activist, yes. But I think before that I’m more like a human being trying to fight for survival and survival for all, not just for myself.

*CE: What are the biggest supports that you have for your activism? Also what are the biggest challenges?*

**The biggest support is actually every person in the world that actually fights for this.** Being here and looking around me, I’m like “Oh my god, I’m just a dot in this big ocean of people who are fighting for climate justice, fighting for a better tomorrow.” That really gives me the motivation and inspiration and hope! A lot of times you see people losing that hope but the fact that people are still here even after all the disappointments, it says a lot of things, so I honestly think we’re near; the issue is just how you define “near.” But I like to think I don’t need to wait for someone to tell me, “The government said they’re going to do something.” I already know there are so many people out there doing it. I’m not waiting. I don’t need a formal decision on paper that says *For me every day is a victory.* says it, no. It’s happening, simple.

The challenge is when you know these people have brilliant, brilliant ideas that they want to implement or scale up, because this is where funding becomes the issue. They can’t do it without that help. For example, when it comes to the agriculture project there are things we can do – it’s just so expensive. So, how are we supposed to implement it? So that’s frustrating, when you have a solution but to actually implement it on the ground it’s so expensive, it’s not something I can do this evening or from my pocket. And that’s the challenge here, just finding that way to actually implement it.

*JF: Do you get help from the government?*

The thing is, I view all governments as citizens, I don't understand how as a citizen, you wouldn't do something for your own country and your own people who are technically your family, because you have your children or your siblings or your niece. I don't understand how, as a citizen and a human being, not really realizing how important this is or even if you do, you just think you need to represent that one voice you think you need to represent. I mean it's possible that's why we have the concept of sustainable development goals people put on the table. 2015 is a very big year, not just for the climate deal, it's also a big deal for sustainable development goals. So people are looking at poverty, health, people are looking at environment and asking, "Why is it taking so long?" And everyone who's in there is obviously in this because they care, but the fact that it's going so slow just makes me think, why? And the funny thing is there is no answer, because every time you ask they say, "Oh, but the economy..." That's why you've set up all these different mechanisms, so why is it not working? And that's the big why, that needs answering isn't it?

*Natasha Weidner: In the panel you were talking about victory, what does that mean to you? What is that going to look like? A U.N treaty that's going to solve everything?*

No, victory is more like, for me personally it is victory of self, like when you know inside that you have helped a community, an area in the world. That's victory, and every little thing is a victory. I like to measure things not in huge quantities, but just little.

**For me everyday is a victory**, we're here, and that itself is a victory. Yes, our numbers are lower every single year, but we're here, everything is closed but we're working out here. This is a victory, you can't shut down, you know everything you're doing because we're still working on it. We're writing this climate policy paper, that's victory; being able to put it down and give it to them, that's victory. You collect little victories, and then what happens in the end is a really big victory, so you don't really need them to give you something that's stamped and goes right, there you go. They've done that so many times, how many treaties do we have in the world? Honestly, how many treaties? How many of these treaties are abided by and then implemented, four or five? I'll give them some credit: maybe six. So you don't need that legal deal, but rather that people are moving. That is the best thing about civil society – there are so many of us. Imagine we're not even a quarter of what's out there. Can you imagine all those other people out there, all those organizations running their own projects, everybody covering the gaps of each other, everybody doing everything themselves, they're not waiting. Because if we're going to wait we would have lost a long time ago; you know, that's victory. The victory in all of this is even though governments are not moving, people are still moving, that's victory. So, we're winning, soon we're not going to have to wait for this deal because we are finding these solutions and we are implementing them and we are finding ways to implement the ones with the biggest challenges.

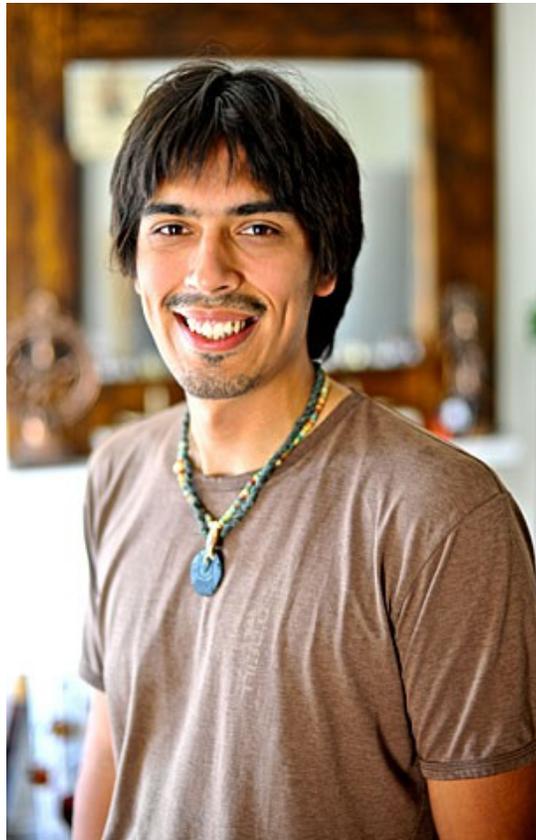
BY THE END OF THE DAY, if you have achieved what you want to achieve, or at least made it that much more possible for the next generation to achieve it, I'd like to think that when the next generation comes, they know we've done it and brought them that step closer and that's victory for me.

“We are really, really building something big”



# MARCO CADENA

PUSH Europe



# MARCO CADENA

Warsaw COP 19 – November 2013  
Interview by Corrie Ellis  
Transcribed by Ashley Sneary and Summer Gray

I came to Warsaw with PUSH Europe and Young Friends of the Earth.

*What country are you from?*

Well, it's kind of complicated. My mom is Hungarian and my dad is Mexican, but I live in London, the UK.

*And may we ask how old you are?*

I'm twenty-nine.

*We're hoping that you can give us some perspective on the COP. How do you feel about what's happened?*

I think this COP was a real historical COP in the sense of what we saw in terms of corporate sponsorship. And the Polish government did everything to undermine the process in that sort of "diplomatic" way. They basically can do anything they want to slow down progress. The Polish government is really strongly linked to dirty energy corporations and they blatantly and clearly, in fact proudly, brought in dirty energy corporations and said this COP is going to bring in business's voice because NGOs have had far too much fun in the last eighteen years. This is the year to actually get businesses on board. But they started with the dirtiest, most polluting corporations, where their own interests lie. So, for us, we already knew that was happening, and in our messaging we were already thinking about how to oppose that and how to sort of expose it. You can see all of the stuff on Twitter, like there was an alternative corporate COP 19 with the same logo, really active. We've really tried to oppose it from the Internet angle, but also with actions and communication. And so I think most NGOs became united against that level of dirty industry influence.

In terms of the negotiations, I think there's not much that you can say, in terms of the outcome. We know that developing countries need a huge amount of financing from public sources. We know that developed countries need to cut their emissions first and fastest. We've kept saying this over many, many years and things are just getting worse. You saw with Australia and Japan, basically increasing their emissions in the next few years. So, it's a real step back. Some NGOs would say it's a missed opportunity, what we're saying is it's pretty much a step back. But on a good note, I think the walkout we saw yesterday was a *huge* momentum for our movement. We had a *huge* array of different organizations, who sometimes we have very different views or takes on certain issues. But we were really united and stood strong, shoulder-to-shoulder, and today we had loads of discussions about how to continue that.

So, I'm really positive on the movement side. **We are really, really building something big.** And we've not just stopped because of all the leaders and everyone inside just basically failing the planet and failing the people. So I think we're starting. This is a continuation of something that's already began, but I can really feel the scaling-up of this movement. I'm really positive on that note.

*What's been your experience with the youth, in particular, the movement of this COP?*

I think **without the youth we wouldn't be anywhere**. So I think the young people in general, not just in the COP, but all across the planet, through the Global Power Shift in June, and throughout last year, throughout the Reclaim Power Global Month of Action, and in here [the convergence space] as well. All the actions and all the creativity and all the energy is like a magic carpet, the strong messages are lifting everybody up and you're carried. So I feel really, really positive about that. Of course there are always discussions and disagreements on the issues that we need to resolve, but that's just how it is and we have to take the time to have some communication within the movement. So that's something that we must do all the time anyway.

*What do you think are going to be the next steps? I know we had a lot of discussion about that today in the post-walkout debrief, but what are your opinions on that?*

I think somebody at the meeting today pointed out that we really clearly need a vision, not just for Paris, but for the next few years. I think for Paris, one of these visions was that we should see at least a million people marching the streets of Paris. Because we saw a hundred thousand people in Copenhagen and everybody can tell that didn't quite make a difference; in fact, it didn't make a difference at all. And a lot of people got disappointed. There was too much hype around the whole thing. So we are going to try something different, but on a bigger scale. We're going to try to mobilize on a really large scale, but still allow the movement to use Paris as a launch pad. Not as *the* momentum, but *a* momentum within, like linking social movements, and climate movements, environmental movements, trade unions and all those different groups who are actually fighting for the same thing which is a livable planet and a just future for all. So I think Paris is going to be a huge momentum and we have a lot of work to do, and I think as the next steps we are going to continue on what we did with the huge alliance we brought together during the Reclaim Power Global Month of Action, which included tons of groups from small to big, from North to South, all over the world. And we're going to do something with that alliance plus bring in, somehow, the youth aspect there and make it flexible and creative rather than lost in the processes, because we have lots of learning from big groups how sometimes you can get stuck in processes whilst the world is changing very quickly. So we want to keep our dynamic approach and a creative approach, but for that we need trust between people. So I think next year we will need to travel a lot to meet loads of different groups around the world who couldn't come to Warsaw this time, couldn't come to Doha or anywhere. And just really, really build trust within the movement and some of our key people within the movement so that we can keep that dynamic nature going and we can keep being reactive but also, start setting the agenda. I mean, one of the things about this walkout was really that it set the agenda. It sets the agenda for the inside negotiations. It sets the agenda for our movement. So it's really important to keep aiming for moments like this, like yesterday.

*When you and everyone say the movement is aiming for a million people for Paris, I think, well, are those going to be mostly Europeans? How do you get so many people there, are you thinking mostly local people?*

As well as global people. I mean it is the idea of holding either an alternative summit or really mobilizing at a scale that has never been done before on climate change. I mean you saw a million people marching in various European capitals before on different issues, anti-war, or even nuclear in Germany, *huge* mobilization. And with the Reclaim Power month, it's a month of action against dirty energy and for community renewables. And for instance, dirty energy is not only oil and gas, but it includes nuclear, mega dams in the

global south, biofuels, all sorts of different types of dirty energy. And so really, our work is to link all those fights and yes, create the big moment in Paris. So, it would not just be the groups who are usually participating in climate negotiations. It would be to link social movements, trade unions, different types of dirty energy fights. I mean France has a massive anti-shale gas movement and a massive anti-nuclear movement. France is one of the biggest countries with nuclear power in Europe, and there is a huge movement opposing that from local people. So there is a huge potential there, but we don't only want European people of course. To get there I think next year is going to be crucial, 2014, with the social pre-COP and with the Lima mobilizations and working with our friends in Latin America, and, of course the other regions like Africa, or Southeast Asia, so, yeah, we're working on it. [Laughs]

*Being an activist, organizing, coming to these COPs, what are the biggest challenges that you deal with on a daily basis, and what are the biggest supports that you have?*

I guess these past two weeks I had a very, very, kind of really strong sleep deprivation. So that's one of the challenges, and the feeling of you can't really add two more hours to a twenty-four hour day, the day is twenty-four hours. We found that yesterday when we were planning the action for the walkout, it was literally like 4 a.m. We still didn't know. There were so many uncertainties about it, U.N. security only authorized it like literally twenty minutes before. Then we had to change plans because we could aim for more, because security was okay with that. But somehow when you have so many things happening at the same time – I'm involved in three or four inter-linked projects, that it gives me that sort of buzz and extra energy somehow. I know that if I spend a little bit more time on some of these things, I can see them actually becoming better or stronger. So, yes it's very demanding and sometimes you really don't have much time to sleep or do anything else, but days like yesterday you feel that it was bloody worth it and it gives you hope that it is actually possible to link all these different people from a variety of backgrounds. We're all fighting for the same thing at the end of the day, so that's the positive note about it.

● *What would you say to high school and college-aged students, what would you say to them about movement and about what they can do?*

Many young people have gotten out of touch with global issues, because it's so difficult for us to engage with anything outside our home, or our school or our circle of friends. But we just have to understand that all over the world people are connecting up because they feel that something is wrong; they feel that governments and so-called leaders are actually not representing real people. And whether you are worried about your local park, or a mine that is being built right on your door step, or you're just unhappy because you think that local representatives you don't even know are not actually representing you, you just have to know that these fights and these concerns are actually global and you're actually part of a *huge* movement that's from various different backgrounds.

**So it is very important to find ways to link up with other people who are actually voicing the same concerns and asking the same questions without expecting that there are always answers for every question. It's important to make that step, to link up and be able to then be open, inclusive, and work together for a better future. That's all we want, really.**

“I feel we are on the cusp of a really important moment right now”



# ANJALI APPADURAI

Earth in Brackets



# ANJALI APPADURAI

Warsaw COP 19 – November 13, 2013  
Interview by John Foran, Ben Liddie, and others  
Transcribed by Nia Evans

*Anjali, you are a veteran of the COP. Here we are in Warsaw; I don't know if it's your third COP or your tenth COP? It must feel like.*

Haha, it's my fourth, though it feels like my tenth.

*Tell us, what this COP seems to be about for you. Or what your experience and impression is here so far.*

Well, there are so many dimensions to a COP. This giant, messy convergence of people and politicians, and dynamics of all sorts. So in one dimension, the political one, this COP is about finance. The UNFCCC is so multi-layered, there are so many elements to what we actually need to do to solve the climate crisis, and one of those is finance. This is the COP when we really focus on that because none of the other elements work without the funding from the global North. Yesterday I was in the meeting and the chair said, "OK let's put our heads together and come up with some new mechanisms. What do you think we need for 2015?" He was being really patronizing. The developing countries were like "Hey, we have all these mechanisms that look really great on paper, and there is zero commitment in the form of putting dollars to what you are saying." It is a finance topic in the political sense. In the social movement sense, we have two years left till Paris 2015 when the new global agreement gets rolled out and that is going to be, if we are not careful, another Copenhagen, where social movements build up and build up with so many resources and energy into that moment. But they're not realizing that the Copenhagen movement was when the work had already been done and they were protesting a lost cause, almost. We have two years until that moment and we will work for that. The political work for that is being done right now. So this is a big year for social movements. We need to figure out a way to connect ourselves and to become a constellation across the globe, not just in our respective nations but strong within our local communities but also building really, really solid bridges so we can come as a true force to be reckoned with in 2015. That's a massive undertaking – building a truly global climate justice movement. We call ourselves a global movement all the time; it's not that yet in the truest sense.

*How do you do that? What are your ideas of making such a movement truly global?*

I feel we are on the cusp of a really important moment right now. I will speak for the group climate movement because that is what I have done. So we just come together loosely. We have own national and local organizations. And there is very little we actually do as a team – we are trying to make things a little more official. We are trying to say, OK lets have official younger positions on politics, and we have a unified younger voice when it comes to interventions. But we diverge hugely ideologically, as I am sure you are aware of. There is a really massive split that is just beginning to be really apparent between people who are focused on justice and equity, which focuses very much on historical responsibility and current respective capacities and of the divide between developed and developing countries. And then people who more in

the politically possible realm. I think in order to have a global movement, we really need to take the global South into account because the politically possible is a *really* privileged, developed country perspective.

So for the movement right now, **I feel we're moving into a new phase** where youth who are focused on climate justice in the true sense of the word are coming together trying to build a really concrete alliance and roping in allies. We already have a really strong network of allies right now, and roping in others especially from the global South. Each of us in this alliance has our own network, our own community and our own activism back home, and we are trying to link those in really powerful ways. And the beauty of it is that it's all online. It's a purely, it's a leaderless, hierarchy-less, placeless movement – it's non-place based activism and I think we need this type of cross-border movement to work alongside community struggles.

*Do you think that it is scaling up as you would like to see?*

I think so, we're starting to. Instead of being bogged down and I was seeing YOUNGO politics, we are kind of taking matters into our own hands. As you saw with the action yesterday, that could have never been passed through YOUNGO. It was a small group of youth, a small alliance of youth. So we're trying to build a non-place-based alliance in the most concrete of ways without just paying lip service to word alliance. We are trying to get funding for server space that we can share. Messaging is really key; it's the cornerstone of how we build an alliance, so building unified narratives is going to be a really core part of this. For that we just need a lot of online space, dedicated people, and the time, the money the space to connect and to converge and to build those narratives together. So right now COP is our best opportunity to all meet and say, OK, so what are the messages we really need to be pushing? Right now it is solidarity with the Philippines, it's finance, it's loss and damage, but we need the time and space to build those narratives together. So we are working on that and it's really exciting.

*So the COP is an important place because it does bring you together for everything else that it is, it is the space where you can physically be together, or some of you can physically be together once a year.*

Yes, the COP is hugely important for that. I was thinking about what is the soul of IYCM, what actually makes this movement a movement. Our online work throughout the year is really important but when we come together that is when the magic happens. And these convergences are important not only like for the political staff and for messaging and actions, it's really important for relationships.

To me, **personal relationships are a core part of this movement** as well because without them, how would we ever get to know and to collaborate with people whose countries are so far away. So that's huge.

*I agree – and do you have any experience with the global power shift that happens in June because that to me seems like a brilliant opportunity for people to come together 6 months after and before the COP.*

I was one of the trainers for Global Power Shift (GPS), so I was involved in the process, in the planning process. And it was a very powerful convergence. 350 did a huge thing by bringing together 500 youth from I think it was 138 countries? That's huge! The magic was tangible. The idea was that in phase one all these youth would come together. In phase two, they would go and form and start movements in their countries. But I think the focus at GPS was more on the starting respective regional movements and less on the connecting them. It was amazing because you need community movements, you need city movements, you need country movements, you need regional ones, and then you need the international and they were really good creating the regional ones. So they would get all the Asian countries together to create some

kind of broad Asian movement. So that was huge. I saw that happen, I helped facilitate it. We provided skills training which was a big thing that's needed – activist skills training. I don't think we could have done better with unifying narratives. We could have sent out an actual message on climate better because giving people the tools to start a movement can only go so far. When people don't really know what it is that unifies all these different impacted communities. You need strong messaging around that.

It's all about communication and underlying narratives that will bring us together in a really powerful way. And there are a couple of those campaigns that I have been involved with, experimented with for example, Reclaim Power. It was a campaign, a global campaign against dirty energy and for community renewable energy. And the power of that was that it is **non-hierarchical**, so little groups in different countries that were fighting very local struggles could be a part of this campaign and be connected to huge groups with a lot of resources. And they could share messaging, and therefore each of those local individualized struggles is amplified and made even stronger just by that common messaging and connecting.

*How did that come about? That was a month long campaign that ended the day the COP started.*

It was kind of the beta version of what we are trying to do. It was thirty day month of action basically. And we had hundreds of participating organizations from the big greens, Greenpeace and 350 down to just tiny, tiny grassroots groups.

*How did you organize that?*

That came out of the global change to demand climate justice. It's a campaign that involves a lot of movers and shakers from various organizations, mostly global South organizations. So if you know Jubilee South, Asia Pacific, or La Via Campesina, or a lot of these Southern groups, mostly in Southeast Asia came together and formed this campaign. For now it's a three-year campaign leading up to 2015 but I think it's going to continue. It's very grassroots, it's very non-hierarchical, it's very radical, and so Reclaim Power was an off shoot of that.

*So, will there be more Reclaim Powers under that name? Will it be a new campaign?*

I think so. I think we are going to try and keep that name because it resonated with a lot of people.

*Earlier you mentioned building the global youth climate justice movement, and you particularly mentioned bringing people and organizations from the global South into the youth group. And how do you see that happening? How do you overcome it if it is not happening enough?*

It's hard because it's a problem of resources and who is able to get here, who is lucky enough to get here. It's a huge problem when you have Northern groups who are able to get funding to be here and Southern groups who just aren't but really should be in this space. I don't know how to go about remedying that except fundraising and looking into permanent funding options. It's a strong imperative; we need those groups.

*The groups exist; the groups are there. It's a question of resources.*

Yes, in whatever the climate justice youth movement ends up being, it has to be made up of mostly global South. It's really interesting because a lot of us in this movement are fluid across borders this movement. I am not based anywhere; I live in Vancouver, Canada but I am not like "that girl from Canada," and I think a lot of us are like that in this movement, and it's only going to grow this generation of people who just don't

really identify with place based activism. But then, there are a lot of people who are deeply rooted in their communities and are very invested in their community struggles. And I think that's a different kind of connection, connecting those kinds of people as well.

● **Whatever this movement ends up being, it has to be comprised of mostly global South youth, or in my opinion it's not legitimate**, because it is those from the South feeling the first and hardest impacts of climate change, who have already felt the devastation of colonialism – they are related, by the way. The voices at these conferences are already saturated with the global North's interests. These louder voices are already taking up so much space on the table that there is very little space for global South voices.

*How do you feel about the coming two years in terms of what's possible, knowing that what's needed has seemed impossible. With what sort of spirit do you approach this and why?*

I have trouble envisioning a utopia at the end of this. I have trouble thinking of it in terms of solving the climate crisis or not solving it. I think whatever we've done to ourselves here, there is going to be hell to pay regardless; things are going to get a lot worse, there is going to be a huge human price.

Even if we stave off runaway climate change, there's still a huge cost to what's already happening. **So it's about holding that sense of really deep loss and that darkness alongside the hope that I have for social movements.** My hope comes from what I see in social movements. I think they are moving in a whole new direction and my colleagues blow me away every day. They are just fearless. They are so committed. They have pushed me so far. There are people living their lives for this struggle. My generation, we are going to be spending our lives working on this issue and being a part of this struggle. And that's an enormous source of hope. But there is a sense of tragedy and sense of loss that necessarily has to be a part of that hope.

*Corrie Ellis: Can you talk more about linking people who are really rooted in their local communities?*

In the world of activism and people working on this crisis, I think there's too much of a divide between grass-roots groups and so-called international groups and policy groups, and there's a dichotomy there, almost a spectrum, and the two ends of that spectrum often don't communicate with each other. Actually they rarely communicate with each other, and there is a lot of resentment on each side. Earth in Brackets convened a workshop this summer that was really interesting, where we had sixty activists who were all at a convergence together, ranging from those who from Greenpeace to those who were in such tiny radical groups that they wouldn't even say their real names. And we got them together, we had this BIG giant conversation about what about each other's styles of working didn't resonate, and why we didn't communicate and what spaces we were missing to communicate in, and how this is such a characteristic of the left basically, the progressive side of things.

We are so fragmented right now. The right is really good at uniting all kinds of movements all kinds of ways of working, all kinds of people; we place these silos between us and I think it is really important to break those down. We need people doing policy stuff. We need people at the UNFCCC – it's dead space but it's still a space, it's still happening, there are still millions of dollars going into these convergences and policy coming out. And we need the grassroots because you can't fight a struggle without communities' needs being amplified to an international level. Otherwise what are you fighting? You are fighting the abstract. So when I say bringing together place-based, community-based people with non-place based people. I mean

finding ways of working and ways of connecting with the climate struggle that can unite us. We connect in different ways. I don't connect to the movement because my community at home or my family has been directly impacted, and a lot of people don't, but a lot of people do, and so we have different ways of connecting and different ways of going about this movement and those need to be brought together. And new and interesting spaces have to be created for that, whether they are online or in person. I think finding ways that what we decide at the policy levels – so right now we are finance – needs to come to the global North and to the global South. How does that translate into something that a grassroots group fighting a local struggle could use, even just recognizing that international truth could make their local struggle so much stronger and vice versa.

*Corrie Ellis: How do you understand the struggle then?*

Since I was really young I always had, I think some people are just moved by struggle they see around them. I am immensely privileged and lucky to have had the upbringing I did. My parents were able to immigrate to Canada and build a solid life there. And that enabled me to think of my life as a small piece serving a much larger project. To think of it as service, essentially. I know that sounds corny but it's true. I started activism by running a global issues club in my high school that focused on international conflict-related issues. We used to bake gingerbread men and sell them with one leg broken off to bring awareness to the issue of landmines. And then it just went from there. Why is there a child eating from a garbage can outside my home? I used to wonder as a child. Then I would refuse to eat. I'm from India and I see it happening there, I envision it through what I am reading and studying and it moves me deeply.

The bird's eye view – the international view of seeing **so much collective systematic entrenched, institutionalized pain** is what really drives me. The bottom line, for me, is that the climate crisis is inherently a massive test for humanity. It brings to a boiling point the entire paradigm of neoliberal capitalism, the current ecological crisis, our notions of self and other, the institution of borders, and our idea of our role in the global community. **There is no easy way out of this crisis.** Either we burn or business as usual burns. Our movement, in all its different ways, with all its different characters, is about making sure it's the latter. The climate crisis is fundamentally, deeply tied to colonialism, which is deeply tied to the current neoliberal economic system. The same logic that drove the violence of colonialism now drives the dependence on fossil fuels. And it is, it continues to be an issue of race, of borders, of neo-colonialism. There can be no climate justice without economic justice, without racial justice.

It is the same story we see playing out all over the world. Why are the resources always on indigenous land? Why does the fossil fuel industry, or dirty industry in general, always set up shop on either indigenous land or in poor communities? Why are the poor and those in the Global South hit first and hardest by this crisis? We cannot ignore the connections therein. So that's why we support the developing countries at these conferences. That's why I think we should be rallying behind voices from the South. This crisis is not only about economics or emissions cuts. It's about entirely, fundamentally wrenching around our worldviews, paying reparations for centuries of debt, finding the sense of justice within to reject the most seemingly commonplace symbols and agents of this system – things like borders, like "clean coal", like market-based "solutions". My aim in this movement is to develop the clear sight to see through that bullshit and find out how to actually exist outside of the capitalist paradigm.



*Corrie Ellis: What are the biggest supports and also the biggest challenges to doing all this activism and coming here at these sorts of things?*

The support is the people around me, working with me. We are an incredible team of people here, of allies. And that is what gives me the most hope for this collective movement because we have our different ways of working. We have our little discrepancies in how we feel about the policy. But when it comes down to it, we can rally really strongly around important messages like hurricane Haiyan. That is something that there is no question about. We were all on board. So that's huge, that's support having those people around me and knowing that if I am writing something and I need info on this, and this I can email to people and they'll write back to me in 30 seconds. The challenges are that sometimes it is really difficult not to have a place and a community that I identify strongly with. It's obviously a really stressful lifestyle and I don't really see myself ever "settling." A lot of the activists who are my mentors and colleagues are way older than me and still don't really have homes, families, partners, stable communities, and I feel like that is going to be reality for a lot of us. I don't really see it as a challenge. I kind of see it as a necessary next step.

*Ben Liddie: So I hear that you were present at the COP last year and were actually expelled from the conference. Could you talk a little bit about what happened in that situation?*

I think there is a really important theme that is resonating this year as well. As you know, three people were kicked out. On its broadest level it has to do with civil society, with people, with non-political people having a right to engage in a political space and how that right is being quelled systematically through various means, and it's just a really disturbing trend. It's a trend towards censorship, towards repression. Last year I got kicked out because I had a meeting with the head of security, basically to assure him I would be well-

behaved for the conference. I was not rude at all, just being assertive by looking him in the eye and by asserting that I would not be organizing mass disobedience. But environmental groups have a history of having the right to protest and of engaging in space in a way that calls into question a lot of aspects of that space, and so I was trying to make it a dialogue. But the bureaucracy doesn't like dialogue, and so they kicked me out because he didn't believe that I wouldn't organize.



But what happened after that was really interesting because there was a giant mobilization of social media. We twitter-stormed the secretariat and then when I was finally let back in after that, I tweeted to everyone who had supported me, saying thank you for your solidarity. This is what happens when people get together, and that tweet was censored by the Secretariat. I received a call the next day saying that this is not an appropriate message. You can't give the message that the Secretariat responds to social media pressure. What does it do for our name and our reputation? So that happened and that was really telling. And then this year, as you know, people were kicked out for... OK, it was an unprecedented moment in these talks – Yeb Saño, the head of the Filipino delegation, had given a *seventeen* minute intervention – the limit is two or three. Seventeen minutes. He got emotional, he *cried* in the UN Plenary. And three-quarters of the room was also in tears. He was speaking about the largest super typhoon in recorded history. Ten thousand people dead in his community, his brother hasn't eaten in three days, and he announced that he was going on a fast – also unprecedented. Everybody is crying, it was a huge pivotal moment. And as he left the room, the youth decided to escort him in solidarity and support because he was obviously in an emotional state. And as they were escorting him, three people had a placard that named one of the worst-hit provinces of the Philippines and they were expelled for that. And actually there is a ban on them for a minimum five years and maximum of life which is like an embarrassing reaction on behalf of the Secretariat. So there is a trend – it wasn't just me, it was me and then these guys and other people as well who have had visas denied and accreditation denied and this year they cut down civil society participation. Our delegation asked for thirty-

one spots, we only got five, and that's unheard of. So there are a lot of different themes going into it and I think as the climate crisis comes to a head, so will this repression of civil society, because we are a huge pressure point on this space.

*Ben: Do you see this situation exacerbating in the future?*

I do, and all we can do, all we can do is push back. And I think if we push back hard enough we may be able to enter into dialogue at some point and figure it out. I don't know if it's at the request of party delegates or it's just the secretariat but I see it as an ever-growing trend, basically.

“It doesn’t matter how old you will be in 2050”



# NATHAN THANKI

Earth in Brackets (aka [EARTH])



# NATHAN THANKI

Warsaw COP 19 – November 12, 2013

Interview by John Foran

Transcribed by Marcelo Mendez

*We're trying to make a film about climate justice on a global scale. And the focus is on the youth component of the movement because in our view it is the strongest and most important in many ways. And we start with a few biographical things we'd like to collect...which I don't have the form for. [Background laughter]*

I'm twenty-three, from Belfast, Northern Ireland. This is my third COP in a row. Good thing they're a year apart [laughs].

*What has been your journey that has brought you here, to this COP? And you can go back as far as you want in terms of and in as much detail as you'd like about that.*

I'll have to kind of answer this question in a round-about way. The title of my application to the Watson Fellowship is something like "Negotiating Difference and Navigating Identity in the Global Climate Justice Movements." So, I've thought about it a little already, and I think in my response to this question, I point to a moment in the Solomon Islands, an experience I had one morning. I was just on a boat; it was dawn. I was leaving from one island to another, with this guy I had only met the day before. We weren't friends or anything, but we decided to kayak to this other beach and, I don't know, I think when I was reflecting on it, and why I had, when previously asked this question, I answered like if this was the moment that I put as a critical juncture in my path to becoming a climate justice activist. I look at that moment as important, but it's more important just because I think probably with hindsight, more with after the fact, at the time, I didn't really know what I was experiencing I didn't think of it as an epiphany then. It's more of a – to borrow a really wonky climate policy term – a slow-onset kind of event that occurred to me. But it was basically just this realization that, like, I guess I've always been in cities and I'm not really a nature person, whatever that means. I don't really go hiking a lot. I live in Acadia National Park and hardly ever go into it. Basically, it was just this realization that, holy crap, this is a beautiful, beautiful Earth, and it's insane that there's still parts of it that are, not pristine, I don't really believe in that as an idea, but there are still parts of it that you can really see that it slaps you in the face if you're coming from an industrialized city.

But at the same time, all of my experiences up to that point have been way more focused, I wouldn't even call it social justice exactly, but, my mum's always been working in humanitarian NGOs and some humanitarian relief, and I guess, because of that, I've been really concerned with global poverty. Both my parents as well. My mum's from an Irish Republican background in West Belfast, and my dad is Gujarati, by way of Kenya. He was born in Nairobi and then in the 70's when things got difficult in Kenya, and you basically had to choose what your primary identity was. They decided that they weren't Indian, that they were Kenyan, but they couldn't be in Kenya so they came to the U.K. So there are a lot of issues of racism, but just of anti-imperial sentiments that I've always sort of had, like an anti-authoritarian streak. So it's weird, I know that they seem really disparate sort of things, of this moment in the Solomon Islands and being on a boat, and that seems like a very kind of hippie or ecocentric or nature-driven experience. I like worlds colliding and

realizing that these are the same things, different sides of the same coin. And then, I didn't really know what that experience was about as I was having it, and it's been much later, with hindsight that I can put significance on the point, on the boat, and, that's when nine months later, I ended up at the College of the Atlantic in Maine and in a class with Doreen Stabinsky, an expert on lots of things [chuckles]. She was teaching this class called Climate Justice. It's my first time; I don't know what I'm doing or anything. That just looked like a really interesting class, I'm like, cool, climate justice. That was actually a class that prepared for Cancún [COP 16 in 2010], but I couldn't go in the end because of personal reasons. I had to go home for family stuff, but I was ready to go to Cancún, in the same way that I've been taking prep classes to end up here and to go Durban and Doha as well. It was then that I would experience that transformative experience, those feelings, you know those feelings. I started to have them in the Solomon Islands. I put it in a context that was like international kind of politics. And since then I guess it's time for the new path. I mean, obviously I have furthered my thinking on things of global climate justice movements and how I'm part of it, and how am I involved in it and I also study a lot of policy as well. It's like learning a second language.

*Great. You mentioned your parents, but you have said you were interested in social justice issues. Were you working on it, or were you just in the atmosphere of that?*

I've also had a really hard time coming to use the term "activist" to describe myself or to identify as one. I thought of somebody that was surrounded by ignorance who has to simplify things. You know, it's really complicated to know, it's messaging; ideas that people have when we're campaigning, you need to have a villain, a good guy. And if it's all of these things, if you go to any actions while being here you'll hear people talking about it. And for me, that was like, no, the world is way more complicated than that; we have all shades of good and bad. It's hard to translate the reality to them. But, I've mostly with the privileged. Going with my mother to her job after we moved to Sudan when I was sixteen, and we couldn't afford for me to go to school. And they weren't offering me anything either, that would've made sense for me to take it. So I had a year off, a couple of years before you're supposed to take a year off. I was not really doing anything that I considered social justice, but it was more like playing football with street kids. It was just that. So, no, I hadn't really done anything.

*Great. Now it's logical though, you tell it with real logic too. So, let me ask you, about Earth in Brackets, which since I've first heard of it in Durban, I was really captivated by the people, and what they were doing. Then I learned about the College of the Atlantic, and then I learned about what Earth in Brackets means, and how intimately connected it is to these negotiations and it's just a beautiful, powerful, critical, living concept; it was just a brilliant name. And, that being your organization, can you tell us about it? What is it about?*

For me, it's not really an organization because how we talk about it is sort of like a blog. Basically, it started as a blog, as a novel idea, just as a visual way to represent all of our frustrations. I think it was in Nairobi, in 2006, at the COP [12] there. It began as a blog when College of the Atlantic students, among them Alex Fletcher and Virginie Cousineau, thought of the name and logo. Juan Hoffmaister, now the Bolivian (and sometimes G77) negotiator on adaptation, loss and damage (and member of the Adaptation Committee and Loss and Damage Executive Committee) was also there. They came up with the idea. I think they were debriefing with our international environmental law professor, sitting back in the hotel or something, just thinking, "This is the worst text being kept in here." And so once they figured out the idea of Earth in Brackets, it just went from there. They didn't think of themselves as an organization or anything, they just thought that would be cool to put on a t-shirt. And then they were like, "Yeah that'd be cool to categorize our

politics under," because they had some other class that they were blogging for, and they said, "This was a lot more of what we think of this.... we'll just hide the text. We're here and how did we get here?" So it was really much more personal, what it was like to be at the international conference and targeting them and their countries for a home audience, and for a school audience, and never meant for people following these processes more seriously just because their friends were there [laughs]. It sort of stayed that way in Cancún, the use of logic again. Someone's senior project, the final project that they did, was to see a way to make the website a lot more visually appealing, so they did that, so there's a good platform for it. And then they're using that blog a lot more, saying, "We're not here just to watch; we're here to participate in a lot more advocacy and activism." So they did that, and it made sense not have would never have an organizational association with the College of the Atlantic.

And then when we went to Durban. The first day, in a meeting, we were introducing ourselves as being from the College of the Atlantic. The second day, we said, "We're from the College of the Atlantic - Earth in Brackets." And then the third day we're like, "We're from Earth in Brackets." So it was really weird; it was just an idea that people coalesced around. Another prime point is our organization doesn't have a legal status; we get accredited through the College of the Atlantic. We don't have a director or anything like that, it's totally horizontal. It's more of a collective than anything else. But I guess we need to think about some questions for the future and why a Party's going to be involved. It's kind of one of the strengths, that we all live together, go to school together, and eat together, and talk together, and really know each other and are interested in the same things in our really small college in rural Maine. You get to know each other in a way that you can fall back on here. Because a lot of that was of trust, and you just can't have that with everyone here. And we have learned about it, and made good friends as well, but we had to really work it, to get up. If you're determined, it's a lot easier to, even if you don't know what you're doing, to end up doing it.

*What would you say – I know the answer, that there is no Earth in Brackets position – but, what is the orientation?*

I guess we would describe ourselves as justice-focused. I guess we sort of line ourselves up with the idea that...honestly, to be real with this, climate change is a massive problem. It's very, very real. It's much worse, and people realize it's much worse than the IPCC, even the AR5 are coming out. The U.N. says that that was from 2006, and we've obviously increased emissions since 2006. That's what this conference is really about, a plan for emergency basically, and then, building off that, all right, so what's the response? I think we're more or less agreed on the idea of having to live inside a global carbon budget, and, from there, trying to divide up the budget and the whole dynamics about how you do that fairly and in a time frame that avoids what most people put as two degrees of warming. I think we're all of the mind that that's a danger, two degrees, with the associated impacts and the sort of differentiated impacts – more in sub-Saharan Africa, it's more than five degrees. There's no chance to live there, so we're like, "Two degrees doesn't do much anywhere." I think you cannot talk away this question and cannot talk about addressing this question without looking to the past, taking into consideration who's responsible historically, for contributing for the warming that we're already facing the 0.8 degrees that we are experiencing right now and the 0.6 more that we've already locked in. Do you have a financial or technological capacity to act? If not, then you can't really expect to do it, you need to have that capacity increased. It's all in the convention of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, as "differentiated rights and responsibilities and equity."

*So, what follows from that, in terms of being at the COP, are you active the rest of the year, or is it really around preparing and gearing up for a COP to make an impact of some kind?*

Throughout the rest of the year, it's more continuing energy and work, sometimes around UNFCCC issues such as following the Intersessional meetings, sometimes going to them, being involved in different groups and coalitions that exist, the Equity and Ambition group, and some of the other spaces like CJN! [Climate Justice Now!], that are there at the same time. We're also on the coordinating committee for the Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice, DCJ for short (is a campaign vehicle for 200+ organizations to work together on shared platform around key issues like food, water, land, energy). I participated in Reclaim Power, the week of action against Dirty Energy and for community owned renewable energy, so that's working for campaigning organizations that, even though a lot of them don't bother with international politics, in this arena, we think this is a dead space. We do some stuff throughout the year as well on that.



*People's Climate March, New York, 2014*

*Let's talk, then, a little bit about the COP. Because it's an amazing thing you're describing. It's unique and it's powerful. It's the way I see it. I can't see it any other way. So you come to a COP, and you've come to three COPs in a row, and, what are you trying to do there? What is your experience, and what are you trying to do?*

Maybe it's quite implicit or self-conscious. I'd like to shift the balance of power within the COP, not as a dead space, but as a space that has to be totally cleaned. It's going to go on no matter what. If we all aren't all here, all these fucking bureaucrats. It's not like they're all just going to disappear, the show's going to go on, no matter what. And so, I look at it as if it's our job, it's a moral imperative, and, you can be here, and you can be infatuated with the process. Since day one, the first experience I've had with the U.N. was actually the Commission on Sustainable Development in New York. The first day I stepped into this world, I was so aware

that there were just a lot of people that are fetishizing the process, it's all about the process. The process, rather than that being the means to an end, was an end in itself. And then it's all about careers, and all about networking in the corporate blah blah way that we talk about networking. And so, being in the place, I think, it's from that; the slogan I came up was that we were bringing the voices of the many to the halls of the few, which is maybe not actually that true, but that's what we want to be doing, so it's an objective. And I would say doing, after building a really strong climate justice youth movement, because, there's a lot of, "Oh we should just be positive all the time," and "We should just respect authority because it's authority." If that's what we want, we should just respect the process, and then respect the Secretariat, and respect the Parties, and we have to work with the World Bank, because they're the World Bank. I think we should have a very much more radical youth, like way out in the extreme, where there's room for people to fall in line behind, to be a front really. To be way more extreme than any of the parties, to be way more extreme than any of the brand NGOs, and to be right there.

*How does that go when you bring that into, say, YOUNGO?*

Uh, not so well [laughs]. It's very difficult. YOUNGO is interesting because there are groups in there that are supposed to be apolitical. I don't know how they manage to do that, how YOUNGO manages to do anything, because everything is a political act. It's difficult because of them; it's also difficult because of a lot of pink [i.e. having national delegations'] badges, I'm not against people having pink badges who are engaging the system, but I think the way you do that is really important. So they're under pink badge, and it's not just that they can leak information to us and they can get access to things through them for a climate justice movement; it's because that's their next job. I call them "baby bureaucrats." And so, they water down a lot of things, and it makes it really difficult for us to come to any sort of strong statement on anything. We just end up following the lowest common denominator all the time, and getting wrapped up in these very very tiring, energy-sucking conversations, and bickering, but, very politely in the face of the sort of to-ing and fro-ing about nonsense. So, YOUNGO is difficult. In the past couple of years, I think, we've made it a much more radical space. We wrote this letter to [UNFCCC Secretary-General] Christiana Figueres this year about her attendance at the World Coal Summit, basically saying this was totally unacceptable, you can't do this. We gave a bunch of different reasons. Some of them were grounded in legal reasons such as to preserve the neutrality of the secretariat, but mostly it was moral: "We don't want to talk to you if this is your angle," and especially because she often uses "youth," that future generations get used, by everybody, for whatever their purpose is. And we recognized that, and we told her that in a public letter. I think that wouldn't have happened last year in YOUNGO, or the year before that. So, there's some slow movement, but it's there.

*Who can you work with, I mean, who can you really feel you're with when you're there?*

Some organizations would be Young Friends of the Earth Europe, I'm pretty close with them, PUSH Europe, to a large degree, SustainUS. Most of the people in SustainUS are great people, and totally on board.

*There's the CYD [Canadian Youth Delegation], who didn't come.*

CYD were great allies last year. And they are; we are close friends with Cam [Fenton] and Amara and all the people who helped set that up. So, it really depends on who's there. UKYCC, quite a lot of the UKYCC here are pretty good, shifting and beginning to get more justice focused.

*I know something's going on because I've noticed that in SustainUS too – the people I talked to in Durban were amazing and got more so when the COP was in Doha. Let's take this COP and ask, how can you make this message come across, and what are you doing, and how do you think about that?*

There's the usual sort of channels, we do all of the interventions, trying to make sure that the interventions are sending the right, or what we believe is, the right message, and that it's a very justice-focused message. It's not just about getting youth into the text; it's not even really all about just the text and the wording, the words on the paper; it's more of setting a precedent and drawing our red lines really clearly in terms of demands. So we go through the interventions, we do the same thing through actions – we're trying to do a lot more of them. This year, we got two people kicked out yesterday for not even really an action, more like a spontaneous show of support for the Philippines. So there are interventions, the actions. A lot of it's a bit more difficult to talk to, a bit more nebulous when we're trying to reach out to other groups and sort of shift them and their thinking along the way to encourage them. Like the individuals that we know in YOUNGO from the global South, most of them are really, really radical, like way more radical; but I feel like they have the organizational support, and some feel that YOUNGO is totally dying, in the case of the North, which it is. They often just stay out of it – "What's the point of getting involved in this? This is just a joke." So we're trying to convince them that we can actually make the space work for all of us, this is going to be a much better space. Just talking to people ... most of life is just talking to people [laughs]. Yeah.... just doing that.

We also have pretty strong ties to Third World Network, Friends of the Earth International, Jubilee South, and others.

*How about reaching into delegations?*

We started, but it's mostly because of the people whom we've known personally, who've been in delegations. I think it was in Durban, there was one girl from the Maldives that we knew because she went to COY; she was from the Maldives delegation. There's a guy that was on the St. Lucia delegation; and we had two, I don't know if they ever got on it, but they definitely talked a lot to two girls in the Haitian delegation. Even in the Bolivian delegation we know one. But, we don't really desert dissention, even if you have allies. We sometimes chat to Claudia [Salerno] from Venezuela, and Yeb [Saño] from the Philippines ... and I forget his name, but someone from Pakistan. I just see them in the halls and they're people. Even the ones we don't know, we recognize that they're human beings. Most of the time they're being forced to do these things they don't really want to do.

*New interviewer: I've been hearing a lot of, in YOUNGO about intergenerational equity. Could you unpack that for us, what are these human pieces of it?*

In YOUNGO, as far as I have come across it, when we talked about equity, in the phrase "intergenerational equity," it's like a legal principal; it's just that. This is acknowledged in the real convention, and has some legal precedence as a principle.

We talked about how we need to consider **future generations** and you can't mess up the planet and just leave the mess for them. I have a problem with that framing. An issue when I first came to this basically was, the whole "How old will you be in 2050" thing, and that was really catchy, and I was like, oh cool, that's catchy, it makes you think. But, the more I felt about it, the more I realized that that's really dumb. It doesn't matter how old you will be in 2050, it's how old you are now, how old are all those people that are dead in

the Philippines; there's ten thousand people dead in the Philippines, and you want to talk about just the future, and just the equity with the future generation?

**Equity** is an issue throughout that is always existing and will continue to exist. So you just forget about the past, and forget about the present, put all your eggs in the basket of the future. It's totally ridiculous, and it's also going to reach a point where you can't even talk about it anymore because you can't, with any real legitimacy, say you're speaking for our future generations. Like, who gave you the right? It's a kind of weird right to assume that you're talking for people who are not alive yet; it's probably even more difficult to claim to talk for people that are alive that haven't even consented. Talk for them, as in YOUNGO, we do all the time, but I think it's more of a rhetorical thing than something we actually believe. With most of us, some people do actually believe that, speaking for half of the world. But real equity would have to address current situations, like, with Durban, massive inequality in the world. Equity and equality are not the same thing, but, in terms of income, in terms of the standards of life that people have, that's the difference, and within countries as well.



*At the 2014 PreCOP in Venezuela*

● **My point is that, the future is important, and making sure that we have a fair society or future is important. But you can always put that off, you know?** A couple of years ago, in Durban, at one of his interventions, in the context of climate finance, Yeb said, "You're always talking about tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow. You say 'Next year it will be in the agreement. In 2015 we'll have the agreement. In 2020 it will be enforced.' And in 2060, we'll have slightly reduced levels of CO2 emissions. What about now? Tomorrow is not a day of the week." That's what he said, tomorrow's not a day of the week. Give any day of the week, that you're going to start reducing your emissions, and that you're going to deliver on climate finance. Because we can give a day of the week that Typhoon Yolanda struck, we can give you a day for that, we can give you every day since then. But you're not giving us anything. So that's

just the problem I have with the way we discuss equity, that within youth groups it's from a position of privilege that we do it. A lot of us are from the North. And it's without much consideration for the South and for people from the South, and also for people that are within our own countries who are living in poverty as well, or are suffering from oppression. It's weird.

*Just tell me this, is it going to work out?*

No! It's not [chuckles].

*Can you deal with that?*

I think I'm trying to. I don't know. I have a really dark sense of humor.

*[laughs] Yes, I agree. Lovely, thank you. I'll let you go ... reluctantly. Thanks a lot!*

“We have to build a much more diverse movement”



## LOUISA CASSON

United Kingdom Youth Climate Coalition



# LOUISA CASSON

Warsaw COP 19 – November 2013  
Interview by Corrie Ellis  
Transcribed by Gaelen Vasquez

*When did this journey start? How did you get to the COP?*

Climate change was I heard about during school, and it was always there. I think I thought it was an environmental issue, and probably something that was scientists' issue. Then when I was about 16 or 17, some of my friends took me to see a film called *the Age of Stupid*, and they just said, "This is something that we think is really important, would you come with us?" And I said, "Yeah, sure, fine." Seeing that film, I think it was the fact that it was really focused on people and their different stories, and actually showing that it was already happening across the world in lots of different scenarios. I thought "Okay, well this is, you know, something that is going on," and then the bit that I think just really sort of scared me was the timeline that they used. It's got all the moments made up of dates, and first of all it was, "Oh, that's when I was born," and you go through life and you're like, "Okay, this is when I started school." Then it carried on going and everything just started to sort of fall apart and it showed all the different impacts. That wasn't just about natural disasters, but the security impacts and the impacts of migration and refugees. I think that just hit home for me in terms of people and how it was going to destabilize so many things that I thought were important. Because it was so overwhelming, in a way I didn't quite know how to get involved, so I did a few actions with them. We gave out a spoof *Financial Times of the World in 2020*, showing what could happen.

Then I went to university and was quite wrapped up in that, and volunteered for a few big NGOs that had small volunteer roles. I didn't really feel like I was doing something. Then I heard about this group called the UK Youth Climate Coalition, which is completely volunteer and completely youth-led. I just thought that they were amazing – they went to the UN, and I thought, "Well, that's like a *huge* thing." But they also did really cool projects. In the UK, they had a picnic, and Parliament was invited to come along and just talk to them. They just seemed like really confident people who were just saying what they believed and offering an alternative that wasn't this doom and gloom narrative. They were saying, "Here's an opportunity, you know, this is serious, we're not pretending that it's like a walk in the park – this is something that we need to do something about, these are the things we want you to do." They just seemed really impressive people, but also really fun and really normal people, so I just really wanted to join. I joined about two years ago and now it has gradually more and more taken over my life. It's weird to call it a volunteer thing because it is just most of my days, it's more than full-time really. But it's been amazing and I've learned so much about campaigning and different ways to work on local, national, international levels.

I think it's also changed quite a lot. First, I think I was really impressed by the idea of going to the UN. Then actually going, what's most exciting is the chance to work with other young people there, and to use it as an opportunity to build the movement and make these connections and do something together – to all learn together. I think that's good because it's campaigning and capacity-building at the same time so you learn by doing it. There's so much energy and creativity that's just really exciting, and you get to make great

friends as well. It's just that dynamism that "This is so important, we have to do something about it, so let's do it," you know? Why are we waiting, let's just do something.

I've gotten more and more involved and have been part of this delegation this year. I'm communicating climate change. Coming from studying languages which is not always the normal way to get into climate change activism, and also coming from the perspective of people saying, "But do you even understand the science?"

For me it's about issues that **everyone** should be able to engage with, but it's also how we talk about it and it is a really difficult thing to communicate. There's so much possibility there, and if we have this conversation, you engage more people. That's how we're going to actually tackle it and build durable solutions, rather than just hoping for this magic solution and thinking we're going to get it through a technical fix or through one new UN treaty. It's about building more of a consensus of people who can actually try and shift the direction of our societies and our economies into something that's much more just, that places people at the center of it, and values things that actually will deal with lots of different crises that we're experiencing.

*Did you come with a big group of UKYCC folks?*

There are about eleven of us this year. We've sent delegations to the UN for the past five years – actually the first time they were in Poland, last time in Doha, and Warsaw this year. Maybe before we have always built up to the UN as this big moment, and while it's the end of our training in a way as the delegation, and we're recruited each year. I think now we see it much more in the context of the general global climate movement that is building. Yes, it's an opportunity to have access to decision makers, but before that, throughout the year we're actually making the decisions about what we're going to talk about at the COP and the UN climate summits. For us, this is an opportunity where we get to interact with a really vibrant, diverse group of different campaigners working on different issues and getting those different cultural perspectives, which I think is so important to actually try and find different solutions. We clearly don't have all the answers now with our current thinking and our current western economic models – so we need to diversify. You get that through bringing two different groups together and doing something together.

*How's your experience been so far working with the youth here?*

I think the reason I'm having a good time at COP so far is because I've focused on working with them and haven't stepped into the plenaries and the actual negotiations. Already the journeys that you see people having gone on and I think, because I've had a fair amount of training, on the first day it was, "Okay, there's this freedom to do what we want because we're organized into these different working groups." So some of us do communications and actions, some are following the policies; there's the loss and damage group this year, things like finance and mitigation are always there. It's up to us what we want to do. For some people it's been a bit overwhelming, so I was trying to sort of organize things with a few other people and saying, "OK, well, we could do these things, we can do this" – just trying to actually get a start to doing things. We did an action yesterday in the conference center with the finance group, and the meeting afterwards was incredible because everyone was just buzzing, saying "We just did that!" People were walking by, and people were interrupting, "Let's do all these actions," and the ideas would just flow. It was just great to just see that from doing something fairly simple – we did a mock lemonade stand to try and save the adaptation fund, to try and match the ambition that the countries are currently showing, saying, "Just put your pocket change here, well sure, that's fine." Quite a spoof action and it was really simple to do, we just made some

signs together, found some jugs and old paper cups, and it was just one of those things, it's just working together and doing something. You then feel like you understand the policy much better because you've actually interpreted it in a much more creative way than all of the negotiations managed to.



Louisa selling lemonade to raise money for the Adaptation Fund. Photo: Ben Liddie

It was really great in terms of building people's confidence, seeing people suggesting what we can do and thinking about all the different ways that we can communicate back home, creating educational resources we can take back to schools and universities and our home communities. I think there's so much work going on across the movement. We've got a couple of hundred people here, and more inside the conference center, also people outside. Just before COP at the Conference of Youth, we had a Power Shift event for Central and Eastern Europe, which is the first one in this region that was amazing. Seeing all these workshops which were just done in such an engaging way, it wasn't lectures and seminars, but it was people who have a skill they want to share, and they also want to learn. When you give a workshop, it's not that you know something or you're giving an expert talk because we're all sort of learning on the job. That just makes it even more exciting and invigorating.

I don't think I would want to come here if I wasn't with the international youth climate movement because I think that's where the exciting things happen. We can see the long term, we're not just looking at this deadline and thinking, "Okay, sure this could be a 'Statement COP,' it doesn't have to be a 'Decisions COP.'" We're saying, "No, we need to see decisions, we need to see action, and we're not going to be quiet about it." We have much more flexibility to say those things because we have the moral justification to say, "This is our future and the future of generations to come." So, they really need to listen to us and we're going to try lots of different ways for them to do that, doing things at home throughout the year and then sending people here as well to show that we are there.

### *What other things do you have planned while you're here?*

I think there's quite a lot of things about the "corporate COP" because this year we've seen unprecedented levels of sponsorship and influence from a lot of industries, particularly the fossil fuel industry. For us this is just ludicrous because they really do not have a role in negotiating a clean and fair future. Their business model is completely opposed to what we're trying to do, and if they have a future, the people of the world do not. That was just awful to see. In a way it shows that they really take us seriously now, in terms of climate denial, because they've stopped ridiculing the climate movement. They've tried that; they tried to sideline us by saying, "Oh, it's a joke. It's a hoax." That hasn't worked so their next tactic has been to really attack us and to come into this space, which is supposed to be about the future of people across the world, and try to invade the space, try to infiltrate, and get their influence in.

So in some ways you could see it as kind of a sign that we're doing well. We're growing in strength. I think it will also be a massive fight, but that's something that we are very much engaging with. I think we're making huge progress, both outside with the divestment movement, but also inside by doing lots of satirical actions, lots of exposing. We've got the research behind us of how much money is actually going through these talks and what industries it's coming from – trying to expose it and trying to really uncover the actual motives of these industries trying to green-wash themselves, saying "Clean coal is a viable solution." It's just ridiculous; obviously it can't be. We'll do a lot of actions around that, because it's quite a fun topic to do, and we think that actually that's got quite a lot of traction outside; a lot of people do not like corporations and think they're a bit dodgy. This is a way to say, "Well, yeah, they are being dodgy and this is something you can do about it – you can help expose it and try and reclaim these talks to actually be about real climate action and ambition."

Next week when a lot of ministers arrive, a lot of the European youth here really want to be putting pressure on our ministers and really calling on the developed world to make huge cuts to their greenhouse gas emissions, and particularly to deliver climate finance. They've already signed up to deliver this money and now they're just trying to kind of backtrack. It's completely unfair that they would not deliver what they promised to, and be calling for a global deal in developing countries with a lot of poverty issues, to talk about cutting their own greenhouse gas emissions, which are minor in comparison now, and even more so if you consider historical responsibility. So I think finance would be a big issue where we try pressure on our representatives. Also Loss and Damage is a new area of the talks, and having seen the devastating typhoons in the Philippines – because this is something where we really hope to bring the outside inside and there's a lot of youth standing in solidarity with Yeb Saño, the lead negotiator for Philippines, who's gone on a voluntary fast for the length of these negotiations until he sees some kind of real action. Loss and damage is the kind of the climate change that our leaders have failed to avoid.

All this inaction for practically my whole lifetime in these talks makes me really angry that we even have to have discussions about loss and damage, or that we have to accept that there will be climate catastrophes and climate tragedies throughout my lifetime. I think having this discussion about ways of funding and responding to disasters and helping people who are in dire need and whose very survival really is at risk – I really hope that we both see progress on these and that you see some human compassion from the developed world. It can act as a catalyst for more increased action in terms of cutting our greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change so that people are better prepared for what they are going to have to face.

*Great, so tell us little bit about the biggest supports you have to be able to consider yourself an activist?*

It's funny, I think maybe a couple of years ago when I first joined the UK Youth Climate Coalition, I wouldn't have used the word "activist," maybe, because I think the word still does have a label attached to it. It's quite difficult when you're 16, 17 to want to label yourself in a way that makes you stand out and makes you really believe that you have convictions. But now I think it's a very empowering label, and I think I can do that because I have this community and this organization of people my age who are also doing things, who are really pushing themselves and challenging themselves and just thinking, "All my friends are really cool, haha, I want to be part of what they're doing." And that kind of exhilaration you get when you're not quite sure you're going to pull something off because you've seen there's a problem, and you think, "Actually, our point of intervention is 24 hours from now and I've got an essay to write at the university, but, uh, it's fine, we'll just do that and then we'll make banners, and then we'll plan what we're doing, and then we'll do our twitter strategy." I think it's definitely having the people my age and maybe a few years older than me whom I can see what they've done and that kind of inspiration you get just from people you know.

That's one of the powerful things about climate change; **it's difficult here where it has been compartmentalized a bit and broken down into different talks and labels**, because I think it is people talking to different people that is one of the most effective ways to create change. So, for me, it's when you have conversations with the non-climate friends, "normal people," I suppose, and they ask about climate change. Even being here, friends on Facebook sending me messages. One of my friends I was sending email updates to asked about the typhoons and said, "You know, you've said that this is related to climate change and I really don't want you to think I'm a skeptic, but I'm interested to know how you know that, and is there anything you can send me? I just really want to learn." Climate change isn't a huge issue for her, but I think that capacity to learn and being open about it, rather than saying, "Well, I'm an activist, you're not an activist." Even phrases like the fact that I said "non-climate" friends, I think that should stop being an issue. I think we have to open up activism and make it accessible for everyone because I was only able to become an activist by my friends saying, "It'd be really great, you know, if you could come along to see this film," and then other people saying, "Oh, this is a cool opportunity, have you heard about this group? You should join in," and people welcoming you in.

● **I think we can't see ourselves as this inward-looking group**, because we have to keep engaging much more widely; we have to build a much more diverse movement because it's such a complicated challenge to see if we can really build a properly sustainable transition that will affect our entire society and economy and all the structures we know. It is transformative systemic change that we're calling for – and even these words I'm using now, I think these are quite "activist-y" terms – and it's quite difficult to really articulate what it is in simple language to people, but I think always being open for those conversations and just having a chat with people and making videos that actually show the human side beyond it, as well as blogging. Some people really like the briefings you can give them, so it really depends on opening up and saying, "There's so many different ways you can learn about this and you can get involved." I think that's the thing that activists can stop being – a specific thing of someone standing, holding up a banner, or chaining themselves to railings. It can mean so many different things, and I think that's really exciting and will also mean more opportunities for people to get involved, which is what we need. We need to have the kind of a movement that is reflected by all the people who can be part of it if we are really going to keep moving forward and keep tackling climate change.

*So if we need systematic, transformative change, what, how do you envision that? What does that entail for you?*

I suppose one of the things that's closest to me, both in my experiences and interests, is the education and the training that children and young people get. I think having more of a kind of awareness of the power structures that control our society and seeing their interplay, empowering of people to feel they can do things, having more projects that can be youth-led in schools, rather than just a school council which is perhaps overseen by a teacher. Although young people feel like they're maybe doing something, they're still not able to really define for themselves what they want to do in their own projects, and I think that is really important, and that's what's missing from a lot youth community projects. I think when you do see the instances where young people have got together and organized themselves, you just see these crazy ideas sometimes, but that they actually manage to pull it off because they just have that commitment. They're going to do it, so they go and do it, and I think if we want to see the kind of transformation that can meet the needs of people and the planet much more justly and equitably, then we really need to not be closing off different avenues of kind of change and ideas and innovation.

I think in terms of the economy – definitely moving away from a world where we have this huge force of the markets, which just seems to have this incredible power over governments when they decide things, and also in the way we talk about economics in an elitist way. If I talk about it some people will say, "Oh, but it's just you don't understand it." But it's stupid that we have this force that makes governments look to see what the markets are doing and I think that is ridiculous. I think opening up making sure that we don't just think that there's two economic models we can use which are radically opposed to each other, but actually saying, "Well no, what about new alternatives like the secular economy?" Thinking about how we can use our resources in a much more sustainable way, not just consuming endlessly.

Actually thinking about **what makes people really happy in the world, what actually really makes you smile**, rather than just buying things or even just saying, "All people just want money." I don't think people just want to hold coins and that has become a way for people to think of status and prestige, a way to kind of enable them to do things to make them happy, to improve their sense of living. I think reframing that in our consciousness, so it's human connections. Maybe earning money enables you to live in a nicer space which you can actually share with the people you love and you think, "Well, what's the important thing here?" It's having a place that is clean and decent to be with people you care about. That's what's important, shifting that slightly. That's hard because it's a cultural shift; it's hard to implement policies that can do that, which is why I think a lot of this is about the conversations between people and new ideas being injected he public discourse so that we can start to talk about these things. Once that sparks ideas, then people can think about projects and how to enable them. I think already we're seeing it with community-owned energy cooperatives, particularly in Germany. There's a few in the UK, but I feel it's something that can continue to grow because it's going against the huge energy companies. Energy is something that affects people on a daily basis; it is one of the root issues and yet a lot of people don't think climate change is one of their everyday issues. It's bizarre, there's been this disconnect, and I think a lot of that is because there isn't this understanding of how we use our energy and how we get our energy. It's just seen as this negative thing that environmentalists are telling you: "Stop doing things, stop using energy." I think we have to take a more open look at energy, and open up these structures. We can see lots of different ways of

organizing it and having systems where you're not always paying someone else to do something for you, but actually you can take ownership of it yourself.

I suppose it's just different ways of organizing, which has actually been reflected in the international youth climate movement in the way we organize ourselves and having very horizontal structures, talking a lot about anti-oppression. These are all things that I hadn't really heard about before getting involved. It just totally changed my perspective and outlook on life and how I interact with other people. Whether in classes at university or in other places, it's something that has been really eye-opening into the relationships between people.

I think it does come down to these kind of links, these structures, the way we organize, and what your priorities are for doing that, whether it's for profit or whether it's for well-being. The New Economics Foundation had a great report about rather than using GDP as a measure of how well a country is doing. In terms of well-being, assessing how a country is doing and we think, "Yeah, that's much more important. Let's actually tackle these issues of inequality and injustice by looking at how people are doing, rather than just in terms of economic output, which sounds so much more dry. So GDP is easier to quantify but that doesn't actually mean very much in terms of people's lives.



*What are your biggest challenges to being an activist, of living this lifestyle?*

I think one of them as a recent graduate is jobs and being able to have the money to be financially independent. I think a lot of the more interesting things that I've done have been as a volunteer. I would love to be able to do them the whole time. The way that they work as organizations and the fact they're so horizontal in their lack of hierarchies is because they're volunteer and it is because everyone really wants to be part of it.

People are fitting it in between other things and making it a priority. I think if it was just a nine to five job, it could lose some of that dynamism. A lot of NGOs are either very small or don't have very much money, so they have unpaid interns, which isn't a way to increase diversity in the movement at all. I'm lucky that I graduated and have been able to move back home with my parents and live in London. I do consider myself very privileged to be able to do that. There's a lot of people who haven't been able to do that. I've had friends come and stay with me; some are doing these internships because maybe they think there is going to be a job afterwards. Also the fact that there aren't lots of internships that allow you to do exactly what you want. So it's a case of paying the rent with one kind of job and then having less time and less capacity to do what you really want. It's this sort of logistical difficulties I suppose.

I also think burnout is a huge problem. Because a lot of these things are volunteer, people will really work themselves down because there isn't a cutoff point; you can't really stop and say, "Okay, I'm done for the day with climate change," because then you'll turn on the news and think, "But it's happening and it's getting worse so I have to do something about it now." I think it's really difficult to find your place in it and think, "Okay, how am I contributing? How am I making change and where am I finding my way? How am I being useful?" It's easier for me in having a really great team of people that can see the impacts when you're training people up. You can see it just in the way that they carry themselves and then the things they go on to do. I think that's why I particularly enjoy running and running workshops for activists because there's an output. Whereas being at the UN, it's really difficult to think, "Okay, this is the difference I made." It's impossible to do that rather than just writing out to-do lists and taking off thinking "Okay, loads of things because I've got like ten ticks here today." This can feel quite stupid, but I think it's really important to value what you've done because it feels like there's a huge juggernaut issue that we're just kind of trying to chip away at.

I think having that community around you to make the chips add up is really important. Otherwise it can be very depressing and disheartening, and it's something that is very emotionally involving. It can be difficult and people can really reject it because it's such a huge thing and it's terrifying. If you aren't quite sure how you're contributing or doing anything, it's exhausting. In terms of how you fit in, the social ethic going back to London afterwards, will be really really strange. The first UN conference I came back from, friends were saying, "So that was the model UN you went to, right?" "No, it's the real UN," but it's so different than what you think. Saying, "Oh, I went to the UN" sounds like you're trying to be really impressive and that's not actually what you felt you were doing at all. You didn't want to go and be in these high level meetings. You realize how empowering it is to actually be there at all, so I think it will be really strange going back.

Those conversations, actually trying to find a way to make it accessible, and not just way over people's heads. You've had two weeks living and breathing and sleeping climate change, so finding that way to connect with other people afterwards. It's equally intense when you're launching a campaign; you can get really sucked into it. It's not useful to always just be talking to people who agree with you and who think the same things; you can spur each other on. You have to also see what other people are so you can meet them there and listen to them and take on what they're saying, because they're going to have really useful ways of looking at things that are just as valid as mine. So, I suppose fitting bits of real life together is the issue.

*What do you think about the COP process? Do you think it will work out?*

I think we've had to slightly change what we think "work out" means. I first became interested in climate change just in the lead-up to the Copenhagen summit in 2009. The way I thought about it was, "Okay, well

you know – climate change, pretty serious problem. Here are our world leaders, they're going to do something, they're all gathering together. Great!" They're going to pass something and then we'll solve it because that's kind of how everything is. You know it worked before, that there has been a problem and then people have come together. There's a social movement that's pushed people to make change, a law has been passed, and you know, great! There's been this big moment; when that obviously didn't happen, it was even more undermining. You learn that actually a lot of social movements create maybe one policy change, but then it's a continuing process once something has been agreed.

You really need to keep being vigilant to make sure that it's implemented and to carry on. It's very difficult to ever solve an issue just in one way. I think engaging with the UN is a symbolic exercise, really. I think it has huge amounts of risk and can do incredible harm if it doesn't arrive at an agreement that is seen to be strong in 2015. But if it does manage to turn these conversations about equity into something productive that can actually be put on paper – and I don't think it will manage to capture the full story at all because I don't think that you can express in legal documents what equity and climate change means to people. It's an issue that actually feels so removed from the fact that we're sitting in a football stadium at the conference center, but I think it can be symbolic and it can send a message that climate change is very serious. If world leaders do want to do something about it and they are committing to say, "This is something we need to act on," that then sends signals to society that we do need to be part of this change. I think particularly in terms of bringing people together that's where the power of the UN can be. But in terms of showing that we're having a global deal that does include everyone – how that's going to be sorted out will be a very tricky problem.

Hopefully it will spark conversations – even if it is just among activists or people who will be becoming activists – about different ways of looking at the different issues. The fact that a lot of the negotiators here are actually from foreign offices and foreign ministries because it's not just an environmental issue, it's the issue of security and international relations and it's national development. I feel like it is starting to join up some of the dots in people's heads. I don't know if it's necessarily in the right people's heads – in terms of the people have the power to actually do things.

But in terms of campaigners coming here, although a lot of them will leave and think, "Well, what did I do for two weeks? I don't know," they will then be able to take that with them and go back into their communities, back into their national campaigns. They'll have brought something and have learned something. So in terms of bringing different people together, 10,000 people in this conference center apparently, there is this possibility for exchange and for cooperation and collaboration between different projects and ideas. That should only be a good thing as long as it's not overly influenced by the people who are trying to greenwash and create a good image for themselves by being "sustainable." We need to root them out of the process; this does need to be a space where ideas can be shared, where we can break down boundaries between countries. We can stop thinking about energy security in terms of "Let's close off our borders and let's think about ourselves as an isolated, alienated country." I think that would be the worst case scenario.

But what it could deliver is actually much more of an open cooperative space people rather than countries to come – rather than people wearing a badge and people saying, "Oh yeah, that's the USA. That's the UK. That's China." They're just people. It has definitely opened my eyes to just how bizarre international relations are. But I also think there is possibility here and potential to unlock something. If there is a strong global deal in 2015 and there's a plan for afterwards, perhaps after that it becomes a space mainly to focus on im-

plementing really strong adaptation and sharing between nations of best adaptation practices, best mitigation practices. We have to keep going with that, but I think the problem is that if we see this as if it's going to deliver a miracle solution, I don't think it will because if they agree something, it then has to filter down. We have to keep the pressure up in all of our countries around the world to see that whatever is agreed is actually put into place in a way that upholds the need to take rapid action. It has at its heart justice and sustainability in the long term, so you're preparing infrastructure, not doing quick fixes like clean coal or natural gas as a less polluting fossil fuel. We need to see a real shift and it needs to be implemented so that it's not just cutting in terms of austerity measures, but actually seeing the opportunity to build a new infrastructure in terms of energy and transport and across lots of different sectors.

*What does climate justice mean to you?*

● **For me climate justice is about preserving the dignity of people, and empowering them to be able to have a home to be able to live where they want**, where they can respect other people's rights, where they can respect the limits of both people and planet and be able to just see the fact that we aren't superior. We can't just keep thinking we can invade other territories and keep expanding; we can't look for energy further and further below our feet. We can say, "Actually no." If we just are happy with working in our communities, seeing the other people around us, that should be enough. And enough should become something that is actually a positive thing rather than actually having all these negative connotations that it does culturally now for large parts of the western world at least. That is what it is for me.

In the immediate sense, climate justice is trying to rebalance this kind of historical responsibility that developed countries have for massively contributing to climate change through their industrial revolutions. It doesn't mean that it was a malicious thing at the start, but now that we cannot ignore the fact that when we burn greenhouse gas emissions, it contributes to climate change and that has an adverse effect on people who are both least responsible for causing climate change in terms of have being not developed in such a carbon-intensive way, but also are most vulnerable in terms of not being able to deal with the huge amounts of devastation they'll face in terms of competing priorities and the lack of wealth in that country.

I suppose we talk more about kind of climate injustice in a way, when we look at the problem. Climate justice as I see it has to be at the heart of solutions that we find. I think it's something that is not part of the legal policy-wonk language they use here. You need constituencies of young people and environmental NGOs and social justice campaigners to come here and to really embed it and really get that in because climate justice isn't something that is found in dry policy documents. It's in the interactions between people and it's respecting the dignity and the value of people and the world that we live in. I think it's one of those things that we really have to push across sort of all levels, really.

*The final question was how does the story end for you?*

I was having this conversation actually with a friend earlier, and she just had this kind of meltdown about "Why are we here; it feels like we're kind of hamsters rolling in these bowls and actually that's just spurring on other people's rules, and we're just making ourselves busy." I say "well, it is difficult and you do get that way when you think, "Well, what will I be doing in 20 years? Are we still going to be pushing ourselves and saying, "Oh, we've got a few more years before we really need to actually act?" That's the fear, but I do think a little bit of fear can really motivate you, because you need to keep in touch with what the science actually means. It's very easy to push away because it's not a very nice thing to think about. In terms of what I can see

myself doing for the next five, ten years, it is activism and it is the energy that you get from that and meeting other people. Whether I want to continue down this more training route or going into running more workshops, or movement building from the grassroots level, or whether it's trying to work more in policy and try and bring that energy to the policy, I'm not sure yet. That's a journey that will continue, and in a way it's exciting that the end isn't written. It's not a case of we're just looking for one thing and then we can all celebrate and that'll be it. We are part of building the solutions...

*It sounds like you're optimistic.*

I think I do have optimism for just the people that I've met and the things that we have done and the conversations we're having. Maybe that sounds like it's a really small-level thing but if everyone is doing that and that's our real sphere of influence. The people who we're friends are like my family, because if you think about yourself as a messenger, you trust your friends and your family. If you get more and more people talking about it and the possibilities that we have, the opportunities that really look at root issues and root problems in our societies, and actually try and change them, if we have a much more honest conversation about it, then that's something that I really want to be a part of in whatever way that is.



“I think we have some heartache to go through”



## JAMIE PETERS

United Kingdom Youth Climate Coalition



# JAMIE PETERS

Warsaw COP 19 – November 30, 2013

Interview by John Foran  
Transcribed by Andre Loyola

*What do you think it will take to secure a just climate treaty (and what would that treaty look like)?*

Getting a just climate treaty is so far away from where we are internationally that it is difficult to talk about. The conditions that would facilitate a just climate treaty would actually require a lot more than what is contained in the UN Climate Talks, it would require a radical shake-up of the way our society is structured and mass mobilization around the world.

In terms of the politics and international agreements there are a number of things needed: recognition and rapid response from those nations historically responsible for the climate change caused so far, finances provided to the developing world to assist in adaptation and mitigation, legal targets for finance and mitigation for the developed, removal of barriers for technology transfer, and an end to market based false “solutions” to the climate problem. The biggest stumbling block is that the developed world has continually lied, misled and broken promises in this arena. They need to address that before any just climate treaty can be found.

*How do you see possible futures? What is likely? What is possible? What is ideal?*

It is difficult to predict. History and the history of movements show us that things can change very slowly. Or very quickly – and it is certain we need change on so many levels.

Business as usual is dead post-2008 and we are, in my view, at the end of one way of operating as societies. It is not serving anyone but the elite and there is appetite for change. How big that appetite is answers the question of what futures we will have. We could have the same corporations and elite calling the shots for the rest of us. And they are powerful and will do all they can to hold onto that. So how that fight starts and ends defines where we go.

● **Ultimately, I think we have some heartache to go through.** Climate change is going to cause damage on a scale never seen before. Adapting to some changes before hand and scaling up our climate action, if done as we hope, will see a positive future with real efforts to end injustice and inequality. And I guess “ideal” depends on who you’re speaking with. Personally, I have to speak to more people and communities before I can say what ideal is. But it is not what we have just now, that is for sure.

*What gives you hope?*

The way the fight is going and the direction the movement is taking gives me hope. As a climate movement we are branching out, become less a “climate movement” and more a collection of groups demanding what is right and just in a lot of different areas of society. And the general direction of public mood is very much, “We are sick of corporations carrying out abuses at all levels, tired of politicians, and tired of a system that is failing us.” More people are saying it, more are acting on it. That gives me hope.

“So much is about to happen”



# BRYNA COFRIN-SHAW

Brown University Climate & Development Lab



# BRYNA COFRIN-SHAW

Warsaw COP 19 – November 20, 2013  
Interview by Corrie Ellis  
Transcribed by Abigail Bernal

*What journey has brought you to this climate summit? How did you get into this?*

I grew up in the Pioneer Valley of Massachusetts, also known as the Happy Valley. It's an area with many colleges and a very liberal tilt, and that community, along with my school and family, always emphasized the values that go along with protecting the environment. Not just appreciating the nature around me, which was easy because it was a beautiful area, but also thinking about the environment globally. There was never any debate over whether the Earth was something we needed to protect. I grew up in a fairly eco-minded community, so I think I've always been aware of environmental issues around me, but that doesn't mean that I was ever asked to think about how the environment connects to issues of international conflict, race, class, culture, or justice. If anything, the environment was sectioned off in my mind as this issue of endangered species and a desire for my grandkids to still have snow. It's very easy to compartmentalize environmental issues, and I was guilty of that for a long time. Seeing footage from the protestors at Copenhagen in 2009 was probably the first time I made the connection that there was something very dire and very humanistic about climate change; I believe that was when I first recognized that climate change went far beyond ideas about protecting certain species or ecosystems or environments that I cared about.

*So then you came to Brown and you're studying now and then what brought you to this COP?*

I'm an environmental studies concentrator, but I'm most interested in how environmental issues exist in the humanities and social sciences. For me, that means specifically in literature, art, education, philosophy. What's most interesting to me is how the environment, and specifically climate change, interacts with the basic question of what defines, or separates, the human species. Is this current failure to adequately address climate change evidence of something in our species that's both destructive and naturally optimistic, perhaps detrimentally so? I'm not sure the answer, but those are the questions I'm interested in. I've participated in activism as well. I was part of the Keystone Pipeline protest in 2011 and was one of over 1000 arrested in front of the White House. Of course, activism is exciting and challenging and very fulfilling, but I'm more drawn to introspection on the issue. And we need both types of people – all types of people – to be invested in this problem and bringing their own skills to the question of solving it.

I'm attending COP19 as a member of Brown University's Climate & Development Lab, led by professor Timmons Roberts, who also teaches a class about power and justice as they relate to climate change. I found out about the lab through that class, and was really interested in seeing for myself how these questions of political divisions and climate justice are negotiated on an international scale. Everything is different in real life than it is on paper. I've been surprised every single second that I've been here.

*What things that have surprised you? What are some of the perspectives that you've seen?*

My work and research has focused mostly on civil society and gender. Yesterday was "Gender Day" which was wonderful to see in theory – women will suffer disproportionately from climate change all over the world – and I really did appreciate the emphasis that was given to women engaging in the issue of climate change. But all of these Gender Day side events and sessions were sectioned off to this one little corner of the arena, with the same familiar group of speakers and audience members present throughout the day. To see this disconnect around gender between what's going on in the plenary and what's going on around the perimeter and with civil society, was disheartening. There is certainly a geometry of power here; the arena is like one big circle in which the power is concentrated in the center and issues of social justice surround it from all sides, but there has to be much more coalescence between these two looming issues. But of course, that's the big issue of climate change anyway, isn't it? The people with power and historic responsibility are least affected, least desperate to claim social justice as a priority. The topic of gender and climate change goes far beyond the fact that women will suffer disproportionately from climate change. I don't want to make gendered generalizations, but I have witnessed – and know that others have as well – that female leaders are more eager to discuss the tangible aspects of quality of life, family and suffering as they relate to the environment, as well as to emphasize a very inclusive mindedness about the various perspectives around climate change. When women are the ones leading the discussions, I believe inclusiveness often becomes paramount, largely because women have been so excluded from the issue in the past. We talk about historic responsibility of nations – India and the US firewall, for example, but what happens when we look at historic responsibility along smaller lines? Men and women, for example. Are men today more to blame for climate change because it was primarily men that created and sustained an exploitative industrial system? I'm not saying I believe in that conflation, I'm just interested in complicating these political questions along a more social axis.

*Can you tell us more about this lab that you're a part of and what you do and your home so what you're doing here as a group?*

The Climate & Development lab focuses mostly on Latin America and the least developing countries, so our work is both research and assisting these groups at the COPs with different aspects of the negotiations. Social justice issues relating to climate change, and specifically the ways they interact with development, are the primary focuses for the lab. There is a range of collaborative projects that we work on from fossil fuel subsidies, to climate finance, to civil society. The lab, which began in 2010, includes undergraduates, Fellows, graduate students, and faculty, so that range of age and experience is integral to the group. We also hold a conference in April at Brown University where speakers both present their work and negotiate with one another outside of the formal COP venues.

*You've been doing interviews yourself too?*

Yes, mostly with individuals from the civil society sector, and primarily focusing on women's inclusion and gender as it relates to both climate change and the UNFCCC process.

*What are you learning from those?*

Well, it's been most interesting for me to hear how often people mention this problem of gender balance versus gender equality, and how that has really had consequences on the front lines when it comes to the negotiations process here.

It's fascinating to see how easily **"gender" became synonymous with "women"**, although that's a phenomenon that goes far beyond climate change. But it's become this simple question of "how do we get enough women to the table" when the issue is so much more than that. "Gender day" ought to be about looking at how all forms of discrimination are present in both the causes and consequences of climate change.

*I saw you at lunch yesterday at the panel on gender 50/50 visit – you commented at the end of it. Can you tell us your impressions of the session and what your comment was?*

The session brought together a big group of powerful female leaders in the climate community. It was a very enjoyable segment, and I really admired the women speaking. I guess I spoke up because I was frustrated by this very strong emphasis on women's empowerment as equal to "women coming to power." Celebrating female political leaders, or lionizing women who are powerful CEOs is important, but focusing on this exact 50/50 gender ratio or only talking about powerful women as these wonderful anomalies overlooks a lot. This phenomenon really facilitates the incorporation of very strong and very intelligent women into the mainstream on these issues in such a way that often stifles their own visions or ideas that reflect more feminist goals, often doing very little to lift up womankind as a whole. I spoke up in frustration. I said, essentially, that as a young woman in the climate change community, I didn't want to be climbing this ladder to power or influence if it meant that I was stepping on other women along the way. I said that the task at hand wasn't to climb this ladder, but to reimagine the ladder and the ideologies that caused climate change in the first place.

*Do you think of yourself as an activist?*

Personally, I do think of myself as an activist. The Climate & Development Lab was actually just discussing this issue when we were asked to sign our name, as a group, to a document alongside many activist groups. We were very split, some believing that it threatened our credibility as a research lab, others believing that on something as crucial and urgent as this, how could we not? As someone who considers herself an activist, I'm really interested in the "activist and" issue. Can I be an activist and artist? Activist and researcher? Objectivity isn't really my thing, so right now I think yes. Because everyone's an activist, whether they know it or not. Some people are just fighting on behalf of the status quo, and that's its own form of activism.

*You mentioned you were part of the Keystone arrests. Can you tell us about that?*

In July 2011 I was arrested with many others outside the White House protesting the approval and construction of the Keystone Pipeline. The urgency and national attention, as well as James Hansen's quote about this pipeline truly being the one action that will make CO2 levels tip the scales moved me. It moved a lot of people, and I was incredibly grateful to meet these individuals during the protest. I remember standing in the jail in a big line. We were laughing with each other about the irony of being handcuffed in these plastic, disposable handcuffs. Everyone was so enraged that they were just going to throw all these handcuffs away! And I met a lot of individuals from out west, or of Native American descent, who were really threatened by the Pipeline in a much more tangible way than me.

*Were you arrested at the Keystone demonstration?*

Yes. I went with a friend. We'd just finished biking around New England as Climate Summer interns for a Boston non-profit called the Better Future Project. I'd just spent the summer biking from town to town

through New Hampshire, working with various grassroots organizations, businesses, activists and educators to affect change in their towns. That ranged from decreasing their municipal carbon footprint to encouraging sustainable business practices, to educating the public about climate change.

*What was the reason to get arrested?*

It was a very formulaic process in which we were arrested simply for blocking this particular patch of sidewalk where tourists like to take pictures of the White House. The goal of the protest, I think, was to get politicians and the public to take note of the fact that thousands of Americans truly cared enough about this issue to get to DC and find a way to get arrested. There was nothing scary about it. I had an amazing time sitting in that paddy wagon listening to the stories of all these fascinating women who cared about this issue as much as I do – often more than I do because it was in their backyards. But I’m a young, white, educated woman who had the privilege of getting arrested. That’s something I think about a lot, now. The positions and perspectives of activists. If there’s anything I’ve come to understand since being arrested, it’s that we can’t expect to solve environmental problems by compartmentalizing them away from the realities of class, race, and discrimination.

As an activist at the protest who was not from a geographic region that was directly affected, it was fascinating to see how these two sources of concern, by which I mean the direct effects of the pipeline and the indirect and ethical concerns about climate change, interact. And the US especially, I think, has a very complicated way of thinking about climate change ethically.

*Can you explain this ethical way of thinking?*

The idea that climate change can, and perhaps should, be framed as akin to genocide is, I believe, more accepted within my generation than in the past. Perhaps because the effects of climate change are actually visible, and the phrase ‘historic responsibility’ has taken on a lot of meaning. I was just reading an article in the New York Times called “Learning How to Die in the Anthropocene” written by an Iraq War veteran. He wrote about the ethical imperative as a civilization to learn how to die because, even if humankind doesn’t go extinct, civilization as it is will certainly be devastated and changed dramatically if climate change continues the way it’s headed right now. I was very moved at first and then, after thinking a while became very frustrated by this idea of “learning how to die” as Americans when there was a much bigger ethical question at hand. Namely, learning how to kill. Or rather, learning to acknowledge that, as members of the developed world, we are perpetrators when it comes to climate related deaths around the world. If climate change occurs as predicted by current CO2 levels, large segments of the world’s populations will suffer, and as historic and current polluters, there’s certainly blood on our hands.

*While you have been here at the COP have you met young people? Have you been to any meetings?*

I’ve met many young people, but have not become involved in the more unified coalition of youths here. But I have spoken to many who were involved in the de-badging incident, as well as young women who are trying to mobilize around the empowerment of girls. So it’s been interesting to see how motivated young people are here and how much more urgency there is to a lot of their concerns, a lot of their demands. What’s been fascinating for me to think about, and I don’t really have any conclusions about this, is the word “youth” and how young people have participated in these conversations throughout history. I happen to be a young person at the climax of this “will we tip over the edge of irreversible climate change” moment.

And young people are very motivated right now. But I think it's so interesting to think about whether this mindset of urgency and social justice and the capacity to have an idealistic vision of the future – whether that is **intrinsically at the heart of being young**, or whether it's a valuable characterization of this generation that will be crucial to addressing climate change as we grow up and come to positions of power. I guess I'm just excited to see what happens in my lifetime, and what problems my generation is equipped to solve.

*You sound really hopeful for the future of this movement.*

Yeah, I am hopeful! I'm hopeful for a lot of movements! I'm not necessarily hopeful for the climate.

*Can you talk a little bit about what you see in the future?*

When it comes to the likelihood of actually limiting our global emissions to the point of halting climate change, I am not optimistic. But being here and witnessing the amount of mobilization around issues of climate justice and the North-South divide, even if the discussions are mostly taking place outside the plenary, has made me more hopeful that we can and will find ways to adapt and respond to climate change, especially in the least developed and most vulnerable countries. My greatest hope is that countries like the US are able to adequately take responsibility for the suffering we will cause around the world as a result of climate change, and to support these populations and the resistance of their cultures. I'm hopeful that, despite the consequences that will occur – which I do not approach lightly, even if I myself will probably not die from climate change – that this is something that can be addressed and adapted to with enough time that someday climate change will be woven into the history of humankind in a way that is not entirely, wholly destructive. Sometimes that hope feels idealistic, and sometimes it feels pessimistic. So much is about to happen.

*What are your feelings also just about the COP process?*

I have so much more to learn when it comes to the process, but I have really enjoyed seeing the different ways power and international politics come into play. Especially seeing the different ways that countries or individuals gain influence, through money, power, vulnerability, emotional appeals. As an American, it's exciting to be surrounded by powerful and intelligent people for whom the question of "Is climate change real?" doesn't really exist. That's so different than what I'm used to in American rhetoric, and it's a relief to be able to move beyond that very useless conversation and get right to the problem of climate change. I've also gained a lot from researching women's issues and seeing the different perspectives of women from around the world and how they are often united along unexpected axes.

To a degree, I've seen how certain priorities don't necessarily align with whether the person was in a developed country or a developing country. Everyone has his or her own personal beliefs and values, and I've learned not to expect that someone I'm talking to "cares" about the environment or climate change in a way that resembles my own expectations.

*What do you think we need to solve the climate crisis?*

Creativity and empathy, I believe. Of course these are frustratingly abstract words, but to me they're the only solution. The writer Larry Lohmann is someone whose ideas I really value; one of the things he writes about is how to reconceive mitigation as not just finding cleaner or better resources to replace coal and oil, but to actually think about how we can re-imagine our economy and our energy and shatter these paradigms

entirely. Because in the end, this slow transition to renewables or ethanol or whatever it is – that’s just not enough. These aren’t long-term solutions, because the problem is really our energy addiction, and first we have to acknowledge that this addiction is what got us here. The fracking craze in the US exemplifies this Band-Aid approach that he criticizes. Creativity and the ability to imagine a future very different from the status quo is paramount, but it’s uncomfortable and we have to get past that or the US will continue to obstruct every possible change it comes across. For countries like the US, Canada, Australia, that has to begin at home – in our communities and our education – because young people will be faced with this issue, and by that point creativity won’t be optional; it will be the only way to adapt to climate change.

● **Empathy, which sounds very optimistic and obtuse, but which I believe is most central to climate change.** From my perspective – and I’m just a kid observing the world around me, not an expert – people in more developed and less vulnerable countries, including the majority of Americans I know, often care about climate change abstractly and politically. But there’s this feeling of invincibility that still exists, I think, in which many people just can’t imagine climate change actually having effects. Emotional effects, maybe. People get sad thinking about polar bears and the Amazon disappearing, sure. There’s this idea that the “best and brightest” will be effective at addressing climate change, but that’s crazy! In the US, we have very bright scientists and leaders and activists engaged in the climate change fight. But without the urgency that goes along with one’s livelihood and home being vulnerable, it’s hard to make climate change a priority. Empathy, which I think often comes from engaging personally with individuals facing very different and often more tangible threats, is crucial. The COP facilitates this, so in that sense it is an important process. But back home, I think this empathy will have to come through seeing a wider breadth of experience and vulnerability in our culture and education and entertainment. And throughout all this, we really do have to maintain hope if we’re going to get anything done. I guess this is a predictable answer for someone studying the environment within the humanities, but there it is.

*Where can we find this hope?*

**IN YOUNG PEOPLE**, in the growing environmental justice movement, in the grassroots movements that are successful by nature of their inclusiveness. Hope is all over the place. And I believe the issue of generational justice is crucial. Humans don’t like feeling guilty. Evolutionarily, we want to preserve our offspring and their offspring, and I think this basic motivator is important for climate change.

*Do you have any thoughts on, on the treaty in 2015 and what that should look like or if that has any potential?*

I think that it should look like anything other than what we saw in 2009. Specifically in its inclusiveness. I don’t have an enormous amount of hope that the UNFCCC will lead to climate change mitigation, but I do believe that this process plays an important role in shaping how various countries understand their responsibility regarding climate change. I do think the 2015 treaty has the potential to lay down hefty groundwork for how we will address adaptation to climate change, and I hope it does so.

*What are some of the supports that keep you going and allow you to be an activist?*

For me, this interest in activism and the support I receive often comes from my family. I was raised by two women, and my mother’s always emphasized feminist values and ideas of equality and social justice, and these values have been central to my life. I think it’s very important to connect all issues of equality and dis-

crimination to climate change, especially because the effects of climate change will be discriminatory by nature of the fact that those already disenfranchised will suffer the most. Racism, sexism, gaps between the rich and poor – these divisions are inseparable from the social justice concerns of climate change. Being surrounded by friends and family who share these values is a source of support for my activist efforts.

*What are the flip sides, what are the challenges to leading this life?*

I think any work that relates to climate change, whether that's activism, research, the arts, doesn't allow much room for peace of mind. These questions and anxieties about the world and the future are just there, all of the time. A big part of my thinking as someone involved in climate change research and activism is being aware of my perspective and privilege in a way that isn't just a source of guilt, but which is productive and useful. That's a challenge that comes along with this work. There's so much potential for hypocrisy when it comes to the environment. Our beliefs versus our actions. And it's been a challenge for me to move beyond that fear and hyper self-awareness and just say, I commit to doing as much as I can and being aware of as many perspectives as I can that differ from mine, and not asking anyone to be perfect, not my friends or my parents or Barack Obama or Christiana Figueres. It's just this thing we have to figure out together, and I accept that we may or may not figure it out in time. But I'll do my best to help out.

*What are some of those things you do try to offset your carbon footprint?*

The basic things, like recycling, biking, buying second hand, limiting meat and airplanes and electricity use. As a kid I was always telling people to recycle and turn off lights, not always as nicely as I could have. What a huge pain I must have been to my parents and friends. I try to just engage people I care about with the issues I care about, sharing articles or books or documentaries, so that these opinions and voices aren't just coming from me. I think people care by being moved personally and individually, and by feeling that they are in a community that cares. Maybe even that it is a social expectation that the environment be something they value. I'm all for going against societal norms sometimes, but I think that being invested in the prevention and outcomes of climate change will take root in the US as it becomes a cultural expectation to do so.

## Post Warsaw reflections

When I returned home from Warsaw, people often asked me if I thought the process was a "success" or if I thought the UNFCCC was "effective". My answer is constantly changing, and on the whole I would say that climate change is not likely to be mitigated by the decisions made at a COP. But this opinion does not devalue the fact that I think the UNFCCC is a crucial arena for the voices of the least developed countries and populations most vulnerable to climate change to be heard. It is saddening and terrifying to me that we're moving into an era of adaptation in lieu of mitigation, but I do have confidence that the COPs will be a useful component in addressing the consequences of climate change. In my personal opinion, securing a just climate treaty will take an enormous overhaul of how nations approach international negotiations of these sorts. If everyone returns home from Paris in 2015 and says, "the US came out of that a winner" then the conference must have failed. No group of countries will come out the winner of climate change, and bolstering power and maintaining the status-quo in the most developed countries does not mean we won, nor will we have lost if highly developed countries make large concessions to those countries affected by our history of emissions. I think that a just climate treaty will demand participation by younger generations and those most affected by climate change; I believe the people fighting will have to be the people with the most at stake, and a just climate treaty will only be achieved if these same people are given the microphone. A just

future will allow for women, who already suffer the most from climate change around the world, to participate equally in this dialogue. This future will accept and welcome women's knowledge and talents when it comes to sustainability and adaptation at home, or politics abroad. A just climate change treaty, and a just future, will not allow science and technology to replace the value of the humanities at a time when grappling with what it means to be human is more crucial than ever.

But in countries like the US, so much has to shift culturally. I'm fascinated by all of the ways people's perspectives on the environment and climate change interact with political and cultural beliefs, and how relevant art, education and the media are to this issue. The UNFCCC is an important framework, but if we look at whether a just, binding treaty will be passed, things get complicated. For example, President Obama can only sign such a treaty if Congress would ratify it. Congress will only ratify this treaty if the American public elects individuals who understand the threat that climate change poses to both the environment and social justice. And all of this is contingent on an educated and empathetic citizenry. There's a tendency to say that climate is too urgent to focus on the arts, or education, or even individual consumption, because what matters is the big decisions made at the top. I think a just climate treaty will come about with the recognition that climate change is so urgent that all of this matters. It's so urgent that everything matters.



“We really have the power to offer solutions”



## ANTOINE EBEL

CliMates



# ANTOINE EBEL

Warsaw COP 19 – November 2013

Interview by Corrie Ellis

Transcribed by Julia Lara

*To begin, I was just wondering, could you tell me how you got here? Like your journey, maybe that first?*

Okay. I was about 20, and on the look-out for a cause that would motivate me. I didn't see myself just taking any job to make some money and spend it. I really wanted to make a meaningful contribution somehow, to the best of my abilities. So when I heard that there was a large-scale simulation of climate negotiations happening at my school in Paris, I applied out of curiosity. It was an exceptionally well organized event, we had about 200 young people who recreated the conditions of the 2009 Copenhagen climate conference, trying to get a rewind on it and see if failure was inevitable. So we had all young French people playing Maldives, and USA, and China, and Philippines, and getting very excited about it and really entering the skins of climate negotiations. So that was a full week of talks, extremely realistic. I was not very knowledgeable about climate change, and I got crash course in a week - I'd never been learning this much, this fast. I learned about the impacts, about the problems, the solutions to it. It was just mind-blowing.

I wasn't the only person whose mind was blown that week, so a group of us decided that we wanted to keep being committed on climate change – but to quit pretending, in the sense that we wanted to actually gather as many young people from different countries as possible, to think together about solutions to the climate challenge. That's how we created CliMates, which functions like a think-and-do-tank but is entirely run by students and young professionals. We have collaborative research projects aiming to come up with collaborative solutions on energy, adaptation, forestry, or economics.... We also have trainings and mobilization activities, which we do more and more.

So that's how I got in and it's been really amazing; since then, my commitment to climate action has only been reinforced as I went along. I also discovered something that was brand new for me: grassroots actions – holding signs, making banners, being out there on the street, voicing my discontent. That was really new for me and wasn't in my culture at all, and it hasn't completely settled in yet, but I do see the beauty of it, the sincerity and passion and openness.

*Now how did you decide to apply for this climate conference? How did you get interested in the climate negotiations?*

Again, I think it was a matter of discovering new things and trying them out.

IT'S THE 'BEAUTY' OF CARING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE: **you never get to the bottom of it.** It's multi-faceted, and you can impact it from many different scales, from the most local to the most national and I think that's very precious. With human rights, for instance, change can only happen with the goodwill of governments and through law, negotiations, etc. But with climate change, you can innovate, you can start a cleantech company, you can voice your concern in the UN climate talks, you can make national coalitions.

There's really a variety of things that you can do. It's that variety that inspires me, and makes me think that I could very happily dedicate my life to it.

*How many nationalities are represented in CliMates?*

Well, we have about 120 or 130 students at the moment who are active in CliMates, and they come from around 45 different nationalities. So we do try to really encourage this diversity, especially by actively looking out to countries that we feel are missing. For instance we have a difficulty reaching out to China or to Indonesia or to Russia, and we feel like we cannot leave these major players out. That's the additional purpose of CliMates: we try to find solutions for here and now, but we are also contributing to forming the next generation of international cooperation on climate change. If here in the climate talks, there was at least some empathy and respect and trust between the delegates, more compromises could probably be found. Of course by the time our members get to places of influence, it will be 15, 20 years from now but we can't wait that long! But that kind of spirit of solidarity and understanding will be crucial for our generation to meet the climate challenge, and if we can modestly contribute to that, that's great!

*Do you have a group from this organization here at the COP?*

We do, we're represented, with the difficulty that Global South countries have been encountering getting here; there are so many CliMates from the small island states, from Africa, that we wanted to bring but just possibly couldn't.

*Because of finances?*

Finances, visa, accreditation, it was just a variety of reasons. So we have some of the coordination team involved, who are mostly French, but also some people from Germany, Singapore, El Salvador, Colombia, from a variety of places. People are a bit "all over the place" during the COPs but we still meet regularly so that we can advance our ideas and visions.

*What have you been up to here every day? What do you want to be involved in?*

It's been a bit of a mess because this is my 1<sup>st</sup> COP. On the first day, I was just finding my way around here and looking for breakfast! I stumbled among the YOUNGO finance working group and I sat in. I had an idea for a potential action so I submitted it to them. It was a great deal of fun to organize: we put together a mock lemonade stand as an ironic way of denouncing the lack of ambition that we're seeing here. The adaptation fund is essentially a few 100 million dollars per year, devoted to adaptation projects in the Global South. It's one of the very few solidarity mechanisms that is currently going on within these talks, and it's drying out. It was supposed to be fueled by the global market and it's all going down. So it's drying up and no country so far has stepped up to save it.

We felt like denouncing it by saying to countries: "Well, your contribution to the Fund so far has been ridiculous; we're going to match it with a lemonade stand." And we were cheering every time someone put a coin or two saying, "Okay this just doubled the amount that is currently in the adaptation fund." And we wrote this big blank check to the Adaptation fund, filled with our donations: half of a ripped dollar bill, two Euros, and five Norwegian crowns, a bus ticket, a dinner receipt. It's really a way to be creative and somewhat fun about an issue that's really serious. The Adaptation Fund is a way of testing the donor countries' generosity

and credibility, and so far it's really not looking good. So I hope that this draws attention on it and if we do that then I guess, mission accomplished.

*Do you have more planned for this week while you're here?*

We want to start working on some education materials, maybe a video, maybe some graphics to explain the dynamics of climate finance, the sums that are proposed and what they mean. Why \$100 billion? Why \$300 million? Why are we not reaching the gap so far? Is it really that much, is it really affordable? Is it enough for what we need to do to actually tackle climate change? We try to break down these big numbers for people, also to draw parallels with the financial crisis because there is really something interesting here. If you look at the sums that have been forked out by countries in just a matter of minutes to rescue banks, and then look at the slow process through which we have barely put together a few billions for climate change, it's a stark contrast. And yet it's essentially the same thing: putting down a lot of money now to avoid further economic loss and destruction of wealth. That was the argument for the banks, and it works for climate as well: there was report by a British economist (*The Stern Review*) who demonstrated it was much more value-for-money if you invested in the low-carbon, resilient economy now, rather than waiting fifteen, twenty years. He also showed that catastrophic climate change could permanently amputate the global output by fifteen to twenty percent. So there is a strong case for action, and the money is there. For instance, we spend about \$650 billion per year to subsidize fossil fuels and lower their price. So the argument that we are out of public funding, that the treasure chest is empty, doesn't work out.

*Do you consider yourself to be an activist?*

I remember when I created my Twitter account, when it came to writing in my description I really didn't know if I should put "climate activist" or not. At first I put "occasional activist" and people in CliMates said, "Come on dude, what the hell. You're spending 35-40 hours a week volunteering your time. Of course you're an activist." So I guess I'm at peace with that, and I consider there a many different ways of activism. For my part, I try to be constructive and offer solutions because I think that's something that young people really have to the power to do. Not just denounce the fact that they're going to be victims of the decisions not made and the catastrophes... which is not very empowering.

We really have the power to offer solutions because we are probably going to be the ones implementing it, the ones that will see the plan through. And so I believe we have the possibility, and the responsibility, to usher in that kind of positive dynamic. If you look at what countries here say it's, "How can I possibly commit less than my neighbor? How can I reduce my commitments without getting too much heat on myself?" That's the logic, and I don't think it represents well the opportunities that are associated to moving to a low-carbon economy and society. All the gains in health, in jobs, in social links, there are many additional benefits that we don't talk about nearly enough. As youth, we can really push this kind of argument forward.

*What are the biggest supports that you have like for your activism and also the biggest challenges to be in this lifestyle?*

My family is slowly getting there, in terms of support. They don't always understand - they broadly understand, but not necessarily the urgency of it, not what's truly at stake and why I put so much energy into it. But they certainly don't oppose it, and they show more and more curiosity for these issues.

My peers, my fellow students in CliMates also support each other. "*CliMates*" is actually a play on words in itself. Like classmates share a class, or roommates share a room, we share an uncertain climate future and that creates a bond between us. A bond that's quite strong, and that we should as global youth use to help tackle the issue.

Last but not least, I would name my girlfriend – she's the next CliMates president and I guess sharing that together is only something that makes our relationship deeper. I know that there is always one person I can go and talk to about this, and she will understand me. We can think together, dream of it together, and that's very powerful too.

#### *What are your ideas about what might happen in Paris for COP21?*

It's really difficult to say. There are conflicting trends; I don't know how they will play out. For instance, we have a growing climate movement, especially youth-led. I think we been quite successful in aggregating all of the initiatives, making them more visible and connected. That's good, and at the same time I can see that there is a growing frustration about the UNFCCC. I guess Copenhagen was traumatic for many people. They were putting most of their energy into climate talks and after that crash, they've found themselves not knowing what to do. And so there is this tension in the movement, how dedicated should we be to the UN climate talks? Are we wasting our time, energy, and resources?

My opinion is that we're not, and we definitely need a just global framework, even modest, but at least something that puts all countries under the same roof, and then they can start moving nationally. Until we have that, it will still be very easy for countries to just shift the blame and the responsibility and say, "*Well, even if we act alone it doesn't make a difference. We represent maybe four percent, maybe ten percent of emissions? Not enough.*"

In terms of discourse, there's another interesting thing happening. Many actors are trying to push for a paradigm shift, in the way we look at these negotiations. There are important issues of responsibility, we have to share it in equitable ways. But again that doesn't take into account the opportunities and perhaps incentives that we should also provide for countries who do more than they're supposed to. More and more voices are calling for that, which is positive.

#### *How do you think the story ends?*

It's a really difficult question. I guess we pretty much have two possible scenarios, at least that's how I see it in my head. The negative scenario is a situation where we failed to tackle climate change and that's, I think, a catastrophic blow to the very notion of "*international community*" or "*international solidarity*," and a proof that we buried these promises very deep. The moral failure would be spectacular. I wouldn't want to live in such a cold, selfish world.

Then, the positive scenario is that we do manage to tackle this together, the most significant challenge that humanity has faced. And that could be an extremely positive precedent for international cooperation, it could really change the way we see ourselves as humans.

I'm actually pretty optimistic about what humans can achieve with cooperation and innovation. When I look at an offshore oil platform, I'm both horrified and pretty amazed at the kind of technology and savvy that people are deploying to get that stuff out of the ground. If we manage to put the same kind of ingenuity

and resources to keeping them there, then everything is possible. We're not putting our money and our imagination in the right places, but I think that if we managed to switch these two things there is really a lot we could do.

Today climate change is not something that a lot of people can relate to, it seems far, it's too big. Even in the US, I don't think that most people are skeptical about climate change *actively*, that they really believe that the science is weak, aside from maybe a tiny minority. I think most people get that information, understand it, and then start to doubt because it's just too big of a deal for them to accept. It seems so depressing and negative, and they already have so many problems in their lives, so just adding another one doesn't work. But if you make them realize that the solutions to this problem are also the solutions to many of their other problems, then I think you really have a shot. As climate activists, we have to start learning the psychology of it and adapt our discourse to the many different layers of society.



“Perhaps a change in the democratic government can have a real effect”



## DAVID GAWITH

Connected Voices



# DAVID GAWITH

Warsaw COP 19 – November 13, 2013  
Interview by Natasha Weidner and John Foran  
Transcribed by Abigail Bernal

*Is this your first time at the COP?*

No, I went last year with the New Zealand youth delegation. So it's my second COP.

*And what got you started on this path of climate activism? What got you interested in the international political side of it?*

I've always been very interested in climate change I suppose. Before I got into university I thought to myself, what do I really want to do? And I thought this was one of the huge problems we all have to try to address throughout my lifetime. And so I thought it would be a valuable thing to start learning more and more about, so I've always had a curiosity. I saw an opportunity to go to the negotiations in Qatar as part of the New Zealand Youth Delegation, so I applied for that and did lots and lots of work early on in the year coming to terms with the policy. We had a lot of work to do last year because New Zealand's stance (not signing up to the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol) was really controversial – it was pretty embarrassing for New Zealanders engaged with climate change issues and got a lot of press coverage. I also started working on [Connected Voices](#), so I was involved with quite a few things at the time.

We worked with the other youth delegations before going into the conference and we realized that the other delegations were having a lot of trouble trying to find the money to make it to COP, because obviously Qatar is an expensive place. It's a little bit out of the way. It was really difficult even for delegations from really wealthy countries, and some like the UK or Canada had to halve the number of people who could attend just because it was so expensive. So we thought if countries like the UK or Canada are having to reduce the number of people, we're simply not going to see delegations from the vast majority of countries which have limited resources. We did a little bit of digging, and we tried to work out how many countries were represented and how many countries had any youth representation. We found that around fifty countries sent youth delegates, which is fantastic and very encouraging. But that leaves 142 UN parties without direct youth representation. This was the basis for setting up Connected Voices.

*Can you talk a little bit about what the organization does and what your goals are?*

It's a communication and participation project. We try to partner young people and countries that have no youth representation with a young person or a delegation that came here to the conference. Last year, for example, the New Zealand Youth Delegation partnered with a lot of the countries in the Pacific that weren't able to send youth delegates, mainly for reasons of cost. So we partnered with young people from six Pacific nations, including Fiji, Nauru, and the Cook Islands. We started communicating with young people in the Pacific because we're a Pacific Island nation ourselves. We have contacts with people there. There are a lot of young Pacific Islanders living in New Zealand. So we took advantage of those contacts and started asking for young people to send messages or concerns or demands that they wanted to be expressed at the COP. And

of course, the Pacific is a common example where climate change is really, really important. Last year we got some pretty interesting responses from many people stressing the importance of climate change to them, because obviously they're from a very different context. In New Zealand, climate change for us is perhaps less direct than it would be for young people from other Pacific Islands, so it's interesting to hear directly from those who are expecting to see the most severe impacts of climate change.

A lot of what we got back was very general – things like increasing ambition, emphasizing the recognition of their existence, which I think is a feeling held by a lot of young people who are unable to attend the COP. You know, they're at home and they aren't covering this huge world summit in some very distant land, and it's very hard to know if there is any recognition of their position within the COP, particularly given the limited progress that has been made at that level. In terms of really specific demands, we got a few things last year from Nauru around the Kyoto Protocol. That was a big talking point at last year's COP. I think that's one of the specific issues that people still engage with, but I also think that some of the most important messages are "Hey look, we're here. We're worried about this. Keep working, keep trying to ensure that we have something, something in place."

Last year when we did the action I wasn't sure that the project would actually work. When we actually did the action, when we had negotiators coming up to us, particularly from developing countries that often can't send young people, when they saw these messages from young people in developing countries or young people in their country, some said "This is really good, keep doing what you're going. Good work." Then it felt like something that was really practical and worthwhile, and I guess that's all I've really wanted.

Last year we asked for people to stand in the photographs, holding their message on a board. We're trying to display the message and they can see the face of the person of the country to the negotiators because it is not coming from us. It is coming from people who can't be here. I hope at some stage we could move beyond still images to short video clips. Even in very poor parts of the world, people often have access to a video camera on their phone and have the availability to share it. I hope that it's possible. It would be a pretty amazing thing to have a video with young people from all these different countries who can't be represented here saying what they want to show that actually it's not just these reasonably privileged young people who are here in person that care about the issue. It's actually pretty much the whole world, and their messages may be different to the young privileged people that are here and the negotiators should listen to them. I hope hearing messages for people who can't be here is an important thing for them to actually listen to.

*So what is something that you would want to put in place? What would your organization like to see in terms of a treaty coming out of this process?*

I think the key thing that we're focusing on, that a lot of young people are focusing on is looking for ambition, and to some extent common justice, in that some people are more likely to see the effects of climate change, and some people have more to lose by contributing to mitigation. And so it's the ones that are likely to see the damages, the loss and damages, that have very little power and are depending on these negotiations coming to a conclusion. They see the conferences as a delicate balancing act that could easily falter, and that's really concerning for the countries that are likely to experience loss and damages. It is less concerning for the countries that are unwilling to reduce their emissions. There is this mismatch of power.

What we push for, and what we're trying to encourage young people to push for through the messages they send to us, is to give the negotiators and leaders a strong mandate for increased ambition, particularly from developed countries, but from all countries as well. I think it was the America negotiator a few years ago saying, "Look, if you want to see action on climate change, if you want to see increased ambition, give me a mandate." It's saying to them, "Look, I am here because I'm representing a government elected by the people, and I certainly don't see concern from the people or a push for increased ambition." I think one thing we're trying to do is show that actually the mandate is really broad and really clear and there are young people really concerned about this all around the world. And, of course, young people make up more than half of the world's population. I think that's a pretty clear mandate. And if we can express that, then I think that's a really valuable job to do.

*Do you think it's working? Do you think you managed to get across the actions and messages that you've expressed so far?*

No, I don't think so, and it's really frustrating to have to say that. I think that it's small and it shows solidarity but I am frustrated by the lack of progress and I do want to see progress made. In terms of being able to influence the decisions made by developed countries, I think people are feeling limited. I think the way to influence developed country negotiators is by describing what we see and trying to educate people back home.

**THE ONLY THING THEY'RE SCARED ABOUT IS THE NEXT ELECTION CYCLE.** If we can make climate change a domestic issue that they actually come to feel, then I think that's a way that we can really influence developed countries. In terms of shouting at them here, shouting these messages, I think that the negotiators that sit here only have so much they can work with. It's their national populations that ought to really make any change on that sort of policy.

And are you working back in New Zealand on actions, pressuring the national government? Last year a New Zealand organization called [Generation Zero](#) did lot of work on climate change - it's a really cool organization.



It started after COP 15 in Copenhagen. It was a bit of a lesson for me, I suppose, that you can't influence things on the world stage just by being there and saying things. You need to ensure that the people who make decisions in the first place do so with the right incentives. This is an issue that matters to people. It matters to people all over the world, not just the sort of people who are here. The (youth) delegation does a lot of work writing things for newspapers back home, trying to get in the media back home, writing blogs, trying to have that impact, and really just trying to ensure that our voices are heard and trying to communicate that if things continue like that then it's unlikely to change.

*It sounds like you have faith in democracy.*

I do have faith in democracy. I'm from a small country.

*Do you have faith in any particular party in New Zealand? The Greens, perhaps?*

I think the Greens would have done something about climate change, certainly, and they're becoming more of a moderately important to major party; they get fifteen percent of the vote so that's quite large and makes it possible to form coalitions. I heard from the New Zealand negotiators that a change of government might not have that much influence on our climate change policy. I'm not sure that I believe that. I suspect that a change of government would make a significant difference. Look at Australia right now, they just had a change of government to a leader who has expressed doubts about climate change in the past, who doesn't see it as an issue. The Australians have almost exactly the same negotiating team as last year. But this year yet their climate policy and engagement with the process has completely changed. Perhaps a change in the democratic government can have a real effect on what parties can bring to the table at these negotiations.

*Would you call yourself an activist?*

No, I don't think I would. Well, probably not. I think activists have very much the reputation of being really focused on actions. I think if someone from outside the climate movement thought of activists, they would think of someone other than me. I think what the activists do is awesome. I think it's amazing, but I don't think I associate myself with that. I would say I'm probably a member of civil society, my approach to things is trying to communicate what I learn here so that people in New Zealand understand what's going on. I think if they're presented with the full information there's a good chance that they will decide that there's actually something that needs to be acted upon. So I would shy away from being called an activist. I have a lot of respect for those who do consider themselves activists, but I am not one of them.

*Do you have a positive alternative word, then? "Member of civil society"? When I hear what you're saying, "messenger" comes to mind for example. It's very powerful.*

"Messenger" would be a good way to describe that. You can't say journalist.

*Will you talk a little bit about the action that you're planning here at the COP?*

The action that we're planning is to showcase the messages that we have received from young people in countries that don't have any youth representation here so they can't speak for themselves and to the conference directly. There are things like photographs with young people holding messages – short simple messages. We have the messages themselves. We received a few really, really long e-mails explaining the frustration of not being able to be here, explaining frustration at the pace of the talks at the moment. So the action will be mainly just showcasing the responses that we have.

It's unlike most specific issues acted upon here. The narrative is that "We will be quiet and give those who aren't here the opportunity to present their messages." Again, it will be people simply standing there, holding boards with messages from young people who can't attend. With the silence I think we found the negotiators were often more curious as to what was happening: "Why aren't we being shouted at, and what's the point of this action? Where are these messages coming from?" So I think curiosity is good. Some negotiators come over and engage and try to work out what we are doing and try to work out what these messages mean. We had a really, really, good response last year. I'm hoping for a really good response again this year.

We want to make it as obvious as possible; a lot of negotiators and leaders go past. And we wanted to bring these messages that we've been entrusted with as physically close as possible, so that they can be seen by the negotiators, so that they could, in theory, influence the negotiations.



*Are there other groups, or other countries trying to do the same thing as Connected Voices with other places? What's amazing about this movement is there are many different things happening everywhere, all the time, and your idea is just fantastic. Is it something that started in New Zealand?*

It started last year out of discussion I had with some of my New Zealand Youth Delegation colleagues, and we worked on it last year, just to see if it was feasible. We had to do a lot of work on it for two months before the conference, and I probably delayed submission of my Master's thesis for two months as a consequence. The project was quite successful in Qatar, so it was clear that it was feasible and worthwhile and there was some interest from the youth constituency. People were generally very positive about the project, so we thought we should work to carry it on. We promoted the project to YOUNGO and encouraged them to apply to be on the steering committee to build the platform.

We needed to build the platform from the ground up. So we ended up with a steering committee with ten young people from seven different countries. We had some pretty amazing applications, and I was shocked, to be honest, with the applications that we had to turn down. Obviously there were pretty major logistical issues in terms of working with a group from seven different countries. If you want to have a meeting, it's difficult to have it with people from seven different time zones – I had to do a few 3 a.m. Skype calls. So from what we learned as an organization this year, next year we're looking to revert to the original structure that we put forward and have the networks regionally dispersed. For instance, we're going to make sure that we have someone in charge of Connected Voices in Africa, someone in charge of the Arabic world, someone in South America, and someone in Oceania. Hopefully it'll be a much more productive structure.

*That's empowering. So now you have the seven people you worked with this year for this COP. How many countries are they bringing in voices from?*

It's difficult to say how many partnerships we are actually working with at the moment. I think we've had about sixty young people registered who are coming to the COP, which is pretty good, Delegations with more capacity take more responses and partner with more countries. We have a large number of partnerships with young people in countries who otherwise would have had no youth representation here whatsoever. Of that number I think we had about thirty direct respondents from around the world whom we put directly in contact with those attending. We had to try to make the partnerships as logical as possible, hoping that there'd be some conversation or dialogue between the countries involved, and we're hoping that through these they could undertake meaningful and beneficial discussions. But we understand it's really, really difficult and it doesn't necessarily turn out that way in the short time frame before COP.

I think also, realistically, there hasn't been a lot of hype around this COP. Obviously everything heated up a lot on the first day with Yeb Saño's speech and what's been happening in the Philippines recently, but there was far less media attention before the COP. We would likely receive more responses at a more controversial, or for lack of a better description, newsworthy COP. Next year in Lima and in Paris afterwards, I think, we'll have a lot more interest from young people wanting to express their opinions. There will be a lot more media focus. So I hope by 2015 it could be a solid platform for young people and that there would be very few countries left off our list.

We're looking for people to sign up to be partners who would like to take messages from young people who can't be here, and basically our job, when we have people signing up, is to try and ensure that it's really easy for them to make these kinds of connections. I think you have noticed very few people have a lot of time at these conferences, and I think the same is true leading up to them. So we're trying to ensure that people are able to engage as quickly and easily as possible. We try to ensure that engagement only takes a few moments of their time.

*Do you do research to connect them with particular youth in particular places?*

Yes, we try to make it easy for people to sign up when they think "Yeah, I'd like to be involved. I'd like my messages to be out there and to be heard at the conference." So we try and ensure that people realize that the platform does exist and help them get the project out there. Ensuring that people know about the project is important because you know, it's useless if you don't know the infrastructure exists; so a lot of the focus this year has gone into building social media platforms and asking people to share the project within their networks. This year we'll also try and pull together a video that explains the project so that it is really easy to see what's going on, because I think, if people are like me, they don't like reading long blurbs, they like watching videos. So I hope that producing a video will ensure more people become aware of what's going on.

*Fantastic organization, to create something like this.*

I tend to be very optimistic about this sort of thing. Perhaps an optimistic mind will think that you know, by the end of this year we'll have this working and it'll be this really broad platform. We'll have input from all these different countries and input from the Secretariat with everyone to scale it up. I've realized that we

really will have to take time and build it up incrementally. I think that it will require a little patience but I'm optimistic, perhaps as a two, maybe three year project.

*Could we go back further? You started with an interest in climate change your from university years. Where does it come from?*

As I was growing up, I spent a lot of time in the outdoors, and my parents are reasonably well informed and up to date on global issues. So we talked about these sorts of issues. Probably the defining moment for me would've been when I took an Outward Bound course before my last year at high school. We were challenged by the leader of the group to try and describe what the world might look like when we're sixty years old, and when we're eighty years old. I put up my hand and said, "Yeah I think we're going to be pretty stuffed. I think the world's going to be a pretty nasty place." I think a lot of the problems that we're seeing at the moment would be exacerbated by things like climate change, and I think it would be a really, really unequal and unpleasant place to live. I think what made me think hard about it is that those around me were really surprised by my response. They had very different views and imagined that we would all be flying around in flying cars; their surprise at my response was something that made me think about it a little bit more over the next year and I thought, "If that's what I really think, then perhaps it's something I should start to look at, start learning a little bit more about, try to understand," and that really drove a lot of my thought that year. I was trying to learn more and more about it. The following year, I took a year off and worked at a school in the UK. I did a lot of reading about climate change, and I tried to come at it from a neutral angle. I'd read things like *The Skeptical Environmentalist*. Having read both sides of what was then more of a debate, I am pretty comfortable with my position on climate change. It's perhaps not as serious as any particular development challenge in any particular context, but overall it is the defining development problem of our generation, and that is something I really want to work on. That led towards my study at university.

*And what are you studying at university?*

I did my undergraduate and my Master's at Otago University in New Zealand, specializing in land economy and looking at agricultural adaptation to climate change. I'm doing my Ph.D. at Cambridge in the U.K. I focused on social science during my Master's degree while my undergraduate was all scientific. I was looking at changes in water availability under climate change and trying to work out what these climate and hydrological factors could tell us about water availability in the future. My Master's thesis looked at the extent to which communities could adapt to likely changes in water availability. So I've really tried to approach the problem from two broad angles.

*Did you do fieldwork?*

Yes, it was really interesting. I was in Nepal for three months last year. I was there during the pre-monsoon so it was getting pretty hot and sticky until you got up into the mountains. I was lucky in that I was able to work with an organization called the [International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development](#) (ICIMOD). I went to look at adaptive capacity in mountain communities. I learned a number of interesting things talking to people whom we generally think of as being very much on the front line of climate change – very, very poor communities that have far more immediate needs. They're concerned with where they're going to get food for the next month, for the next season. They're concerned with having energy for the light bulbs in

their houses. Some of the younger participants were concerned about climate change, which was interesting.

*Did you find people knowledgeable about the future of water there? Aware of the changes around them already?*

People were aware of the issues in the general sense. They're expecting more droughts and floods in the future. Regarding specific projections, they were probably not so knowledgeable. There have been lots of studies looking at things from fifty thousand feet, but my dissertation will be on the behavioral economics of farmer adaptation to climate change.

*Are you optimistic about the big picture?*

I'm not particularly optimistic about what the UNFCCC can achieve. Having almost 200 nations coming to try to agree on something, the negotiators always end up converging on the least ambitious ideas. I'm perhaps not particularly optimistic about what these negotiations can achieve, although I think it's worthwhile trying. Being here is an opportunity to give this a shot and to see what we can do. If we can do a little bit, then a little bit helps. I think where my optimism comes from is from what's been done now in the absence of a legally binding treaty. Aid agencies and development agencies have to ensure that climate change adaptation is occurring now, and I think that's really, really important. My hope comes from the fact that there are a lot of people who are genuinely concerned about the effects of climate change and see the need of doing something now. If each of those people acted to ensure that their support is effectively targeted towards vulnerable countries that will see lots of damage in the next fifty years, I think that would make the most beneficial steps forward. I'd like to see governments pledging more. I've got my fingers crossed, but if I really thought it was going to happen, I wouldn't have to cross my fingers.



It is a really, really interesting thing to be able to come here and watch this develop and see how things change. It's interesting to be able to compare what I see here to what I've experienced working with people on the front line of climate change and see the commonalities between the two, but also see the enormous disjuncture between the two. It's such a completely different way of thinking about the same problem; it's frustrating but sort of fascinating. I just hope I will contribute something. The problem is that what is being discussed is often not informed by academic research, but by people who are governed by inefficient and distorted the political realities.

*What is climate justice to you?*

● **Climate justice to me would be ensuring that if your country contributed to the problem, it is responsible for a certain proportion of the emissions, and should contribute in equal measure to efforts to mitigate the problem going forward, build adaptive capacity and compensate damages that occur.**

*How do you see initiatives, like the Green Climate Fund and the new emphasis on Loss and Damage?*

It's something that needs to happen. I also think that the Green Climate Fund is much smaller than it needs to be. I've heard, from those in a position to know how far \$100 billion goes, that it amounts to mere pocket change relative to the development challenges climate change is expected to impose.

*Do you think there's a more hopeful or more effective way to move toward a climate that is just?*

I'd like to see some sort of change in the structure of this particular negotiation. I don't think it's possible, but this is what I'd like to see. I guess trust is a big issue here. Parties don't seem to be trusting each other with anything, and if there was some way to hold people a little bit more accountable that would be beneficial. I don't think it's going to happen because I don't think parties are going to be able to get beyond their own interests.



## Additional material from June 2014

*Do you plan to go back to a COP, either in Lima or in Paris? Why or why not?*

I am not going to Peru. While I would like to go to Paris, it's too far away to know whether this will be feasible. It really comes down to timing for me as I am looking to start my PhD, so sometimes it is possible to drop things and go, while other times it is not. I think that this uncertainty probably fairly common for most young people - you have to be circumstantially quite lucky to be able to take a month off and spend thousands going to these conferences.

*What do you think it will take to secure a just climate treaty?*

I think it will take a reshaping of the decisions structure in the UNFCCC away from total consensus (which is a bit of a farce at the moment anyway) towards a more democratic structure. I doubt whether this can be wholly democratic but perhaps somewhat of a hybrid system which uses majorities rather than consensus on certain issues.

*What is your sense of how the global youth climate justice movement works? How is it doing, in your view? What is your vision of it for the future?*

I see it as a complex collection of intelligent and energetic people who perhaps don't work very well together. There is a huge diversity of views and philosophies of change which can be a critical strength for the movement as a whole. Too often, however, it turns into a weakness as different groups and individuals block each other's proposals. While I have been inspired by the work of many young people in the movement, I have also seen fairly extreme narcissism among some who seem closely tied to their own activist image and persona and appear more concerned about being completely correct and true to their activist philosophies, than being effective.

I think these people should consider what young people in areas that stand to lose the most from climate change may think of their conduct. I think they would say, "We don't have time to parade around on our philosophical high horses; try to make progress NOW even if it means departing from the steadfast images you have of yourselves." We simply don't have time to be totally correct or totally ethical about everything. While this is a bitter reality to accept, I think denying it is doing more harm than good.

*How do you see possible futures? What is likely? What is possible? What is ideal?*

What is likely: I think that the UNFCCC will struggle to make substantive progress on climate change mitigation. I see climate adaptation finance and payments for loss and damage as the main way in which the UNFCCC structure can make progress on addressing the effects of climate change. That said, I think that major contributions to adaptation and loss and damage finance are only a possibility in the current structure, and will require positive diplomacy, democratic pressure and perhaps a bit of luck. I think that the major contributions to climate change mitigation, climate finance, and adaptation will come at the individual level as people learn more about the realities of global change, and their disposable income and philanthropic power expand. I think that the pressure to make ethical choices on the individual level will grow. It's

interesting to look at how a small proportion of individual income and expenditure could make a difference on the issues of climate impacts and adaptation.

### *What gives you hope?*

My friends and family becoming more aware of these issues and more interested and active in addressing them through their voting and consumer choices.

This is a [link](#) to a 4 minute video of the activities of Connected Voices in Warsaw:



“Something is happening and it’s good”



## SILJE LUNDBERG

Young Friends of the Earth Europe



# SILJE LUNDBERG

Warsaw COP 19 – November 2013

Interview by John Foran  
Transcribed by Jennifer Melo

I am with the Young Friends of Earth Norway. I'm twenty-five. I am from Norway.

*Is this your first time at the COP?*

No, it's my fifth.

*Fifth? Wow, that's the record, I've been here four times. Wow, that's super. We are interested in how you became a climate activist essentially; so what your journey has been that got you here to your fifth COP and going back as far as you like and telling us in as much detail as you like.*

I joined Young Friends of the Earth Norway when I was 12. So I've been working with environmental policy for thirteen years, yeah. What got me there was my older sister, who was part of Young Friends of Earth Norway, and she wanted me to join as well. So I think at first it was not necessarily because I was that involved, it was more like, "Okay fine, I'm going to do it. You are the oldest, you decide." Then when I got involved, I understood more and grasped more of what was going on. What also got me engaged was a big fight we have at home. We had it then, and we still have it: the influence of oil industry in Norway, which is quite huge. At the time, there was a major struggle going on in the North because they were going to open a new area and I'm from the North so it was not that far away from where I lived. For the last twenty years the city where I live has been trying to build itself up as the oil capital of the North. So that got me involved and I learned about the debate in Norway which was only about how much more money you can make, how the community that would benefit from the oil will get money to rebuild schools, do whatever, and all the promises they made. But the debate on the climate issue was really small, and the debate on the impacts of the climate change is really, really small. You know, we really don't use a lot of time talking about the consequences and changes it has on the people of the world. So learning all of this got me so angry that I just continued and continued and that's, I guess, what finally brought me here.

*How did you get to your first COP? How did that come about and which was it?*

In 2007, when I ended high school I moved to Oslo, to our capital, and started working in our main office. I was coordinating our home delegation, a hundred young people from the age of sixteen and upwards. So in 2009, I was never really excited, I couldn't understand any of the acronyms that people were talking, like UNFCCC. What is this triple C? Then, in Copenhagen, I was on the outside with the hundred other activists from Young Friends of Earth Norway; so we were there for the last week. So we were on the outside and having actions every day, and trying to get the story out to Norway: What was going on in Copenhagen? What was happening? What wasn't happening? We made that story since the hundred people that we had were from all over the country. So we made them get their stories out as well to their local newspapers, make them tell the story of what they learn, and what also what they saw, who they talked to, and their experiences being there. So that got me to Copenhagen. Since then I've worked in our main office for six years

now, yeah, and for the last two years as the chair for the Young Friends of Norway, so then I have to go there, I have no choice. But mostly our work isn't based on the complicated texts of SUBSTA [Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice] or the SBI [Subsidiary Body for Implementation]. Our work is based at home and in the local communities or the counties who refuse to reduce carbon emissions in Norway, in local municipalities, and also nationally that Norway will come here with good positions and deliver on their promises. We also work up until the COP to make them have the good positions, to make them feel the pressure back home, so that they have to deliver.

*How do you do that work at home? How do you try to make that awareness and bring that pressure?*

It's a lot of different work. Young Friends of Earth Norway has 6,500 members all over of the country, seventy local groups who are working with environmental policy in their cities. So that's where I started working on my local municipality to make them do everything from having a better public transportation, to lower emission, to recycling everything, or all the small things. We started at that level. When I first started at the main office to the Young Friends of Earth Norway, I started as a secretary for some of our regions – we have people who are dedicated to travel around all over the country. There are five people doing that, and their job is basically not to be at home but to be around the schools, to give lectures at high school and secondary schools on climate change – how it impacts people, why it is happening and the responsibility that Norway has for it and then also the responsibility that each and every one of us has to be a part of a movement that actually works towards shifting the power. So we do that and then we do lobby work against our governor and our Parliament. Norway is a small country so it's easier doing that for a youth organization more than the US, I can imagine. We have meetings with the different parties, we have different campaigns around them and then try to have a massive public pressure on the things that are happening.

So one of the biggest issues that we've been working on for the last, I think we've been working on it for the last twenty-years actually, it's the matter of oil drilling outside the Lofoten islands; they're in the North as well, even closer to my home. It's one of the few areas that Norway hasn't opened for the oil industry. It got opened in 1994 but Young Friends of Earth and another Norwegian NGO had an action against it in 2001 when the rigs were coming up north to drill, so we managed to get some pressure into the public debate. One thing was that we had an action we were laying in a really small fishing boat in front of the oil rig so that it couldn't go anywhere, and it cost millions for the oil company every day we were there. But in addition to that we had a massive public support. When it comes to Norway's oil policy, most people don't care. In Europe, you get reminded where energy comes from when you see the coal fire plants, when you see the nuclear plants; in Norway we don't see all that, and the only thing we see is the money coming in. But these areas are so unique that we manage to break the whole money bubble in Norway that "that's all that matters."

We've been doing a lot of work on that for the last twelve years, especially since we managed to close the area in 2001. Our prime minister, Jens Stoltenberg, said that we can't do this so he ordered the rig back in 2001 and it never drilled. Since then the area has been closed and that's both because of a massive public campaign – we've been travelling around the area – but also the whole nation is talking about it; it's not just a local cause that the people who are living there are supposed to care about, but it's something that matters for the whole nation of who we want to be. It managed to tell a story that climate science tells us that we have to leave the oil in the ground, and if it's not one of the world's wealthiest country in the world that it's going to do it, then who is going to do it? If one of the world's most unique areas is not going to be

spared from the oil industry, which areas are left to protect then? In Parliament for the last twelve years, we've actually had a majority who are for an opening, but the five times the issue has come up, they vote against it because they know that the public isn't on their side, they're on our side.

*That's a fantastic story. I'm very interested in the politics at the national level because of the Green Party for example and the question of Norwegian oil as kind of the incubator of the economy. You are in such an interesting situation because of that and my assumption is that northern Europe and Europe as a whole is known to be more advanced in terms of wealthy countries on the issue of climate and alternative energy, and we have the impression that Scandinavia is on the leading edge of that. But I guess Norway is the only country that has the oil and the space on that level. How do people respond to you? I mean, outside this issue, which as you said is an extreme case and that you were able to win is fantastic, and keep it won as they kept coming back. It sounds from the way you are telling the story, that your organization Young Friends of the Earth in Norway, was the leading force in that battle?*

Yes, it was, and it has been ever since. We have been supporting other NGOs but what is different in Norway is that they are not as strong because we had already established national organizations before they came along. For example, Friends of the Earth Norway was established 100 years ago; they've been around for one hundred years. Young Friends of Earth Norway was established forty-five years ago. People have a relationship with us whether they like us or not.

*It's such a long established organization.*

Yes, people have a relationship with us. In politics, I think one of the things that separates Norway from the rest of Europe is we never had the Green Party in Parliament. Because in Norway we have a Green Party, on the right there are the Liberals, who have a really good environmental policy in Norway, and on the left is the Socialists Left Party, who also have a good environmental policy. But they all have different views of the world and everything else. The environmental issues are quite the same actually in every cause, and those two parties have managed because since we managed to stop the rig, the government has been either a majority government with support from the small parties, like the Liberals, or for the last eight years we had a Labor government with the Socialist-Left Party as well that has managed to stop them. Because Labor says "drill," that's Labor's view on the matter. Now we have a new government, which is a minority government this time, with the Conservatives and the Progress Party; "Progress Party" might sound nice but it's our far right party. They are in government now, and they need support from either the Liberals or the Christian-Democrats, and both of those are against oil drilling and have good environmental policies. So it's the small parties that have managed to cut across and to get where we are at.

But Norway is so oil dependent that it's actually quite scary, and for the last year or so more and more economists have been warning Norway. It started with the whole issue of the Lofoten islands where we said that we didn't want open to drilling, and which we won just a month ago. We had to state that we don't need that because it is a danger for our economy. We are facing a split in our economy between the oil economy and the other industries that are not oil-related. Our oil industries are driving the prices so high that other industries in Norway are not able to meet them, so there is a brain drain with new engineers and others going to the oil industry. And one quarter of our national budget comes from the oil industry. The oil helped Norway to get where we are today, most definitely. But all the same, Norway wasn't built on oil; what really raised Norway away from being a poor country was hydro, when we discovered how to use hydropower.

Norway accounts for fifty percent or more of the storage capacity of dams in Europe; that's what really built the country. Then we found oil forty years ago and started doing that as well. Now the oil industry is without doubt the most powerful industry in Norway and it has so many direct links to our government – former ministers who are now working in the oil industry, or people who used to work in the oil lobby are now the main advisor to our prime minister – so the ties are really close. Even though the economy has been booming for the last year, we don't have support either in Parliament or in the public to really do something about the oil sector, to start shutting it down.

*Is that what you would like to see?*

Yeah.

*What is your sort of vision of the economy?*

You can just turn off everything over one night because then it will have lots of impacts, no doubt. The first thing you need to do is to stop awarding more exploration blocs to the oil industry. You need to stop giving them tax relief if they don't find oil. That's the policy in Norway; if you are a small oil company, and you don't find anything when you drill, you get something like seventy-eight percent of all the expenses covered by the government. So we have a policy that keeps dragging on. You need to start shutting down what we already have, and that's a lot. If you look at Norway's emissions as a country, then our emissions are 0.02 percent of the world's total emission, 50 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. If you look per capita, we have eleven, twelve tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per person so we are one of the highest in the EU. That number, 0.02, doesn't cover all the oil and gas that we export because the oil and gas we are drilling in Norway that we don't use, we sell, because ninety-five percent of our electricity comes from hydro. We have two gas-fired power plants as well; one is not operating because of the prices for the last five years and the other one has not been functioning for some reason. It's mainly hydro that we have. The oil we are just selling mostly to the EU, to Britain and to Germany, for the oil and the gas. If you take those numbers into account, we are at two percent at the world's total emissions; I can't believe five million people are responsible for so much. If you look our historical responsibility, for the last four years, we've been producing and selling the equivalent of 15 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. If you compare it to the world's emissions now, it's fifty percent of what the whole world emits during one year. It's big numbers.

*Really big numbers. It's a unique situation, obviously, very tricky and fascinating. What about the positions at the COP of Norway? Is there tension there as you bring pressure on the government around that?*

Yes, we do that. One of the difficulties with Norway which I've discussed this several times with young people from Canada, is that the two countries are on opposite sides in the negotiations. In Norway's case, everybody looks up to Norway. Bård Vegar Solhjell, our environmental minister, said that when he went around the world he was greeted like a hero, but when he got back to Norway everybody was just yelling at him because he didn't do enough. That's true, because Norway is seen as a nice guy in these negotiations pushing for higher ambition and we have good positions on several things. But at the same time, we need to understand the logic behind that because when the EU, for example, says "Okay, fifty percent reduction emissions by 2050," Norway has to say eighty-five. So that's really...

*Again, it's really fascinating the politics of it, everything – the economy, the politics, the struggle that you have to do, the public opinion, and then that disjunction at the national level – just what you said. Norway*

*and EU are our leaders; they have a great responsibility. Norway has to think about what emissions is going to contribute to the atmosphere if it keeps oil the basis of the economy.*

Definitely. Also, one thing is that Norway is not doing what we should be doing at home. Our Kyoto target was actually to increase our emission by one percent; we managed to actually be allowed to have that increase in emissions. We have not reached that. What have we done? We bought someone else off in another country to do the job for us. So when Norway is pushing for higher emissions it is deeply connected with the market and the different market mechanisms. The proposal in Copenhagen of how we were going to resolve this it came from Norway. The EU was not as sure and then Norway lobbied it for it because the costs in Norway are so high and our emission reductions are pricey. So that we didn't have to do it, we just bought someone off. So when Norway is pushing for those emissions and goals they won't ever do that if you try to take away the markets, then they won't. Norway has a target reduction of thirty percent and we can raise it to forty. What we are doing at home is we are going to reduce our emissions at home by approximately five percent and the rest we're buying in offsets.

*Oh, I see, okay. Let's talk about activism at the COP. Let's talk about the global climate justice movement. You've been to five COPs, the first one on the outside and I was the same on the second week on the outside of Copenhagen. That was my first experience and that's why I'm still doing this now because it was quite powerful being in the forum and of all that. Tell us a little a bit from your perspective about the growth of the global youth climate justice movement, how it's doing over time?*

It is doing better, I would say. But the problem also to the global justice climate movement is that our backs were broken after Copenhagen. We told the wrong story and everyone did it. We were told the story that we were going to Copenhagen to change the world; we were going to get this agreement that would be fantastic and everything was going to be so good. What happened? Complete failure. Complete and utter failure. It's weird though, because the biggest climate march in history was in Copenhagen, a hundred thousand people in the streets. How many people in just the UK took to the streets to refuse the war in Iraq? We had major difficulties at the same time in gathering support at home. I don't have the right answers why but I think we've been telling the wrong sets of stories as well, and also we have the slogan, "System change, not climate change." A lot of the people whom we are trying to reach don't have a clue about the system. What is this system that we are going to change? We need to communicate better, I think, and we have been able to after Copenhagen slowly, but we are managing to build up the movement again. A lot of us were involved then and are still involved, so we kind of know what we did wrong.

At the same time, Paris in 2015, shit, it scares me. It scares me not because of the agreement and outcomes, but that we might end up doing the wrong things again. We need to build pressure; we have to have it. You can say a lot about Copenhagen, but if you have had no public pressure at all it would've be even worse, so we need the pressure. How do you build that up? How do you mobilize thousands and thousands of people to come to Paris to show and demand that they want climate justice? At the same time, as I think all of us who are here the COPs and have been here for the course of the years we are not going to get that agreement in Paris. We are not. You are mobilizing people on something that is not going to be the thing that we really need. I think what we need to do more broadly, wider, better is to build those movements at home. Right here we have a lot of young people springing up and you have some young people who are involved in grassroots movements where they live; you have some who interview bureaucrats, who like talking to negotiators.

**WE HAVE ALL THESE PEOPLE WHO HAVE A REAL PASSION TO SOLVE THIS**, but we need to transform that passion not only about these two weeks, but to be about the rest of whole year at home as well so that we can build public pressure. So that we can actually manage to have those transitions, so that we can manage to have negotiators who go here with ambition in their briefcases because they know that they have public support for it. We don't have that now. So that's the biggest challenge to build the movements at home. It's really important that the justice perspective is grounded so that it's not only built on "Whatever happens, we are glad," because we are not. It must be what we really, really need, and we need to have the justice perspective. We have to understand how people are impacted, what that requires from us, and not be blinded by making you say that it's China or that it's India or whatever, and letting you pick sides.

*The justice perspective – can you articulate that?*

● **I've talked and given lectures for thirteen years. I say climate justice is that everyone around the world has an equal right to the atmosphere.** You have kind of a budget and everybody is going to get something, but you don't have more than you actually deserve, and it has to be fair. Climate justice is not only the right to emit CO<sub>2</sub> or the right not to emit CO<sub>2</sub>, because if we are going to have a vote, a really equal right to the atmosphere, we know it's way too much there now. How can it be that a person from Norway can make 12 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year when a farmer in Bangladesh makes 0.5? That's not just, and at the same time we know that our planet can't cope with the idea that everyone is going to be like Norway. We have twelve tons so that means that we need to lead. We made this problem; it wasn't Bangladesh. It's our oil, it's our gas, and we've been profiting from it for years so now we need to use that profit wisely and we need to use it well. And that is not giving tax relief to the oil industry to use to do more harm. It's by filling up the climate funding, filling up the education funds, by reducing our own emission. That will cost us a lot of money, but at the same time it's the only way we can go.

We live under the same sky, so we all have a say in it somehow. We are simply not on the path to do that.

*This is a daunting, awful dilemma.*

Yeah.

*So then you said that more recently you think that the global movement has made some progress, in what sense? Why do you say that?*

I say that because I see it back home. I see more people getting involved, more people asking questions, more people demanding answers from politicians, from oil companies. That's one thing, and the other thing is that our movement, Young Friends of the Earth, is growing. We've been cooperating with organizations both in the US and Canada for quite some while. In Canada it's been growing at a speed that's just crazy with the CYCC, Canadian Youth Climate Coalition. Also in the US, organizations like Earth in Brackets, who are mainly kind of international in their focus, are doing really important work as well. But at the same time now they are involved further in the climate justice movement, not only at the COPs, but also when they get back. Something is happening and it's good. We just need it to make it happen faster and we need it to be stronger so it can't be ignored anymore.

*One of the things that really impressed me was that the fact Global Power Shift was out here this year in June. So then again, it wasn't just in two weeks in November and December but the movement came together in the middle of the year with the same strategy that you mention, which is to go back home and do local*

*Power Shifts. It's an interesting combination of the global perspective, and serious work at the local level, and then somehow getting all that together. I would like to hear about Global Power Shift. Was it significant in your view, in terms of the growth of this movement and the future of this movement?*

I think that it is significant for some but I think that in some way we lost track a bit in what we were doing. 350 managed to get so many people from some many countries; I don't remember how many it was like 130 countries, I think. It's great; it was so good. We had people with so many different backgrounds, from people who were never involved with the climate issue to people who had been activists for a long time. I think what was missing was the story on why they are doing this because that was not as clear. For me it's quite clear. For someone who has never been involved, it's not. "What is happening? What are the impacts? How are people affected? Who is to blame?" So kind of both the *why* and the blame were missing. We got trained in doing local grass root movements and having national or regional campaigns. But when you didn't really have the narrative on why are we doing this or what are we going to build this movement on – there needs to be some kind of common ground rules or some common ideas or perspective that we agree on. When that is lacking, I think it is much harder for those people who were there for a week, got excited, and then go home, but don't know quite how to translate it.

*To me personally the article that made it real two summers ago, Bill McKibben's "The Terrifying Math of Global Warming," was very striking...*

It was brilliant.

*... and very clear. It was quite useful explaining the situation to all kinds of people and also as kind of a step forward because he names as what he sees the end of the enemy, logically the fossil fuel industry. Do you have thoughts about that? Is that the kind of vision that you are talking about?*

I think that story, or that article, is so important because it brings a new perspective that hasn't been in the debate for so long. The Bill McKibben presentation and the whole fossil free campaign should have been on the opening day. We should have told the story. So many people have heard of him, heard that he gives these great speeches, and really explains why this is so – it's just going to fall into place and he explains it so well. More people need to hear about it, so that's why the fossil free campaign that they are having now around Europe is brilliant. We need more initiatives like that and new ways of kind of tackling the whole issue of climate change because that's what it is. When you use everything from the whole debate on the carbon bubble, the economy and everything, we have new arguments to build on which is great, which I want us to continue doing. But we will always have the perspective at the same time on the main principles that I personally and Young Friends of the Earth Norway think have to be on the table and it is the developing countries that need to get the support from the rich countries, the developed world that has this sole responsibility in really bringing this forward and in doing everything from reducing their own emissions from following the recommendations of the IPCC. The developed world needs to be doing that at home and the same time delivering the support that countries in the South need to get where they are. You have to have a base that you are telling the story on. You are not having that, I think, for a lot of people. We are losing in the long run. We are losing a lot of the people who were in Copenhagen because we did not tell the story right.

*It's very, very hard actually for people to get their heads around that issue; something they can't see, something that is in the future, something that they are being told by the media, the culture, the politicians, don't*

*think about it. Of course here at the COP this all comes together. Let's talk about this particular COP and the movements here – it's only been two days but quite a lot has happened –and perhaps the conference of youth also. What do you want to tell us about what the movement been doing this last days?*

I think the movements have been doing really well, but I'm almost a bit surprised how good it's been. Sometimes within the climate movement you have these different fractions and people have everything that goes back historically to some years ago, "Someone did something and someone doesn't like it anymore." At least for the last few days, we manage to look beyond that and stay more together. Of course what happened in the Philippines had a huge impact on this COP, and it set the agenda as well, and set everyone in a new state of mind, at least from civil society as well and the negotiators, people who can't consciously close their eyes. Because you turn on your TV and you hear about it, so that's been really good. I think a lot of the reason why the COP for the last two days are gathering in a different way is because it is the most corporate COP that I've seen; the corporate influence is huge. Look at what we are sitting on: what are these bean bags from Emirates Airline? When have they ever done anything that is good for the climate? You have the Polish coal and energy company whose logo is on the building in the middle of the stadium, we also have some on the water. It's crazy; the corporate influence has never been this big. Next week, they are having a coal summit and Christiana Figueres is one of the main speakers; I mean, people are outraged – they're outraged.

My rage is just because that's not how a COP is supposed to be; we can't have climate negotiations sponsored by the people who are causing the problem. I mean it would be like having a health summit then letting the tobacco industry pay for everything and having their stickers everywhere; that's what you have in here. We have companies here who have spent more than \$20 million in the last ten years in support of an organization who are lobbying against climate policy. In the EU, Poland is one of the blockers, but at the same time there are a lot of countries that are blocking the EU that just put Poland in front of them so that we can all be angry in Poland instead. But I think it's done something to the whole atmosphere, also in the civil society that is here. People are more angry and people are even more clear on demands, and standing together is even more important. There is also the absurdity of the stickers from the oil industry and fossil industry, overall, over this whole conference.

It is so absurd that yesterday on the opening day, three young activists who were at their first COP ever got thrown out because they had a banner that said, "How many more?" That was in support of the Philippines. So we had two banners. One said how many were killed during Bopha last year, eleven months ago, at the typhoon, and the other one said how many have died in Haiyan so far this year. They had a banner, "How many more?" They managed to hold it up for five seconds and then they got thrown out. They are banned for life is the message that we are getting from Figueres who is speaking at the Coal Summit. What's stopping climate action: Is it youth who are pushing for more ambitious targets, who are pushing for action, who are pushing for climate justice, or is it the companies that are giving money to organizations, to lobbyists, to everything that is working against climate action? It's not in a coal company's interest that we solve climate change, it is not in their interest to secure an outcome here, in Peru, or in Paris that takes us anywhere near a safe future for our climate. No way. That's why they are putting money in it to stop it from happening and that's what is going on here. We've had corporate influence before but never, never on this scale.

*It's just insulting. I mean, to have it in Poland in the first place after Qatar, which is a huge surprise as well, when it was supposedly going to be South Korea and suddenly it is in Qatar, and then getting it back to*

Poland twice in the same decade with only Denmark in between. Do you know anything how that comes about?

What I heard was that none of the countries in Europe wanted to have it, so Poland was just forced.

*Do you think it's good in a way that it's a very strong contrast of perspectives? -- the awful timing, I don't know how that could happen again, the typhoon last weekend, right on the eve of the COP. The Philippine ambassador did something that I think in my sense of the history of the COP was unprecedented and as you started to say had some resonance here, and not just with civil society. I guess my question is: What do you think is possible at this COP? Do you think it's all scripted and it's going to end as they wanted it to? Could something unexpectedly good happen? Is something unexpected underway really?*

I hope so, is the short answer. The long answer is that I don't know if the typhoon that hit the Philippines is enough to get these people to understand what is going on because we end up having the same blockers each year. The blockers are the rich countries; they just keep pointing fingers at each other. "No, I don't want to, you have to." "No, I don't want to, you have to." So I don't know, I really, really hope so, but at the same time, we are getting told that Japan is going to turn down new emission targets during this COP with twenty five percent. Australia might make an announcement on their target, so that's not good. So we have those things that are going on at the same time. I'm not sure. But I also thought that the speech from Yeb was the strongest speech I've ever heard and it made the whole, or half the hall cry – the delegates, civil society, chief negotiators – it moved people but I don't know if it's enough. We need people to follow up.

*Do you think that the movement here can build on this? There is an opportunity here as you started to say, in a surprising strong way, in a very positive way. I am really interested, I mean, when I heard that the people were banned yesterday, I thought they were going to be back in today. I really couldn't believe that she would do that, in other words, to really exacerbate the tension that she has set up with global city society, with science in fact, so I can't believe that's the end of it since. I don't know. What do you think could be done or should be done compare here to keep that kind of pressure on or the real issues in focus?*

Well, there are several things that we are following up with the people that got banned. Christiana [Figueres, UNFCCC Secretary-General] might reverse it or she might not, I don't think she will. I think she is setting an example; she did the same thing last year with Anjali Appadurai but reversed it after a week, and after a lot of back and forth and back and forth. And a lot of that was going on. That also meant that civil society needed to use powers not in fighting dirty oil, not in pressuring negotiators, but needed to waste our powers to fight Figueres. For god's sake, it's so pointless. So this year we said that we are not going to the same mistakes that we did in Durban. Then we played by their rules, we didn't issue any press release, we had the twitter storm, but we let them go quite easily. A lot of people were working for that and we managed and it was great. But this year we are not doing it that way because the UNFCCC can't treat civil society like this, and it's not difficult or it's not just bad for the democracy of it all; it's bad for the COP. It's bad for the negotiations and you end up having a more weakened COP because you don't have the pressure that is desperately needed inside these halls as well.

This COP is at a venue where there are a lot fewer people from civil society because we didn't get accreditation, and that has actually been a trend since Copenhagen that we've been shortening down. The UNCC won't look at us as equal partners; we are just guests so then we have to obey their rules. So now we have sent a letter to Figueres to give her time to answer the decision to ban for life or even just these two weeks

which are out of proportion, and trying to get an explanation and saying we want an answer by tomorrow. But at the same time we are releasing a press release saying this is not how a UNCCC should be, this is not how a COP can be held, and this is not a way to treat civil society. At the same time, she is speaking at a coal summit, so we are doing that. We need them more in the inside we have lots of people coming to be on the outside as well during next week of course because of the coal summit.

There are more actions and demos planned for this COP than the last, than even since Copenhagen. We just have more things planned on the inside and the outside of what is happening. Of course then we will try to keep the focus on the Philippines as well, and not just on the Philippines. It's not that the Philippines is weak, this is not supposed to be a charity, but this is a catastrophe that has happened to them, and it will continue to happen if we don't drastically change the way we get our energy from. So that's kind of the story as well; it's not going to be a story of pity that now the great North is so kind to say some words to the Philippines in their opening speeches. That needs to be translated into action, so we are planning on doing that also for the following days. We have another solidarity action today with the fast in solidarity with the Philippines which is spreading now, worldwide as well, so it's not just going to be here at the COP. Tomorrow, the Philippines are having a press conference where we are also invited in to talk not only about that, but kind of the bond that is also between activists here. Our activists got kicked out from showing solidarity with the Philippines. Now, the Philippines should not have to worry about our three activists. They are actually sending press releases and statements with solidarity with our actions and our activists.

So it's a problem that's around the world, and that's what we managed to build up especially since the last year since Durban. It's been built and built, and that's what we need to continue to do. I hope that we'll manage to hold the pressure at this COP, and to be honest, I can't understand how we can't. I mean, the UNFCCC have done so many stupid things and they are just making it easy for us in some way just by attending a coal conference, by having it in Poland, by kicking out people who are young - young people who are at their first COP on their first day to set an example and at the same time Cristiana Figueres is going to speak at their summit. In some mystical way, the banner that our activists held was more dangerous to this COP than the coal summit; it's out of proportion. You've given civil society so many reasons to be really persistent, really fight this time. If not now, I really don't understand when we are going to do it.

*What you say is very powerful and very beautiful. I want to ask you a really ridiculous question and let you have any fun you can with it. How does the story end, this last struggle, for truly saving the planet with justice? How do you see it end?*

The story ends well; of course it does: Why else would we be fighting? The head of one of the Norwegian environmental NGOs, Frederic Hauge, who was part of the Young Friends of Norway in his youth, said when they were working in the environmental movement they used to say that "Everything's going to hell, but at least we're going to make it difficult for them on the way." And that's not how it should be; it can't be that we are going to be making it a bit difficult on the way. We are not going to go that way because we are going to stop it.

**THAT'S THE STORY WE ARE GOING TO TELL**, the story of how our planet is going to look in fifteen, seventy, one hundred years, and that it's going to be more beautiful planet to live on than the planet we have today. A planet where everything is better; you have clean energy; you'll have energy access for all. We will have clean energy that isn't ruining the planet.

We'll have a world that has clean energy and that has energy for all, so that we don't ruin our planet by simply surviving. I usually say that the ultimate goal of Young Friends of the Earth Norway, is that we will not be needed any longer. So that's what we are working for; you will have communities that have both the capacity to deal with the changes that are already made, but then also have the capacity to think anew and to find new solutions. I have no answer on all the solutions that are going to take us to this world but I know that's where we're going. That's why I have been doing this for twelve, thirteen years now; I could never have done it if I kept telling myself that we will ultimately fail. What we need to remember is that climate change wasn't decided on a COP so climate change isn't going to be solved at a COP either. It's going to be solved in every single country. So we need to have mass mobilization of people, young people not just from the age of twelve, and not just people ninety years old and upwards. We need to have them working for climate justice; we need them working on solutions that are good for their community, for them as youth, and towards the future where we all want to go. At least I hope. I think most of us want a better future. We are going to have such an enlightened public all over that we won't need the environmental movement any more...

*The real secret is that it's a lot of fun do to that.*

Oh my god, it's so much fun.

*Thank you so much.*

Yeah, definitely.

*Thank you.*

No problem.

*That was really beautiful.*



“The idea is to *sexify* climate change”



## RAQUEL ROSENBERG

Engajamundo and Coalición Latinoamericana por la Clima



# RAQUEL ROSENBERG

Warsaw COP 19 – November 14, 2013  
Interview by Natasha Weidner and Corrie Ellis  
Transcribed by NhuMai Do and Holly Higgins

My name is Raquel Rosenberg. I'm 23 from São Paulo, Brazil. I'm here representing [Engajamundo](#). It means "engage the world" in Portuguese. I'm the head of the organization, and we just recently created it five months ago to increase the participation of the Brazilian youth in the U.N. processes, not only in climate change, but in gender issues and social development as well. So this is our first conference. Four of us are here, and we were able to organize the Brazilian youth delegation with all the youth from Brazil that were coming to the conference. This is the first time it happens, so it's a huge step for us. It's really nice to be here.

We also have no funding for the organization as a whole, so we make everything ourselves without any funding until now. We hope that this experience can bring a lot of not only money, but recognition from the government as well. Yesterday we had this meeting of the Brazilians here with the Minister of Environment, and she said that it was part of the platform of the minister to get youth engaged with this process. But they didn't help us at all before coming so we raised our hands and we said, "Oh really, because we didn't have any support from you before coming; it's good to know that we're going to have from now on." It was really nice, everybody was applauding – a good moment for us.

*So this group Engage the World organized the Brazilian youth delegates?*

Together with *Vida Film*, which is a magazine in Brazil focused on youth. We articulated everything before coming.

*And you were with CLIC too right?*

Yes, [CLIC](#) (Coalición Latinoamericana por la Clima) is the Latin-American Youth Movement on Climate Change. We just created CLIC a month ago. We went to Bogota to a workshop organized by CliMates, a French organization. And we were in a group of forty young people there; the movement came from this workshop. So the idea of CLIC is to get us involved in climate change issues and to organize ourselves for COP 20 in Peru. But it's more like the movement of the Latin Americans for climate change.

*So those are the two. Are you involved with any more organizations here?*

Yes. We call ourselves the Brazilian Youth Delegation, but we have a huge problem of funding. We went to all the places we could to try to get something to come to Warsaw, so I'm here for [Adopt a Negotiator](#). I was approved in their selection process. There are twelve of us here, each from a different country in a different region of the world, so it's really cool to work with people from Africa, India, Fiji, Philippines, New Zealand. It's awesome to have all of us together working on the same thing, but with so many different realities and different things happening in our countries, it's a huge challenge to put everything together. It's really nice. The idea is for us to adopt a negotiator from our delegation, or maybe from another one, and to write a blog

about our impressions of what's happening here at the conference and anything we want to bring up, especially to our countries and, for me, the youth in Brazil, what's happening at the conference.

*Is this your first COP then?*

My first COP and Engajamundo's as well. And also we wanted to have a Latin-American elected for focal point of YOUNGO, not only as Engajamundo, but as CLIC also and that just happened today so it's huge day for us as well. I'm really happy with everything that's happening.

*Who is this person that was elected?*

Her name is Danãe. She's from Mexico and she's been involved with COPs since COP 16 in 2010. She has a lot of experience, and we hope she's going to be a good focal point; we had never had a focal point from Latin America in YOUNGO so it's really nice.

*To begin, what was the journey that brought you to this climate summit? You can go back as far as you want into your life and your childhood. What's been your journey to get here?*

I was always involved in environmental issues. My father is really involved with it, and I was always worried about what's going to happen with this planet and the water. We have a lot of forest in Brazil, so I was born with this concern, I think. And when I got to the university, I didn't know what to do; I studied international relations, and I had no idea what to do with that. I just wanted to learn something about the environment, but I didn't even know that COPs existed. I started to research that and to be part of groups of study, and I realized that whoa, there is a place in international relations for environment and I decided to go further into that. Then we had Rio + 20 training in Brazil and before that, in my organization, in my university, people didn't even know that we would have Rio + 20. My friends and I were really worried about it; it was going to happen right here, and the youth didn't even know this exists, so let's do something about it. We created the university committee for Rio + 20 training. We did a lot of events to raise awareness about the conference in São Paulo, which is my city. We did fifteen events in ten different universities. It was really nice, and we had a lot of partnerships. Everybody was supporting us on that, and then when we went to Rio we were all totally lost about what was happening at the conference. We thought, "Okay, we brought a lot of people; we raised awareness about it, but we have no idea of what to do now." Then we saw all this youth organizing and getting their things done, and their lobby points with the government, and we thought "Oh my god, why is this happening and we don't have any space here because we're not organized, so let's organize ourselves."

When we got back, we created Engajamundo to increase the participation of Brazilian youth at the U.N. conferences. We had a lot of support from other young people that had more experience than we did but we're doing things by ourselves. I came for Adopt-a-Negotiator here, but we made a crowd funding campaign to make sure we had more than just one person here. And it was a huge success. We asked for a lot of money in Brazil, and we got it; we had a lot of people supporting us on the idea and this is how I got here. It was a huge journey, and I'm totally satisfied to be here, to be part of everything here.

*Wow. How does Engajamundo raise awareness? What are the activities that you do at home?*

We made capacity-building material. It's a Prezi based on YOUNGO. Jamie [Peters] helped us a lot, but we also have material on climate change as a whole because in Brazil, people don't know anything about cli-

mate change. So we have this introduction, and we had a lot of help from 350 to do it. And then we did events in a couple of cities in Brazil, and we also had a process of engaging the youth in a capacity-building event to make sure that their voice could be heard here.

After it finished we asked them, "So now what do you think is the position that we can have at the conference?" and they told us we should talk about deforestation, and we should talk about agriculture and livelihood, which are the biggest problems in Brazil on climate change. These are totally different from the North problems like coal and energy.

We have problems as well, but it's not like it is here, and it's good to bring their voices and our agenda to the YOUNGO and the youth as a whole because it's not only about coal and the problems that you have here in the North, it's about our problems as youth in the global South. So I think we are really good on that at the conference. We feel that this is the agenda of the youth here as well, so another good point of our participation here is to bring those points and these agendas to YOUNGO, not only to the Brazilian delegation.

*Can you tell me a little bit more about what you do in Engajamundo, the actions, all the many things you're involved in, and what you've been doing since you've been here?*

Well, I tried to engage before coming. It was really hard because if you get to the mailing list, it's totally confusing. I didn't know what to do with this and with that. We tried to help the COY [the Conference of Youth held in Warsaw just before the COP] so I was part of the mobilization team on Latin America so that I can spread everything here, in Brazil, and Latin America, and I am trying to do this. I don't know if it was a good job or not, but this was my involvement with COY. And in YOUNGO, we had a lot of support from Jamie [Peters] especially. He did a Skype call with us. He explained everything about the working groups and how we can be part of them, and we started to try to understand everything that was happening. Since then, we have been coming to the spokescouncil's meetings and making sure that we can put up our agendas as well, and what we think as members of the global South and Latin America especially. So I try to engage as much as I can and I'm really proud of it. I like YOUNGO's work, but I think we should sexify it a little bit so maybe I should tell you about the "sexify movement." It started, I think at COP 16 with some friends of mine from Brazil.

**THE IDEA TO "SEXIFY" CLIMATE CHANGE** – not in a sexual way – but to make it more attractive and less technical and boring so we made things in a fun and "sexy" way to make sure that we engage with youth. If you speak about all these acronyms and everything we say here, people, especially in Brazil, will never be want part of it. They will say, "Oh, this is not a problem." But if you do this in a fun way, it's much easier to get youth involved, so we also have another collective which is called CliMates Brazil. We were part of the [Global Power Shift](#), organized by 350.org, and as the phase two after going to Turkey, we had to have something to spread what we learned there. Some countries decided to do an event so we had the Power Shift here, but we also decided to make our own actions, sexify actions, to take climate change out of the closet, we say. This is what we aim to do. [For the sexify action in Warsaw, [click here](#).

So we raise awareness about climate change, but in a fun way, with jokes about things that are happening in Brazil. Let me give you an example. In the last one, we created a sticker that said "This product contributes to climate change," and there was a picture of meat or something. We went to the supermarket and glued it on every meat product; the security guys were looking at us, and we were just gluing everywhere. Then we left

and we made a video of that so everybody was talking and saying, "Oh, I won't eat that" and then did it again so it was really a fun way to raise awareness. We also had the flash mob here on fossil fuel; it was like a dance, flash mob, involving a lot of people, and we did it in the city center just before the march so everybody was looking at us and saying, "What's happening?" We were dancing, and at the end we had a message "Fossil fuel, no we can't." So we did something fun to make sure that people look at us, and then we say the powerful message that we do not support the fossil fuel. This is the sexy movement and how CliMates works in Brazil.

*That's great. So how many people are part of CliMates?*

At the Global Power Shift we were eight or ten. Now we have a few more, so I'd say from fifteen to twenty people are involved in it. And we are open as well. Like all of the other organizations I'm part of, Engajamundo has a form that you just need to fill out to be part of it. And CliMates, CLIC is the same, so we are really open to all young people that want to get involved with climate issues.

*That's great, so then can you talk a little bit about how you talked to the negotiator?*

Actually it was really easy for me because the Brazilian negotiators just changed the delegation so they are not the same that last year or the others; they are willing to show new things. And when we went there before coming to COP we went to Brasília, the capital of Brazil, to have a meeting with them. They were really open, saying, "Oh that's so good that you're coming as youth; you can count on us." And first day here we were having coffee together and laughing about things. So we were really engaged with them, and now in the second week we are putting a lot of pressure on them, and they are supporting us even on that saying, "You should pressure us, this is your role here, so we expect that from you." And when I meet them in the corridors they are always saying things like, "Oh Raquel! How are you, how is your day?" And I'm like "Oh, okay, thanks." So it was easy because actually Brazilians are very open and the negotiators were totally the same.

*You say you are putting pressure on them to speak. What are you putting pressure on them about and how do you feel about how it's going?*

Especially on targets, making sure Brazil has a target for 2014; we don't have an answer still, but especially on finance because we think if Brazil and the BASICS [Brazil, South Africa, India, and China] could do something, they would put a lot of pressure on the developed countries because they are the ones that are supposed to do this. But we know they are not doing it, so let's do it ourselves to make sure that they do the same; otherwise they will just do total nonsense. I will say if the BASIC countries can do this, why can't the developed countries? This is our main strategy right now.

*When you talk to the negotiators how does that work on a daily basis? Are you just in contact with them?*

I think it's more like in the corridor and elevator stuff because when we go to the Plenary they are always so focused and busy on the Plenary that you can be like, "Hi" and yes, they know me already. But the real conversations are the ones where we go to the Brazilian office and "Hey, hello, how are you?" and start to have conversations about their daughters and everything, but this is when we can talk about the serious stuff. And they are also having a meeting every three or four days in the afternoon to make sure everyone knows about what is happening, how Brazil is dealing with everything, and this is another opportunity we have to make sure our questions are heard, not only by them but by all the Brazilians here. And this is what hap-

pened yesterday with the minister: She's here for only two days so this was our chance to put pressure on her, and we used it to make sure they support the Brazilian youth in the coming year and at the COP. And I think that after yesterday they will, because everybody was saying, "Oh yeah, amazing," and the ambassador was like "Let's applaud them again." I was like "Oh, I'm dreaming, this is not real," but yeah, it was real.

*Can you talk about CLIC and who's here for that part of the week?*

We had Antoine [Ebel] and Mathieu from CliMates, so they were part of the background of the team, and from Latin America there's Evelyn [Araipe] who's from every organization I already mentioned, and me. Evelyn's from Engajamundo, and we made all the presentations of the Brazilian youth together. She went to Turkey with me, and we are the ones representing CLIC. And now we have Danäe, the focal point who was just elected. She's from CLIC and she just arrived yesterday, so it's good to have another one here. Our work is basically to engage people with CLIC, the Latin Americans here, so we are having a few meetings with all the Latin Americans in COP. And it's good to know that they are all preparing to go to COY and to make sure that we have a process from now until Lima, and not just go in there and do workshops because that's not what we want. We want to have common lobbying points to talk about with our negotiators before going to Lima, and to make sure youth can be heard from the beginning of the process, not only like here as we did this year. So I hope it works with Danäe as focal point. We think our engagement with YOUNGO will be much better than in the past years.

*You said they have workshops and that you are hoping that all the youth will work with their delegates before even coming to COY and that everyone unifies around one thing?*

Yes. On CLIC we have four working groups – one for COP – I'm the focal point for this working group, and we are working about policy, making sure we have a common lobbying point and everything that's related to the COP, COY, and the projects working group. The idea is to make sure that we can exchange projects. So if we have some project in Brazil that we think we can export to other countries, we want to make sure that we have everything written so they can do it in other countries. And we have the information/knowledge working group so when we have this capacity-building from Engajamundo, we can share it with all the Latin Americans so they can do the same process before Lima. And we also have the communications group because we always need communications, and Evelyn is the focal point. So it's good to have both of us here to make sure that we can communicate and engage with COP as a whole.

*So the-capacity building, how does that work?*

For the capacity-building, we made this material as a Prezi available to all the Brazilian youth so they can download it and learn by themselves. We also did events, particularly in universities but also in other places in Brazil so people can understand climate change, the process of the COP, and how to engage with it. Now we want to do it throughout Latin America and it's easy now because they only need to translate it into Spanish. It was like a huge challenge but we had support from Jaime and from 350 as well. I think people know a little bit more now about how to engage with the COP in Brazil.

*That's great, what is your impression of COP so far and the whole process of the COP?*

Wow, it's so confusing. We feel like we want to be in three or four or five places at the same time. So we definitely feel frustrated, not only for the results, but for not being available for everything. And here at COP 19 especially, we have this huge problem of nothing coming out and everything getting stuck, and all the

countries that are blocking the negotiations so it feels bad. But we didn't have high expectations for it, so it's about balancing your expectations on the outcome document. For us, the main idea is to engage with the Brazilian delegation and with YOUNGO, and I think we're doing well. My personal experiences are more than good now at this moment, but I feel frustrated because of the process. Because we feel that not a lot is happening, and when we get back, people will ask what happened, and you say, "Oh, I was doing so much but no, nothing happened." It feels bad. But at the same time, I think we are accomplishing our mission as Engajamundo here pretty well.



*Do you consider yourself an activist?*

Yes, I do. Yes, for sure. And there are some activists in Brazil who would never consider me an activist because I dialogue with the government. In Brazil we have this radical environmental justice movement, so radical that you cannot speak with the government, otherwise you are not an activist. So I was really criticized in my blog posts of Adopt a Negotiator by a guy from this movement and it was really bad. But I feel like I am doing what I think I need to do. Because I think we should dialogue with the government; otherwise we are not going to get what we want. It's not only about saying, "The government is this, the government is that, the government sucks," like this guy was saying on the comments of my blog post, but it's about doing both things.

**You should go out to the streets, of course, but you should also lobby with the government and say this is what we think. Otherwise they are never going to hear you if you keep hating them. That's what I think.**

*What do you envision as the thing that should come out of the government that could help garner change?*

I actually I believe more in local projects, so I think that if we raise awareness in Brazil and people start to do their own stuff, we would have more results than if we have a treaty over here. But I also think that we need an international treaty so we can pressure the governments to do things locally. Brazil always goes to the conference and signs everything and we don't have the same problem as in the U.S with Congress. But when it comes to implementation, Brazil doesn't do anything. We have the plan for a climate change, we have some laws on adaptation and mitigation, but they really don't work, so this is the balance: We need to pressure the government to implement the things that they are putting on paper but not carrying out in the real world.

*So you think there needs to be more local pressure on the government but you also need some binding thing at the international level to make sure that they do everything they sign?*

Yes, both things I think are going in the same direction and one is kind of pressuring the other.

*Now, what are the, what are the biggest supports that you have to lead this life of an activist to be involved through everything? Do you do this full time?*

Yes, I quit my job a month ago to make sure that I could create Engajamundo as I wanted to so I do tutoring to get some money.

*In what?*

On every subject from school. But I don't want to do this for life; this is the way I made sure that I could create Engajamundo as a volunteer and at the same time survive because we need to. I think we're going to have funding, but I don't know if we are supposed to have salaries in the organization. We still have to think about this but I definitely think this gives me not only one opportunity but a lot of opportunities for jobs; I could do both things at the same time, working in a place that is meaningful for me and also helping Engajamundo, but I think that in this moment of creation, I needed to do everything I could to make sure it happens, and it did already. Now I can say that.

*What are the things that helped you, the biggest supporters that helped you create this?*

This is a really difficult question. I think it's myself, the things I believe in, and I had the support of family which is really important because if I didn't live with my mom, I wouldn't be able to do this; I'd be paying for rent and it wouldn't be possible. But I think it comes from my own determination more than anything. I support myself.

*What would you say is the situation in fighting climate change?*

Whoa, this is even more difficult but I could see while creating Engajamundo that there are a lot of young people willing to work on it and to deal with that in Brazil. We created as an online platform, and now we have people from other states, not only from São Paulo, who saw us on the internet and they say "Oh we want to do this." I'm here with Laura; she's my good friend, and she created everything from the beginning with me but we also have Bia and Iago; they're from the Northeast which is really far from São Paulo, almost like another country. We can see that the movement is much more than ourselves. It's like we only created this platform but there are a lot of people willing to work with that, and this really inspires me. I know that

I'm not alone; I'm not only with my friends, but there's a movement being built in Brazil and this is really what we wanted.

*You're optimistic; it sounds like you can make a big difference.*

I think so, but I'm an optimistic person so this is kind of my personal view. I don't know if other people would say the same, but I believe in us.

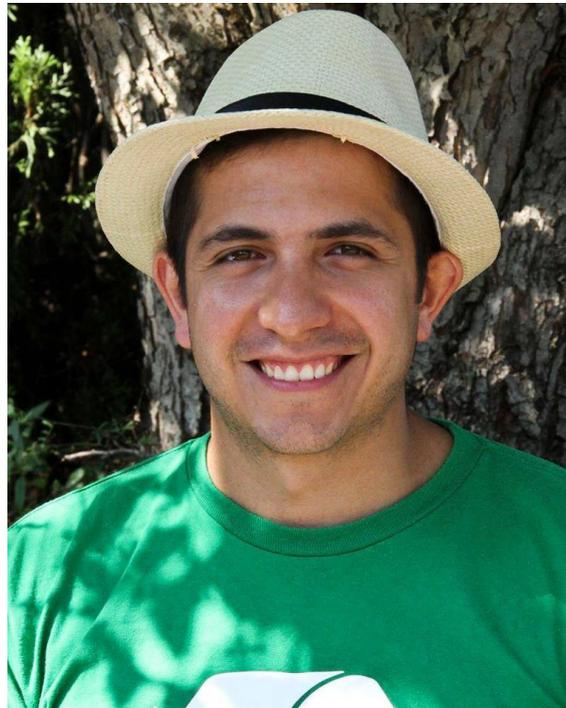


“Once you choose hope everything is possible”



# JUAN VAZQUEZ

Brahma Kumaris



# JUAN VAZQUEZ

Warsaw COP 19 – November 11, 2013  
Interview by Emily Williams and Natasha Weidner  
Transcribed by Paige Gankema

*Juan, where are you originally from?*

I am originally from Mexico, but right now I live in Montréal, Canada. I was born in Mexico and spent the first fifteen years of my life there, and now I've been in Canada for the last fourteen years.

*How do you think your identity, having lived in Mexico for so long with a certain culture, and then moving over to a more Francophone culture, how do you think those two lifestyles have influenced your mindset?*

That's a good question? I guess it's a little like growing a plant. You put a seed in the ground, and then what you do is you transplant the plant to a bigger container. So I feel like Mexico was my original pot, and then I had to transplant into a bigger one. So when I say pot I say my consciousness and awareness became bigger in Canada and it really gave me a lot of my sense of self in Canada I guess. In Mexico we have this millennial long culture. For centuries we had the Mayans, the Aztecs. And somehow in myself there is something that speaks to that, you know that spiritual part is very strong in that Mexican part, but there is also that Canadian aspect which is more refined, newer, and it's a mix of those two. I guess it's the cultures of spirituality of both of them that really inspire me. I really like shamanism and anything related to healing. So I love healing and I love spirituality. So both combined are a great great thing.

*So it's almost like you have this spiritual core; this spiritual, very passionate, creative golden core, with this more refined reaching out exterior. Which I think is wonderful. I've really enjoyed talking a little to you the past few days, and I'm wondering how you think that helps relate to others who don't necessarily share the same ideas and have the same mindset?*

I think listening is one of the first skills that you need to have. And observe. Listen, observe, but observe deeply and listen deeply because when you see beyond the physical aspects, when you see what is beyond the culture, the religion, the sexual preference, you can see that there is something beyond that, that is unique in every human being. I can understand a lot of people and see that whatever they are coming from, they're their unique. Their uniqueness is what is appealing to me. That is what I observe, that is what I hold onto; that uniqueness in them because when you look into that you see wonders. It's like magic really. Because you are seeing what is special in them and not what is wrong, not their physical aspects, but you see beauty. And what is beautiful inside is what shines and then makes everything so interesting; life becomes more interesting.

*What do you think about the level of listening that goes on at the COP? Do people listen well here?*

Well people listen but I am not sure how people can cope with so much information. I think it's important to be present and listen to each other but the quality of listening changes when we are authentic, when we

walk the talk, we need to reach people's minds and hearts in the conversation. Then a deeper dialogue can take place.

*In your wildest dreams, if anything was possible, what would you hope for to happen?*

Anything? It's a good question because once you choose hope everything is possible.

For me, **hope opens the possibility** that humans can live in a better Earth, in a world where there is peace, healing, love harmony, prosperity not only physical but spiritual as well. We can ignite within ourselves deep universal human values, which are the bedrock of any sustainable society. Humanity needs to have more openness, to listen to each other, to reflect on what's really happening; to have more compassion and see the deeper line of reality, what is deeply meaningful and common for all of us. Gandhi says, "Never lose hope in humanity," and that's something I keep in mind especially in this conference. No matter who is talking, let's have faith in humanity. Even though they may be doing something wrong, there is something good in them so it can be changed. In any minute, in any circumstance, you never know. So I'll be open to that possibility, keeping that possibility of hope alive is what I dream of.

*So today was fairly interesting inside with the plenary session because there was a Philippine delegate who talked and it was a very emotional experience. And I feel like a lot of people feel very touched by the typhoon hit in one way or another. How does that resonate with you?*

Last year I went to Qatar for the first week of COY. And then I traveled to Malaysia to another youth conference on climate change. And a third of the youth that went to the conference were from the Philippines. So I made a lot of friends with them. And this week I post a message on Facebook sending all my good feelings to them and their people. It is important for people to be heard, that we see them and acknowledge them when there is something happening. And interesting and unfortunately, sometimes, a bad situation has to occur in order for people to awaken. Even though it's a calamity, even though it's very disastrous, there's always an opportunity for us to change. When I see a disaster s like this it's always reminds me about myself and my personal commitment as a trustee of the earth. Every single thing that I do, every little action that I have, if I throw something on the ground, if I chose to take a car instead of taking a bicycle everything has a consequence – everything has its own cycle. Am I creating positive cycles or am I creating negative cycles that create cyclones? I have the choice to contribute or not contributing positively towards humanity and the planet. So it's very subtle, and everything, everything that I do matters to stop future calamities like this.

*And the friends you made. So you made contact with them all. How are they doing?*

Well, I haven't really had the time to ask them personally each of them how they are, but I know that they are very touched by that disaster. Some I saw were angry and saying that it is worse than hell. I guess what we need to do is give them support and let them know that we are with them in heart and spirit. That we are truly with them.

*Natasha Weidner: I have a question. First of all, I love you. You've done an amazing job. But hearing that your organization is so much geared towards the individual and people all being an equal footing and holding hands and agreeing, I would posit that maybe a lot of the problem with climate change is a very structural problem. Although we have some choices to make as individuals, there are certain individuals and certain institutions with so much power to make so much change that it almost feels like the individual is powerless or*

*what we really need to do is have such a huge mass movement to overcome those powerful interests. I'm just wondering if you can respond to that.*

I believe that we have to become images and voices of hope, we have to become what we want see in the world like Gandhi said, because it is who we become that changes the world. I also believe in coincidences. What if met someone and by being that image I become the instrument to change someone's mindset and that person may be someone in power who can change things around. What if my example ripples like a wave on water, like I am echoing Gandhi's wisdom?



So I think this is also what we come to do to be living examples. How we behave, what our attitudes are can make a big difference. I hold on to the idea that there is hope. There is hope for people to change and to react and to see that there is so much wonder on the Earth. We are losing the opportunity to express the best of ourselves. There is such a beauty you know. Have you ever pondered, "Okay, I'm a human being. I have a spiritual life as well and there is so much we can do?" For me it's amazing to see what humanity can do when work together. I have a dream and maybe my dream is for everyone to awaken and become and give their best to really make the shift we are asking for to make the shift into a better world. And so, thank you. I really like your question, I'm full of hope. I want to say I care, and the green color is hope. I care, I care for hope and I care because I believe in change. And no matter how bad things can be, I think we have to hold to that; there's hope.

Emily: That's beautiful. Thank you so much.

No, thank you for your questions.

*Do you plan to go back to a COP, either in Lima or in Paris? Why or why not?*

Yes I am planning to go to Lima, I already bought my ticket and I have a big smile and am happy to have this new opportunity to share who we are and what we do with the global climate community. Technically I am coordinating the youth activities for Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative at COP20, but personally why I am going is a continuation from the work that we have done in the past, the exploration of relationship that exists between climate change and spirituality. It is a very deep and sacred relationship that deserves to be addressed and addressing it will automatically bring the heart into the negotiations, is a deep reality that we cannot ignore. On the contrary, the more we become aware of it, the more easy and simple is the way to have more authentic success.

*What do you think it will take to secure a just climate treaty and what would that treaty look like?*

It needs **commitment, selflessness, kindness, courage, care, trust and love**. What it is lacking are values and the lack of them is creating the crisis that we are living today. For the treaty to come true there is the need to work from wholeness, to work like a whole organism, and find a common language and have dialogue where values are put into words and action, I firmly believe that values are the most sincere way to approach and achieve something. Values create quality in our lives and relationships, giving dignity to our existence. I would like to see a positive treaty, inclusive, a treaty that the countries of the world will be happy to work with. A treaty where there is a sense of accomplishment for all countries of the world, a source of inspiration, where all our best intentions are captured in simple solutions.

*What is your sense of how the global youth climate justice movement works? How is it doing, in your view? What is your vision of it for the future?*

It's wonderful to see how youth can organize and create events such as the COY, the Conference of Youth. I think is very important for the climate justice to have spaces like this, where we really have the opportunity to grow, to learn, to share our experiences and move forward. When the energy of the youth is focused on something positive we can definitely achieve wonders.

But in order for this to happen we need unity. To really become a global climate community we need, trust, openness, love and cooperation. I am talking about values here which are the foundation of any community, if we as youth are able to tap into these values, if we put them into practice, if we reflect on them, then unity is forged. Otherwise we would be making the same mistakes, working from a superficial level and fragmented place. I have seen also a lot of anger, frustration, anguish and that is understandable when we face a challenge of the magnitude of climate change. But now there is the need to go beyond these negative emotions and search within ourselves for the courage to be and act from a place of inner peace, serenity, love, determination, and non-violence. For me this is the key to success and unity among the youth.

*What does "climate justice" mean to you?*

● **Climate Justice means equity, compassion, brotherhood.** It means to have a broader vision where we see each other as a new global or terrestrial community, where resources are not to be exploited but to be shared. Nothing belongs to us. We are simply trustees and earth-carers of this planet. To fully understand climate justice is necessary to shift the way we think, a shift in our consciousness, to make a quan-

tum leap in our awareness like the physicist- philosopher David Bohm has said, and therefore understand the interconnectedness of all life systems and how these living systems depend on each other.

*How do you see possible futures? What is likely? What is possible? What is ideal?*

There is a saying that those who dwell in the past limit their future and that the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.

I see that **in any crisis there is a great opportunity** to come into a better understanding or greater state of wholeness. I see the future in a very positive way but I have to be realistic. There is always the possibility of failure in the climate negotiations. But failure means that there are other ways to achieve what we want, so again the crisis that humanity is living is an opportunity for all of us to change and reflect how we want the future to be. I have a lot of faith that there is something even better coming, but before we get there I understand that there is a period of transition and knowing that all things move in cycles reminds us that what is unjust now will soon change.

*What gives you hope?*

That all around the world there are those who are not famous but who are well known for the positive love and hope that they bring. These are the lights of the world. Each little light, by keeping itself going, adds to the sparkle around the world, keeping goodness alive, so it becomes a light for the world by keeping myself lit with positive energy. This gives me hope.

*Any last thoughts?*

Thanks for this opportunity is always a pleasure and learning experience to have good questions like this, all the best!!

“My hope is in the fact that youth can make a difference”



## SYLVIA YIRENKYI

Ghana Youth Environmental Movement



## SYLVIA YIRENKYI

Warsaw COP 19 – November 13, 2013  
Interview by John Foran and Corrie Ellis  
Transcribed by Ashley Sneary

My name is Sylvia Yirenyi, I am here with the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts as part of their delegation. And I am from Ghana. I'm twenty-five.

*Is this your first time at the COP?*

Yes.

*It is for many of us.*

[laughs]

*Do you have a group of people here?*

We are actually eight delegates. We have a person from Barbados, from Maldives, Sweden, Canada, and then two of our coordinators are from UK and then another person here, and one from Poland, from here.

*The first question we like to ask about is of each person, we ask what is your journey, what has been your journey, in life, all the way to get here to the COP? You can start as far back as you want.*

Well this is a long journey, well not that long. When I was younger I was excited about Captain Planet, which was a very nice cartoon that I followed a lot. But I wouldn't say I was so keen on environmental issues. But then, for whatever reason, which I am grateful for, I got to study Natural Resources Management at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana. That was not my first program choice; I wanted to do pursue actuarial science. And then you have options to choose different programs, and I chose that because my cousin was offering the same program. So I did it just to please her. So I went there and along the line, I started developing interest for the course, and I got really excited about the environment and all that. But then, my interest was in water and watershed management. And then in final year, I did my project on the government response to climate change. Okay, let me give you the proper title, it was Urbanization and Climate Change: Institutional Management of Impact in the Kumasi Metropolis. So that's when I got to meet most government officials, and I got to know what's really going on in the climate change circle. Also I got to read more about what climate change is and the impact and everything. That's when I got excited about climate change; and then I started working towards it. So after completion I volunteered with an NGO for about a year or so – just to get involved, and know what's going on and everything. All along I have also been a Guide, because I have been a Girl Guide from primary. That's when I really got interested in the environment when I did my project, and after school, I worked with an NGO called the HATTOF Foundation which gave me the opportunity to go to meetings and to be involved in very interesting government work. It's mainly focused on policies and then a few projects, so it was mainly a policy organization, but I worked on a few projects while I was there. I don't know if you have heard of Clean Up the World? It's an Australian High Commission-funded project. It takes place every year in so many countries; I think it's

in September every year. It's Australian High Commission and UNEP. I organized that and it went very well; so I think it made me very excited about the environmental projects. We also ran a coastal restoration project in Ada, which is one of the very impacted communities in Ghana because of climate change. So that got me so interested, and I decided to continue this path.

But of course, I couldn't volunteer forever. So I got a consultancy with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for a while, where I worked with Youth and United Nations Global Alliance (YUNGA division). It was a department under the Natural Resources Department, so I was involved in making these educational materials called challenge badges. They come in various topics including water, food security, biodiversity, among others. These are educational materials on various environmental topics. Children get to learn about the environment and how they can manage it through games, and when they complete each game they are given a badge. And most of the time when it comes to these particular challenge badges, FAO works a lot with WAGGGS, that's Girls Guide. After my consultancy, I met other young people in Ghana who were excited about climate change and were really passionate. We started talking and then I joined the NGO they had set up called Ghana Youth Environmental Movement. So I joined from there and through many more activities. I'm here now, so that's it. I've been in that movement for about a year and a half now.

I train girls (Guides) in my Guiding unit which is a school called Mothercare International. That's where I do my guiding; and as guides we do a lot of volunteering. I also organized the ninetieth anniversary celebration of the association which was on the MDG 7- Environmental Sustainability where we got the then Ministry to take part, and it was very successful. Because of my environmental background, most of the time, the environmental activities are pushed to me, and just recently I organized a water sanitation project with Scouts from Netherlands who came to Ghana to undertake a project. So when WAGGGS opened the application for the COP I applied and got the recommendation of my Association. And here I am now.

*That's fantastic. Can you tell us about a little bit about the Girl Guides? What does it do for children?*

Well, Girl Guides is an association and mainly what we do is to build the capacity of girls in various aspects. So, we don't have a particular focus as like, just environment. We deal with various issues like human rights, violence, and environment. We train girls using various means and we have something called an eight-point program. Well let's say in a term or semester when a topic is picked we devise various programs under it using the eight points of mind building, character, games, creativity, relationship, service, etc. We also go to both local and international camps where the girls get to learn lots of things and meet people from various backgrounds and cultures. I learned how to make soap and beads while I was young during such a camp. So you are trained to do a lot of things on your own and believe in yourself. So that's mainly what we do. And then, we do a lot of leadership training for girls. But most of the time it's very active amongst children and teens, fifteen and below. The youth also receive training but are more involved in training the girls. The youth also often take part in programs such as this one (the COP). We had a delegate from Ghana who went to the Arctic with the Greenpeace on a Save the Arctic Campaign. So that's what most of us do, and that's how guiding operates.

*What are the activities of the organization and your own activities here at the COP?*

With WAGGGS, our main message for this year's COP and has been our message for years, is on capacity building, because we believe that it underpins every other message here and also forms part of the convention. Whether it's finance or its mitigation or adaptation, the capacity of people needs to be built to address

those issues. That is what we have been doing and I think last year – I wasn't here but I've been following it – we did very well with an intervention and we came up with a work program. And at this year's COP, we have been divided into groups, so there's a policy group has made a good intervention and they've been allowed to bring a working paper on capacity building for this years' COP. That's our main message.

#### *What group are you in?*

I'm in the actions group. Lot of actions take place here involving young people. So we are involved in supporting YOUNGO -which is the mother body for youth NGOs at COP – to come up with actions for the COP; I don't know if you've witnessed any of them since you came here. So, we come up with actions, we implement them, and being a WAGGGS delegate too, we also have to come up with our own actions and implement them, and then take part in other activities These actions are aimed at getting our message across in a different ways through activities, act, and plays. So today, we had an action which was on capacity building as well. We went to the plenary space on the minus two floors. We had all the major messages of the COP on cards and all joined together by capacity building. We then shared our key messages to all, and those who were convinced by our messages and agreed to support it took band on their wrist. I wasn't expecting so much support, but a lot of people actually took the band and the our write-ups on our key messages, so I am hoping that by the end of next week we should see very, very good results.

The key message was the fact that one, capacity building is very important. Two, that a lot of young girls in so many countries have been adversely impacted by climate change – a term we are calling “double vulnerability.” This is because girls and young women are already struggling with issues of inequality in Africa and Asia, among other places; therefore when countries are impacted by climate change, it ends up putting much more stress on this group that are already undergoing challenges. Girls have to walk much longer distances for water in drought areas; when there food security issues, men eat first, then women. So our second message is to give a voice to these girls and young women who are at the receiving end of the climate challenges. So we say, “Capacity building is important, and it shouldn't be just for the youth. There should be means of support for such girls wherever they are, to also train them to and build their capacity to adapt to climate change.” So those are some of the things that we talk about.

#### *What does capacity building mean?*

**Capacity-building** is just about inspiring people and building their capabilities to do things, and to take up initiatives, and to be able to rise up to the challenges they are facing, and to be able to solve it by themselves, even if you don't help them. So when you empower them, you've given them enough tools to be able to create the solutions for themselves. That's what capacity building is, basically.

#### *What happens at a training? I know there must be all kinds, but...*

WAGGGS often uses a non-formal approach to capacity building, where we believe in learning by doing. So we don't do the classroom kind of learning, which everybody's tired of. We do the learning where, like I said, we go for camps and then we all learn how to make soaps so you leave there with that skill. So that's how we learn about climate change, we go out for hiking; we do tree planting exercises. Sometimes you are made to come up with a task. For example, “This whole week make sure that you don't waste any food, you eat all the food.” So those are some of the ways you train people to be conscious of what they do, and how it affects climate and then to take part, be part of the solution.

*At what age, and what do you tell these young girls about climate? How do you actually talk about climate change?*

You can't go and stand in front of them and start talking about climate change; that would be almost like lecturing. We have various age ranges in Girl Guides. From about five to ten, they are called Brownies, but in Ghana we call them Huhuwa Guides. Then from ten to fifteen, then you are a Guide. Then from fifteen to about eighteen, you're a Ranger, then you're a Cadet, then you're a Leader. Those are the steps. Depending on the country, some of the age groups may be meshed together. How do we train them about climate change? I think we go to them, and you know, the more you take people out, the more you make them conscious of the environment. So, you make them observe what's going on. I tell them, in Ghana it used to rain a lot in June, July, and then a lot in September. That's our rainy season. But this year, like this, we had very poor rains. You make them observe these things, then you can make them understand what is happening; that's the change that is happening and that is what is called climate change. So you can't just come and tell them climate change, but we make them observe the changes that are going on, then we make them know what is causing the change.

*At each stage, you get somewhat deeper into it?*

Yes, at each age you get more involved and much deeper into it. Most of the time we don't have guiding in most of the senior high schools because at fifteen and eighteen you will be in secondary school. So, from ages fifteen to twenty-five, we all try to meet together. We try to undertake projects together, like what I talked about, the water and sanitation projects. It is a matured stage so you can really discuss climate change and what they can all do to help address the issue. There, we're really doing the hardcore work.

And then outreach, because we also have to spread information about the association. We often go for meetings, and workshops and organize other trainings.

*What was this project you mentioned a day in September?*

It was called Clean Up the World. It is a community-based, environmental campaign that inspires and empowers communities around the globe to clean up, fix up, and conserve their environment. That year, I think the theme was Community Caring for Nature. We picked up the Sakumono Ramsar Site in Ghana as project grounds, as that area had been encroached and degraded by people and most of the trees and the mangroves have been destroyed. We had a documentary on climate change shown on the Friday, and on Saturday we did a cleanup in the morning because the area had become very polluted with dirt and garbage. We also have a tree planting exercise on the site. Then it was ended, with of course some lunch [laughs]. So that was the main activity for Clean Up the World.

*What year was that?*

That was 2010.

*Are those trees growing?*

Yes, they're growing. I've been there once since then. But, because I'm no longer with the NGO, I have not been there much.

*How big is WAGGGS in Ghana?*

Girls Guide in Ghana is big. I can say that we are in almost a hundred schools in Ghana. Or more, because, so it is big, but the issue is very common amongst young people fifteen and below, but not so common amongst the youth because a lot of people drop out and do other things. It's a very common organization most people know about. But for WAGGGS we are about ten million Girl Guides and Girl Scouts from 146 countries across the world,

A very big school can have about hundred Guides, for a very big school; we have like the small, younger ones and then the relatively older ones. And so, I think some schools can get between fifty and one hundred guides. With my unit, I'm just working with the upper primary – that is ten to fifteen – and I'm working with about forty guides. That doesn't include the ten year-olds and below, in one school in Accra. I can't do two schools. [laughs]

*Did you grow up in Accra?*

Yes, I grew up in Accra, but I come from the Eastern Region. It's much more quiet, it's calmer, it's fresher, because it still has more trees. Accra is like the city so it's very busy with all the traffic and everything. The Eastern Region is better, but I would say that very soon it will have a lot of issues there, because real estate companies are coming up in Ghana, and a lot of land has been bought there. That area is one of the cocoa producing areas in Ghana, and Ghana exports cocoa. And cocoa needs to grow in a forest area, so if the forests is cleared very soon we'll lose the forests and we'll lose the cocoa, but I think it's not been considered much, so that's it.

*Is it difficult in Accra, I mean it's not as nice in Accra in some ways, as a way of life, in terms of the environment and so forth? Or do you like the big city?*

Well, sometimes you like to be in the big city because there is a lot to do and there are places to go see, but of course there are days when you'd like to go to a quiet place. I often go there during festivals. We have a festival called Odwira, which is the festival in my hometown and that is in September. So I went in September for that festival; then I came back to Accra, of course. From the house in Accra to that house it would probably take me an hour and thirty minutes.

*Let's talk about your experience at your first COP and did you attend the conference of youth?*

Yes. It was exciting; it was interesting. When I was coming, I did not know what to expect because I hadn't been to a COP before. I had been to a Power Shift before, but I hadn't been to a COY [Conference of Youth] before, so I was wondering what to expect. We came the first day, and it was pretty much interesting – the workshops and the trainings. I think the day of action too was very interesting. The following Monday would have been the Independence Day for Poland. We knew that Independence Day they had a Run for Independence or something like that, so the action was themed a Run for Climate, for Green Independence, or Climate Independence, it was just the same theme but replaced with climate in the title.

It was a video shoot and I think the video is out now, and I hear it's great, but I haven't had the chance to see it. The main concern was to have runners from the green side, and of course from the coal side, run and then of course the green side will win, right? The green side is like the clean, climate side. So it was just trying to say that. And then along the line, of course probably the coal people got tired and then they had to come to the green side for support. That was the whole concept, and I think it also showed the fact that we need each other to win the race. So that was the concept for the video.

*Some of you played the coal side?*

Yes, I was on the green side [laughs]. We did the running on the park. It was interesting because it was cold and then we were outside taking the videos. Lots of people came around; I'm sure they were wondering what we were doing. And I think the most interesting aspect of the video was that while we were running, there was an older man who happened to have been in a green shirt. He was jogging, and we thought, "Oh he should join us to show that it's not just young people. Why not have some older ones?" He was so happy about it, he joined us in the race and it was very exciting. And we had some cute girls also take up some of the banners too, so it was fun.

*So what was it like meeting youths from all over the world to work on climate change?*

I think it was very inspiring. Sometimes we undertake climate projects and environmental projects in our own country, but when we go out there and meet various youth and get to know what they are doing, some of the challenges they face and how they overcome it, or how they are able to coordinate things. You get to learn things; you get to share your experiences, share your struggles, and then know how to move forward from there. So it gives you the extra strength to do more when you go back.



*Would you be the only person from Ghana to come here with YOUNGO?*

Yes, I had two other friends who were coming, but they were both denied visas. We applied through the Netherlands Embassy. But in Nigeria, they were denied visas by the Polish Embassy; about fifty Nigerians were denied visas – I'm not so sure about the number but it was a lot. The Nigerian Youth Delegate here, was able to come because he was with TckTckTck organization, but aside from him, I don't think there is any other Nigerian here. That's how serious the situation is.

*So, if we look at YOUNGO as a whole, how many people have come from the whole continent?*

I've seen other black people around, but I don't think all of them are from Africa. Because in Barbados, they have dark skin, so one can hardly tell using skin color. But it will be a handful, a very few.

*Do you go to the YOUNGO meetings?*

Yes. I think they are very interesting meetings. It helps because I mean we are all part of YOUNGO, and then as YOUNGO we need to organize activities and move forward. So we get to plan the activities, we get to plan the path YOUNGO wants to go, we get to agree on decisions whether YOUNGO is going to take a certain action or take a certain stand or not. And I think it's very diplomatic, it's a very open platform; there's no serious hierarchy, everybody has a say, every organization's view is respected. Like I remember when we were told about this I was shocked because if an issue is brought up and even one organization blocks it, it will not move forward, that is very democratic, I think. I know things are not blocked very often. But I think recently there's a workshop or training, and I think World Bank is one of the sponsors. So, the issue was brought up at YOUNGO meeting, I think, yesterday as to whether YOUNGO should go or not. And some organizations thought that because World Bank is funding a lot of coal related projects, they don't want to go, but others wanted to go. But since they have said they don't want to go and they are part of YOUNGO, and if YOUNGO goes that means they are a part, we couldn't go. If you want to go as individuals, that means you received a personal invitation. But if the invitation is for YOUNGO, then you can't go. I think it's a World Bank event where they are trying to create the impression that they are involving young people and their organizations and that's it.

*How do actions get proposed? Where do they come from?*

The ideas come from peoples' minds, of course. You just have to work on ideas until you just get it right, then you have to fill the form, which is very technical this year. So you have to fill the form and submit it to the COP by three o'clock, and then they can decide to approve it or not approve it.

*Have they not approved any actions here? That you know of?*

I haven't heard of any action not being approved. Probably they would offer a few suggestions so that you fine-tune it, but I haven't heard of any action being refused.

*I'm interested in how within YOUNGO the idea comes up "Let's do this, or let's do that"?*

YOUNGO also has a communication working group, and action working and other working groups. So the action working group is responsible for coming up with an action and then working on it, and then you inform everybody and then we just take part in it. That's my working group also. I'm enjoying it. I would say yes at the same time because I like to be on the move, so I like that. And I think it hasn't given me much of a

chance to be in there to see what's going on inside the COP, which I am also very much interested in. I think that's the other part of it, but hopefully I think that after today, I will be less busy. So for tomorrow I will try *and do that*.

*What's been the most exciting and interesting action that has taken place for you?*

I would say my action [laughs]. There are two, my action and another action going today. We had cards, and with them the messages were in two different areas. One was about the various messages under the convention that had to do with finance, mitigation, and everything. So if it's mitigation we write "Mitigation needs capacity building." If it's finance, we say, "Finance needs capacity building." If it's adaptation we do the same. And the other one had to do with the various tools and the capacity building. It was capacity building equals knowledge, equals technology transfer, equals education, so that was the message. And we had arm bands with us, and then we had our key message. So we went to the plenary hall. There's a corridor there where we stood there with our cards and had other people with the key message so we approached people who passed by, and asked them if they thought capacity building was necessary and if they were ready to support us for it. And most of them said yes. That was exciting because I didn't know what to expect. But most of them said yes, and they actually took the bands and took the message and took contact and everything to get back to us, which was very great. And then the other action that was interesting is the Young and Future Generations Day action where people had tapes, I don't know if you've seen it?

People had tape on their mouth and a sheet of paper around themselves. With dates that are yet to come, so it could be "5<sup>th</sup> July 2053" or something. To represent the unborn generation and the tape on the mouth was to show that they have no voice and they're not being listened to. It was to draw people's attention to the future generation. You have to pick a venue for your actions. So I think they picked their venue and then so they walked to that venue and then they moved around to get the attention, to get people asking questions and that was it.

Today is the Young and Future Generations Day. This year's COP, they have tried, because children under eighteen have been given three days; normally it's one day. But the person who had three days, after talking to him, I think he said he's the only person who had three days, most of the rest had one day. So I don't know how that came up. I think when you come in you need to have like an escort or somebody who'll be with you to just take care of you or something, I don't know. He's a German; he's not from here.

*Corrie Ellis: What is the biggest support for you to be an activist, to be here?*

When it comes to support, I won't say I'm getting so much support. The NGO I talk about doesn't have any funds, we haven't received any funds from anywhere. So we actually work from our pockets.

I'm with the Ghana Youth Environmental Movement. So, it's young people, but I think because we are passionate and we understand it, we are ready to support an activity, an action, and we try to make actions as cost effective as possible. So in terms of that support, it's not a motivation to be in the field, but it's about passion and it's about drive. And I think being able to have other young activists around me and then we get to do things together is a big support. So I think there is some support because when we meet and we get to plan activities, we get to see more young people get interested and come onboard, and it's very fulfilling. But WAGGGS is supporting all her delegates at COP.

*JF: What do you think about this global youth climate justice movement? Do you think you can remain connected to it in some way, are there plans for that?*

I want to be connected to it as long as possible. I think it's very important. Countries have contributed to climate change and we will not deny the fact that some developing countries have also committed some amount by beginning to develop. But then someone has caused the havoc and lives are being lost because of that. So let's at least look at that. We need justice for those lives, we need justice for those communities, we need justice for those countries. When that one is addressed then we can talk about equally sharing responsibilities, but if you haven't addressed those justice issues, and those life issues and those community issues, you can't talk about equality. Because then we are not on the same platform, somebody has the higher leverage over another, and it's not fair.

*What do you mean by justice?*

● **I'm talking about fair treatment to the vulnerable person or to the impacted person.** I mean, let's see what's happened in the Philippines. I think the best justice they can get right now is support for a concrete action or a concrete policy or something to come out of COP this year. I think that's the best justice Philippines can get for this year. So that's what I mean by justice, not just about like the court case or anything, but it's about support and response to actions, which would help save the whole world or planet.

*And do you think that could happen here?*

Here? I think a lot can happen here that will influence 2015, which everybody seems to be excited about. And I think, I mean, we have just this COP and next COP, so it's like just two COPs and it's not enough. So depending on how negotiations go, I think a lot can be done this year.

*Do you have any connection with the Ghana's official delegation?*

I happen to know most of them, informally. Because I did an internship with EPA in Ghana and I have worked with and done a few things with them in the ministry before, so I know most of them from meetings and workshops. So I kind of know them.

*Do you have an opportunity to be in touch with them here?*

We haven't had any official meeting, but we try to keep updated on issues or if there's anything. I know we are trying to organize a side event but I don't know if I'll be around for that event because I'm going to be here just for the first week. After Sunday I'm out of here, which is bad. We are trying to work on something.

What I will say about movement building in Ghana is a very new concept. So people are not so comfortable with it because a lot of young people who want to get involved in movement building are being seen as kind of rebellious and stubborn. Most parents really know that their children are involved in movement building; probably they know they are working with an NGO, but not the exact activity, so it's very interesting. And then climate movement building in Ghana is getting almost no support.

We have just two movements in Ghana: Ghana Youth Climate Coalition and Ghana Youth Environmental Movement. And all of them are youth. For the first one, the leader is still in school, so they're just pretty small, and the second one is us, of course. So it's a very young sector in Ghana, but we are hoping that for next year to build up because next year Ghana is supposed to organize a Power Shift. So hopefully that

would work things out and get more people on board, as I'm part of Ghana Youth Environmental Movement, and I'm part of the group organizing Power Shift.

*Tell us a bit about the Global Power Shift in Istanbul.*

[laughs] It was big; it was interesting. Meeting with 500 people from all over the world was great. It was difficult to believe 500 people would be there, but we went and that was true. It was a training ground for me because before then, I hadn't really received much training on movement building. I was just working on what I think is right, but I got a lot of training there. At Istanbul, I was more involved in the digital training and the digital aspect of it, which was very interesting because I learned about the skill of trying to do an online and offline merging to get people to not just "click, click, click," but to take part in actions. And then we had a march on the Saturday. We had a march or a rally through town against the coal plants establishment, and then it was followed by a nice cruise.

*Can you tell us about this Power Shift? Are you going to play a large role?*

We met with Ghana Youth Environmental Movement because we are working on a coal campaign. The government of Ghana has suddenly decided to go into a coal power plant. So it's one of the main focuses for Power Shift in Ghana. To raise awareness because of the government's plan, and to put pressure on them to drop the plan. A Chinese company called, I think, Shenzhen, made a proposal to the Ministry of Energy about establishing a coal-powered plant. The government has accepted, and plans are being put in place for this. Unfortunately, most Ghanaians have a bit of apathy. Probably because we are tired of the government, so most times we don't even react to what the government does. I think they thought they would get the same response for the establishment of the plant, so they gladly published it on the website and made news about it. And then we got a hold of it and we said, "No." So we started making noise about it; the ministry never came out again on the issue. They later said, "Oh it's just a proposal and we have yet to consider it," and that they'll get back to us and then we'll talk about it. But because we got media attention, the government now doesn't want to tell us whether it's going ahead with it or not. But then, I mean we got to know that they are going to go ahead with it anyway. And we know that the coal is being shipped from South Africa because Ghana doesn't have coal plants.

*Wow.*

It doesn't even make sense. It doesn't make much sense that we are shipping the coal from South Africa to create a coal powered plant in Ghana. When Ghana has a lot of solar, Ghana has a lot of other resources that can be used for energy. And we're supposed to reach a ten percent renewable energy by 2015, but we haven't even gone halfway there, like five percent. We don't understand why the government will go out of the policy because coal is not even part of it and then go for that.

*Would this be the first coal plant?*

Yes.

*So how do you generate electricity?*

Ghana is mainly hydro. We have a huge dam, and then a bit of thermal, and then biomass. There's a solar plant being established in the north of Ghana right now. And I learned that it'll probably be the biggest in either West Africa or Africa but have yet to hear about that.

*That's pretty good.*

Hmm, so that's good, but I think now they are going for coal.

*How do you see the future with regard to the whole climate dilemma that we're in? What's the ending? Is it going to be happy ending?*

I don't see an ending to this any time soon, but I think that countries can come up with a good agreement, a fair agreement. I'm hoping that 2020 will bring something good out. But I'm more hoping for good results at 2015 because that's what would determine how 2020 would be. I'm hoping that we get more commitment from countries, we get more people seeing the reality and the challenges some of us are facing and dealing with in our countries because of climate change. And, come up with real commitments and real support for climate change.

*Do you have hope, personally?*

**I DO HAVE HOPE, BUT I WON'T SAY MY HOPE IS IN THE COP.** My hope is in the fact that youth can make a difference and we can get our governments to act in our countries. I think when we push our governments, then there will be a change at COP. At the Young and Future Generations Day meeting today, Christiana Figueres said that by the time government delegations come here for the COP they have made up their mind about what they are going to say or do. So it is up to us to convince them in our various countries, then we can know we are going somewhere. But if we don't convince them there, and come and make noise here, it won't achieve much of a result. So that's where my hope is, that we influence them from there, at home.



“Climate activism is what I breathe and do”



# LEEHI YONA

SustainUS and The Canadian Youth Climate Coalition



# LEEHI YONA

Warsaw COP 19 – November 19, 2013  
Interview by John Foran  
Transcribed by Hannah Ward

*What organization are you with this year?*

I am here with SustainUS as a member of their Agent of Change delegation.

*Now, we have to ask this question – what is your age?*

I'm twenty; I will be twenty-one in December.

*Where are you from?*

[Laughs] You know "third culture" kids? That's me. I was born in Israel, and my whole extended family is there. I grew up in Montreal, Canada, and I am currently living in Hanover, New Hampshire studying.

*So what would be your citizenship?*

Israel Canadian – I have dual citizenship.

*Living in Dartmouth.*

Yes.

*What year? Are you still at Dartmouth?*

Yeah, I'm a sophomore.

*And this is not your first time at the COP, it's your second?*

It is my second COP, and it is my fourth U.N. conference. I was at COP18, Rio+20, and the fifty-first Commission on Social Development, which was in February in New York. I'm actually co-leading a delegation to the Fifty-Second Commission this February.

*What are you leading at the fifty-second one?*

I'm leading a SustainUS delegation. We're still figuring out what we're doing. It's funny – I'm working on another UN Conference, while at a UN Conference.

*Brilliant, brilliant. Well here we go – this is where you get to go off on your tangents.*

Ohhh... crap.

*What journey has brought you to this COP right now? Think back and tell us how you got interested, and tell us how you got involved in climate activism. Tell us why you care and where you come from.*

Ah gosh, this is going to be such a long answer. Okay...where do I start? I used to be the typically shy kid who didn't really ask any questions. I would sit in the back of the class, and never saw myself as being a

leader whatsoever – which most people find hilarious when they meet me now because that doesn't look like me at all. I wanted to take Mandarin in high school as an elective class, but there weren't enough people, so I had to take environmental biology. I was sixteen at the time and I did not know about climate change at that point – I had no idea about anything. I just learned all these things about climate change, and it was a really hands on class with an amazing teacher. It kind of just seemed to me like: "Whoa, there's this massive issue here we need to deal with," and it really felt like nobody was doing anything about it, relative to the urgency. So I revived the environmental club at my school.

#### *What school?*

West Island College, a high school in Montreal, and we were called the Green Warriors. We did a lot of things from local community work to school-wide work. For example: cleaning shorelines, planting trees, recycling programs, and educational things to try and educate students. And I kind of just, I don't know, something happened along those lines and I got more and more involved, and just began taking any opportunity that came my way. I started getting more and more involved in the community and ended up getting more involved with local organizations. I serve on the board of directors for the Green Coalition – I'm by far their youngest member. The Green Coalition is a group in Montreal that tries to protect green and blue spaces, so forest and water areas. Somehow I got selected as a finalist for a scholarship in Canada called the Top Twenty under Twenty when I was seventeen. They had a leadership conference for the alumni, including finalists and recipients, and that is when I met some people who had gone to COP 15 in Copenhagen. I was shocked because I had learned a lot about Copenhagen that December when I took that environmental biology class, when I raly got involved in climate change, and I never realized that you could go to these conferences.

I applied for the Canadian Youth Delegation to Durban and I got wait listed; same thing happened with Qatar, I was also wait listed. I ended up going to Rio+20 with the Quebec's social economy group, the Groupe d'Économie Solidaire du Québec. Then I went to Qatar with Professor Michael Dorsey and kind of did my own thing. I got really engaged in this, and so I am kind of at this place right now where I try to get involved in environmental or climate activism from local to international levels. The international stuff is these kinds of negotiations. Locally, I founded and I'm currently co-organizing the Divest Dartmouth group. Among other things, I was one of the organizers for PowerShift Canada in 2012, and was a New Hampshire state lead for Power Shift USA this year. That is more regional/national stuff, so I am kind of trying to do a mix of things. I know it sounds a lot, but for me being here is an incredible opportunity. But it also makes me realize how important domestic grassroots work is, so I am trying to keep a balance between them.

*So would you say you live for this stuff? This is your identity? It sounds like you're super involved.*

**CLIMATE ACTIVISM IS WHAT I BREATH AN DO.** Sometimes I wonder, "If only I didn't have school in the way, I could do so many more things." I am really busy all the time, and people tell me sometimes to scale back on some of the stuff that I do, but I would be so miserable if I didn't do those. With that being said I don't know if it's... I mean I know I am known as an environmentalist... but there are also a lot of other things that I do. This is just like one of the more dominant ones.

*Let's talk about that. These other things, how do you connect them all? What are they? How do you connect them?*

When I have the time, I adore art and I paint. I've engaged a lot in trying to figure out how to put art with activism together, incorporating them. I am really interested in the intersectionality of climate change: how to look at it from artistic, economic, political, scientific, and social perspectives. I also am involved in something called the Weekend to End Women's Cancers in Montreal, which is a 60-kilometer, two-day walk. It happens every August to raise funds for the women's cancer ward at a local hospital. That is something that is really close to my heart, so I lead a group of students through this walk. In order to do the walk you have to raise \$2,000, which is really tough for a student, but this is our fourth year and we have raised more than fifty-one thousand dollars. Crazy. So that's a big part of what I do as well, and just trying to keep balance between that. I am also involved with the Jewish community at Dartmouth, and in Montreal. So, I'm trying to bridge connections between all of that, but also it's kind of nice to have sometimes things that are a little bit distinct because I feel like environmental work is literally all I do and I never really disconnect from it.

*Okay, okay... wow. Let's talk about your experience at COP 18. Maybe before that though, you're at Dartmouth College, sophomore. What are you studying? Is it related to all of this?*

[laughs] I haven't declared my major yet, I am leaning towards is doing a double major in Environmental Studies and Ecology/Biology, with a minor in Public Policy. So yes, my studies are pretty relevant to climate change [laughs]. I am trying to get a basis in, like I said, a social, economic, political, scientific, background of environmental issues because I don't feel like I know what I want to do for my career yet. But I know that some of the politicians don't know nearly enough science, and scientists don't necessarily have the means to get involved in policy, so I am trying to get a basis in both disciplines regardless of where I end up.

*Okay, tell us about COP 18: being there, what did you do, what did you observe?*

It's funny, because I think most of the youth here, especially ones who are veterans of COP, understand that there's this moment that happens your first COP, where you arrive super-idealistic and then the reality of this place hits you. You think, "If only I could make it to this conference, there would be so many things I would do, and so much progress I'd help to accomplish." And this was me in Rio, totally me in Rio. I thought, "If only I can be a voice for youth, if I can try and hold my representatives accountable, if I can just try and make people hear, maybe I can do something here." And you know, realizing that I am at the UN, this is not just any little meet up, it's the UN. So there are global decisions being made here, and then you get here, and very quickly you realize you are kind of this vestigial organ. You do not have a say in negotiations. If you are lucky, you might make it into the backs of some plenaries, but a lot of things are closed, and a lot of countries come here already with a plan of what they want to do that was decided upon months ago. So nothing really productive really comes out of these conferences, and you have this moment where you are totally depressed. Actually, this morning at 4 a.m., I was talking to some SustainUS delegation members – most of the delegates who came with us this year are new – I was talking to them and they said, "What's the point, you know, we're literally just chronicling our demise, what are we doing here? What's the point of being here? This is so depressing, this sucks," and this is at 4 a.m., right? So I think a big part of attending COPs and other UN conferences is feeling that initial idealism crash and burn, and then picking up the pieces. When I went to Rio, I was totally devastated. At first, I was really idealistic, and then I was really mad. It was the first time I really cried about climate change; meeting people who are so directly affected, and then knowing that you come from a country that has a huge impact to other peoples' livelihood, but is doing absolutely nothing to rectify that, is just heartbreaking.

Basically, getting to COP, I kind of had the mindset that I already understood that this was not going to be this little perfect meetup where if I am here I can do something. My main goals there were to hold our representatives accountable; since we don't have a lot of Canadian media here – we actually don't have any Canadian media here – trying to report honestly and vulgarize the jargon so people can understand it back home, trying to be a voice for youth here, trying to be open minded and learning. Since it was my first time and I knew that this was just this huge thing, and I was trying to form collaborations with people later on. And so, that was kind of what I did at COP; I took a part in a lot of actions, and things like that. I helped organize rallies and nonviolent direct-actions. I also somehow ended up speaking as a youth representative on a panel for the Arctic Council, where they had ministers from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Greenland, and supposedly Canada, but they canceled ten minutes before the event was supposed to happen. This was a high level dialogue and because it was a panel they had to listen to what I had to say, so I tried to use that as kind of a forum for really just putting a lot of pressure on the negotiators.

*How did you do that when you started?*

I think I started my presentation along the lines of, "Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak here. I appreciate it because youth rarely get the opportunity to have a voice here, but because this is such a rare opportunity I am not going to sugarcoat anything." And then I just, you know, ripped on a lot of them. My main goal was to hold Canada accountable because Canada will not meet with environmental NGOs at COP; they will not meet with youth. And because I was not with the Canadian Youth Delegation, the Canadian government knew that I was Canadian, but I don't think they realized who was speaking and what I was doing. I knew something was up because the day before the event all of the aides, and myself – and somebody from World Wildlife Fund was also speaking – they all came to a briefing to make sure we would be on track with the topic of the event, and the only one that took furious notes was the Canadian aide. She wrote my name down and everything, and I knew... because if you Googled me one of the first things that would have come up, during that time especially, was the op-ed that I wrote when I was in Rio – that said I was ashamed to be Canadian because of the actions my government was taking – plus I've written a lot of stuff about Peter Kent, who was the environmental minister at the time because I have a really strong dislike for him. Coincidentally at this COP, it was the first time that Peter Kent decided to meet with climate NGOs. Which is, in comparison to the meeting of the Arctic Council where Canada was the incoming presidency, is not important whatsoever. So what happened though, is that conveniently ten minutes before this event was supposed to happen, he rescheduled that NGO meeting to be during the Arctic Council.

*That didn't go so well for him as I recall.*

No, of course it wouldn't.

*He was afraid.*

I mean—and again I'm speculating – he would have much rather had a closed door meeting with NGO's where there isn't much press, than be on a panel for the Arctic Council which is important. They had a bunch of news outlets there because of the environment ministers that were there, then have a Canadian youth publically address and also expose him for all that Canada was doing at the COP.

*So did you talk about Canada and the COP?*

I did. It was tough because this panel ended up being mostly Scandinavian ministers; which are not really the countries which were disruptive, but I had spoken to a lot of Arctic youth and a lot of NGOs from these countries and tried to incorporate a lot of issues that they might be dealing with in my presentation. So Denmark is exploring a lot of offshore fracking – I spoke about that. I spoke about how youth experience the impacts of the Arctic, and spoke to the ministers and said, “Look, it is your responsibility to ensure that my generation, and the generations after me, have a livable future. It is your responsibility; we are holding you accountable to it. You are in an international forum where you have the power to side and say, “No, we will not agree to this.” You have the power to put pressure on other countries. You should either step up and do something about this, or you should step aside.” It was kind of wonderful because I felt as though they all suddenly became really uncomfortable. I oftentimes talk about whether, if negotiators’ children were at the table with them, they would still make the same decisions. I try to remind them that they have the opportunity to tell their grandchildren that they knew climate change was happening, and that they did absolutely everything in their power to stop it; otherwise they will owe their grandchildren more apologies than they will ever live to make. It was kind of awesome to make them feel so uncomfortable because they had no choice but to listen to me; I wasn’t asking a question as an audience member – I was a fellow panelist.

*Was that the press conference with Peter Kent?*

Yes.

*That the people stood up with the t-shirts turning their back on Canada?*

That was Durban. Yeah, that was awesome. I remember hearing about that back home. What happened after Durban was that pretty much, and you can probably speak to this more than I can, but pretty much every COP towards the end of it – more for a cathartic reason honestly – people want to get de-badged. They are tired (especially youth), fed up, thinking, “Why are we here? What is the point of this fancy little thing if we don’t actually have a voice?” And so people take part in unsanctioned actions that get them de-badged, and usually there is no issue with coming back to the conference the next year. What happened in Doha was that people who had been de-badged in Durban – for whatever reason – people who have done it before, and had come back to COPs afterwards, where nothing was any different – people who received their accreditation letters from the UN, who bought their tickets and came, and who didn’t know anything would be any different, came to sign up to get their official I.D. and were told “Oh, you’re not on our list for people who got their badge. You cannot come here.” And some people who groveled received I.D.’s after a few days. Some people, who were a little bit sassier, did not receive their badges until intense pressure from civil society. People were very cautious of that, and a lot of youth were weary of getting de-badged because getting de-badged when you are first starting to get involved in these negotiations, and you’re young – that has a huge impact. Even if you’re de-badged for five years, you’re practically no longer a youth when you’re eligible to come back to these negotiations. So there was less de-badging this time around in Doha – the only people as far as I know who got de-badged at COP18 were the two members of the Arab Youth Climate Movement, one from Algeria and one from Libya.

*What did they do?*

They held up a banner in an unsanctioned space, and it was an unsanctioned action. Basically what they did was hold up a banner saying something like, “Qatar, why are you hosting, not leading?” Something along those lines. They got de-badged immediately, and they also got deported because their visa was contingent

on their accreditation. That was a huge wake-up call for youth because a lot of people didn't realize they would get deported. So that really kept it down.

*Was that in the first week?*

I think it was in the second week.

*You mentioned the Canadian youth delegation, and I am quite interested to hear why they decided not to come this year. Even though you haven't been directly inside the CYD, it is an organization I am quite interested in. Can you tell us a little bit about your sense of that delegation from having applied, and then being in Doha and sort of being with them in some ways, and maybe a little bit about why they are not here this year?*

Yeah. They are awesome. I love the CYD. I think nothing brings people together better than hatred of Harper, and his environmental policies. Prior to coming to Dartmouth, when I was still in Montreal, I would attend student protests that happened daily to protest a proposed Quebec government tuition hike that would raise fees from two-thousand to four-thousand dollars a year. This brought together 250,000 people every single day. So coming to Hanover, New Hampshire and to Dartmouth, where the town population is barely 10,000 people, and where students more easily conform than resist, was quite a big contrast compared to what I was used to in Canada. In the same way, looking at YOUNGO as a whole, I see the CYD as being radical, or trying to push the envelope a little bit more, when it comes to getting things done at COPs.

I also think that, while many youth delegations here have some kind of influence on their countries (however small they may be), Canadian youth have a true challenge in these negotiations. The Canadian government is simply astounding in its disruptive actions here. Therefore, I can understand why the CYCC preferred to Cam, the Director of the CYCC, was telling me how Canadians have their work cut out for them at home. We are being attacked on all sides, we have pipeline projects proposed everywhere, tankers, rail, we had the Lake Megantic derailment in July which killed forty-seven people, and basically we are being attacked on all fronts. We also have a government that could literally not care less about what NGOs think. I was talking to Maude Barlow, Chair at the Council Canadians, a couple months ago, and we were talking about this and she shared my frustration; we can't get mad because there currently is a majority government and they can pass whatever they want, and there is nothing we can really do about it. A lot of the Members of Parliament who are in the Conservative Party are from Alberta where there is really strong support.

So, there is a lot of focus on acknowledging the fact that you cannot do a lot at these conferences to try and influence Canada. Canada is probably the country you can least influence at this conference. Typically Adopt a Negotiator trackers will follow negotiators, meet with them, try to work with them, and my role is to not do any of that because it is completely useless. It will be a waste of time and energy to do that, it is more about trying to figure out how to connect these issues to things back home. So, a lot of the Canadian youth delegates are just staying home to focus more on Power Shifts and other regional campaigns. Part of the initiative of the CYD not to come here was also trying to pressure the Conservative government not to come because they're useless and distractive. So they have this whole petition telling Canada to stay home and not come to these negotiations because they're only doing bad things. This weekend, November 16<sup>th</sup>, they had Defend Our Communities. It was a big national day of action where they had more than 130 communities engage in some type of action - more than ten thousand people took a part in that. So there is more of a focus on domestic stuff because they have so many battles to fight at home.

*Is CYD an ongoing, year-round, organization that actually does climate justice in Canada then?*

So the CYD is a product of the CYCC, the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition, like you probably have heard of the AYCC, KYCC, and so on. The CYCC is probably the most influential youth climate NGO in Canada – there are some others, but it is the biggest one, it is national. The CYCC is responsible for organizing PowerShift. You would think that by all the stuff they do that they are this huge organization with an office, and headquarters – that’s what I thought they were – but it’s just Cam [Fenton] who gets paid, and everyone else is a volunteer I think. They accomplish an incredible amount for such small capacity. They organize all of those things, and they work with different organizations. There is a big political organization called LeadNow, which is just trying to get the government to work on certain issues. They are pro-democracy, they’re awesome people.

*Is that a youth organization?*

No, it is all encompassing. They have a huge base in Canada, I think in the hundreds of thousands. They are the ones who exposed a lot of different scandals and things like that. They collaborate a lot with different groups.

*Are you a member of the CYCC?*

Yup, since 2010.

*Before we get to COP 19, let’s hear about PowerShift. What was your first Power Shift?*

Canada, 2012. I had no idea what was going on; I got there not really knowing what it was, just knowing that it would be really awesome. For PowerShift Canada I was on the francophone caucus, and the media/communications and outreach/recruitment working groups. I worked on trying to get people to come there: I had just previously been on the Yukon and was trying to get Arctic First Nations from the Yukon to come. PowerShift Canada brought together 1500 young people, and it was kind of amazing. I think in some ways I feel like the climate community, the activist community, is very tight, so it might be kind of hard to become a part of that, especially if these are people who have been involved with the CYCC for a while. But, I just had so much fun because PowerShift basically put all of my favorite people in one place. I enjoyed Power Shift Canada because I felt like it really had that grassroots element to it, where it trained people took the lead on climate issues. Having worked with organizing PowerShift Canada and then moving on to organize Power Shift in the US, there are a lot of things I’ve noticed that the Energy Action Coalition could learn from the CYCC and the way they do things. I found that Power Shift USA was very hierarchical. I was one of her state leads, and then I have to find five regional coordinators, and those five regional coordinators I was supposed to find five local recruiters, and those five local recruiters would have to find five people they want to bring to Power Shift. I was not a huge fan of that. The CYCC was more organic. That being said, PowerShift Canada was on a smaller scale. We were trying to bring 1,000 people to Power Shift Canada, and the US was trying to bring 10,000. So it was clearly way more logistical. I like Power Shift in the US a lot because all of my COP friends, the SustainUS Delegation, Divestment friends, just any climate activist I knew from all over the country were just all there so it was awesome to be hanging out with everyone. I think it was great because the Divestment Movement is becoming really big in Canada, but just exploding in the US. It was kind of great to have all those people come and focus on Divestment. For Dartmouth we sent down a couple students, and it was great to have people who were really energized about that.

*Emily, who is in our group here, was there. She was our sort of lead Divestment person. So that's super, that whole thing is really helpful. Did you follow the big global Power Shift last June?*

I did. I applied, and I wasn't expecting to get accepted because of the limits on global north and American youth. I followed it a lot. I think International movement is kind of interesting because you have people who come from very different communities and very different situations politically. So, you know, there is a very big difference between all of that. If you were working on organizing in Delhi, you do not have the same kinds of goal as if you are organizing in Boston, or Sweden. I think GPS was really great because it kind of brought all that together. Also, one of the reasons why I love COP – there are very few things I like about COP – but one of the things I love about it is meeting all my friends, and meeting people who are from Kenya, Ghana, and just everywhere in the world, Australia, the UK, who are all working on similar things that I am working on. There is that incredible feeling you have when you realize you are not alone, and that there's this collective movement growing to fight climate change. I think Global Power Shift is really important in making that happen, and having Phase two where people go to Power Shift and they come back and organize local, regional work in their communities. I think that is incredibly powerful.

*Me too. I think it is a huge step forward in the youth climate justice movement. Which in turn, is leading the climate justice movement. I think the youth are leading, but that is just my two cents.*

Definitely.

*That's why we are here.*

Of course.

*Tell us about the Divestment movement and your experience in it.*

(Laughs) Dartmouth is a special place. Maybe I'll start with saying that when I was in Rio I briefly met Bill McKibben, and when I moved to the US I had no contacts in the climate world. I had built this really great network of climate activists in Canada, but I knew virtually no one in the US. I contacted Bill and asked him if he could plug me in somehow, and this was maybe September of last year when divestment had unofficially just started. I tried to work on that, but no one seemed really interested at Dartmouth at all. Then I was at COP when there was a New York Times article about divestment, and it spotlighted Brown. Then someone sent an email to the environmental listserv at Dartmouth asking why we weren't doing this if Brown was... typical Ivy League mentality. But we launched our campaign.

Dartmouth is an interesting place because we only have 4,000 students, and that means we have a very small environmentally minded student population to work with. Most of those people are interested in composting, and reusable water bottles, and things that are really great; but acknowledging the fact that you're at a school where you can have a huge impact on things; it is just not looking at the bigger picture in my opinion. Todd Stern, who is the lead negotiator here, is an alum. Dartmouth alumni love getting to know students, so it would not be an issue to try to influence them in some way. We probably would have access that a lot of other students won't, but that was just an example. So my ultimate goal is to get that momentum going where students think beyond campus. Divestment is wonderful because it is campus-focused but connected to that international community of schools that are working towards this. Also, it is connected regionally, especially to a lot of schools in Boston since we are so isolated, which is really great. So it is an uphill battle. I think we have a lot more support from alumni than we do from students, which is kind of sur-

prising. Louise Erdrich was one of the first people who signed our petition. She gave the commencement speech in 2009.

We fortunately have a lot of people supporting us now. We had a Dialogue on Divestment that three students organized. It was a ton of work and organized by just three students. We had Terry Tempest Williams, who was a visiting professor in the spring, and Bill McKibben, and a professor from the business school, and some students talk about Divestment. We were really hoping that maybe we could get 150 people to come, and we had a room that was 170-person capacity. It turned out that the event was beyond standing room, people came and didn't know where to stand so they just left. We had more than 250 people there, which was the largest attendance for an environmental-related event in recent memory at Dartmouth. So we're gaining a lot of traction – we think we're getting a lot more coverage from the very conservative newspaper, and you wouldn't expect it. I think they think that they are being really negative because they're saying, "The environmentalists are taking over, they are sweeping campus, and you have to watch out because they are going to win." And, it is just so positive for us (laughs). We are kind of like the CYCC where we are just a few people, but people who are working really hard so it looks as if we are really big. So, we are working on building that.

*So, the Global Youth Climate Justice Movement, what is your sense of it? Its strengths? Its weaknesses? Its trajectory? How is it building or not building? Just talk about it for us.*

● **That is a big question**, and I think that one of our strengths is that we are a moral voice in a lot of cases because we are the current generation, we are the future generation, we are the ones to inherit the world that we are currently ruining or saving. I think that has a lot of influence. I also feel like, and I heard this a couple weeks ago, that as you get older you get more conservative and less liberal. I guess that might be true, but I think the great thing about the youth climate movement is that we are idealistic, and you need to be idealistic. You need to demand more than is currently being given; business as usual is not going to cut it. And so I think the youth climate movement is really wonderful in that we are actively working really hard towards making this happen. There is so much organizing because the movement is growing, and divestment is a huge part of it, but so are the COPs. I see youth as being a huge part of the movement worldwide. That being said, in terms of weaknesses, one of the weaknesses I find, especially here, is that there are such petty differences that people are frustrated over. I feel like this is true for a lot of environmental NGOs in general, you know, and some people get discouraged with that because if YOUNGO can't agree on something, how can we expect the UN to agree on anything? How can we expect our governments to do the same when we as a small group that has such similar interests, and agree on most things, cannot agree on specific aspects of actions, campaigns, letters, and such?

I spent the semester studying a lot of rhetoric for social justice, and reading a lot of papers – one thing I have noticed is that we do not celebrate. We work so hard, and we want to reach this goal, and we're going to reach it, and once we do or we don't, it's kind of like, "Oh, cool, we've done this," and we go and keep moving on. That leads to so much burn out, and I know so many people who are so active in the youth climate justice movement and just completely shut off because they just can't deal with the pressure; they are always pushing themselves and sacrificing their lives for an issue that is so pressing and urgent, but they do not take the necessary time to replenish and celebrate their victories. Another thing too is that some people feel like they need to be really active, and you have to commit fully to this cause. Which, I mean, I am a hypocrite because this is a huge part of my life, but I feel like that might be alienating to some people. And just,

another thing is, we should ask for more. Something I have noticed especially with graduate students or students who are maybe older who are here as student delegates, and may be more conservative don't ask for nearly as much as we should be asking from our negotiators.

WE SHOULD AIM SO HIGH that it doesn't matter if we think it's politically possible. Anything that is politically possible is just basically a term that we use to say like, "Oh we are going to confine and create these limits." Anything is politically possible, technically, from the worst possible scenario to the best possible scenario. Anything is... This idea of "Oh we don't have the political will," personally to me is just bullshit. It is just people who are trying to set limits to help control this. Kind of like the third realm of power, where you don't even realize that you are being limited and constrained. And so I think that the youth movement should just ask for more.

#### *Like what?*

Sometimes, when I hear people say things like, "Let's push for X amount of emissions reductions from Y country because they're saying they won't do more than that." They tell themselves that they might as well push for something that is more probable, more "possible", than something more ambitious that may be "unrealistic" to achieve – in other words, that little progress is better than no progress at all. No. Just, no. I think the Coal Summit is a perfect example, with people saying, "Well, coal needs to be part of the future." No, it does not have to be part of the future. It cannot be part of the solution. Some of the older folks in the U.S. talk about how, during World War II, they completely overhauled industries to help the war effort – within the span of a few months. I think we can manage to do something that is on a much smaller scale within a few years. I do not think that is out of realm of what is realistically possible. I think it is just a matter of being an idealist, but also being a realist; and acknowledging that there are these challenges we face, but also recognizing that we have the potential to overcome them.

But then – you alluded to it little bit, and I am hearing more about it – the mismatch, or as you say, in any organization that is diverse there can be all kinds of positions. Even they can be divided into camps, they can have disputes, like you say, sometimes even personal, and the disputes can really leave a sour taste for a lot of people. I understand that at this COP there are not only that expected sort of encounters – of course people are learning a lot because it's their first COP – right? They get to hear these perspectives and so forth, and they change in the course of two weeks. I know that. I think YOUNGO is a case in point, seeing individuals. But, did you attend this meeting where it was supposed to be hashed out on Sunday afternoon?

I had so many meetings on Sunday. Although some members of the delegation were there, and I think they had left for dinner when it was seven hours in. From what I understood, I think it was basically the same voicing of concerns, but not much coming out of it. Which is pretty typical of YOUNGO.

#### *They stayed together then?*

YOUNGO is tricky because it is a fluid organization with a diverse constituency. You have so many different positions represented. First of all, there are organizations that cannot engage in civil disobedience such as scout groups; then there are some members of YOUNGO who feel more strongly about collaborating with businesses, or BINGOS. Some feel very much against that, and others do not want to work with government. There is a lot of disagreement on how to approach the UNFCCC process. I think it's important to understand that, as a whole embodied group, YOUNGO organizations do not need to be in agreement with everything.

CJN realized this early on, there are some groups that are very much opposed to each other because of their mandates, yet they still manage to work together. I feel that at YOUNGO the challenge is, again, that youth are probably thinking, "Well if we can't work together, how are we supposed to expect world leaders to?" There is that strong feeling of wanting to work together, but we also must acknowledge that people come from different places with different cultures, and different contexts. It would be impossible for everyone to agree on everything just because there is no universal blanket platform for working on environmental issues.

It is kind of hard to say, but I think part of the challenge with climate change is that there's such a wide range of views on the issue, where if you look at other big movements it doesn't seem to be as fragmented or as diverse. Of course there are divisions within those groups, but I feel like there may be more in the environmental movement because there are so many ways of looking at the issues – there are so many ways.

*I am particularly personally interested in political views because of my own sense of issues in the parties, the radical wing of the global youth climate justice movement. I would like you to tell us what you can about that, if you would like. Try and describe it, and maybe your relationship to it and why you feel this or that.*

Yeah, I always find it funny that to people on campus, I am considered the radical environmentalist. It's funny because I am on a student visa so I cannot get arrested. I also do not like confrontation, so I do not consider myself to be radical. That being said, maybe I'm radical.

**I THINK PEOPLE ARE AFRAID TO BE CALLED RADICALS.** I think we need to change things. I think we can't keep doing business as usual, and I think we should demand more. We should demand to have a future where things are better. It is not a crime to want to have a livable future, and it is not a crime to think in ways that are beyond what we currently consider paradigms in society. I feel like maybe throughout this conference – and I could just be a product of the people I've been interacting with – but I do feel now that my views may be more radical. I think there are a lot of environmentalists, and again I don't want to speak on behalf of anyone, but I think there are a lot of environmentalists who see that there needs to be a complete overhaul of neoliberalism, and capitalism, or one of those, or systems of governance. A lot of Canadians I know feel like they have lost faith in their system of governance because there is clearly a huge groundswell of people who are concerned about these issues, and people who are directly affected in incredible ways in terms of their health and their well being, and who are completely overlooked. And so a lot of people have those kinds of views. Then you have a lot of people who are just way on the other side of spectrum with anarchy, and down with everything. And then you have people who are also pro-Green Economy, or trying to work with business, with government.

I feel like maybe just growing up in Montreal, seeing activism everywhere, I am not weary of activism. Whereas I have met a lot of Americans who – I don't mean this goes for everyone but just because I'm living in the US I find this – who never engaged in activism. I took a political sociology class, it was the Sociology of Social Movements and Protest, so it is kind of self-selecting, right? My professor asked us on the very first day of school, "Who here has ever been, ever in your life, to a rally or a protest?" Only me and one other student raised our hand, and asked the student, "Where are you from?" He's from Greece. This was last year. Of course he asked me, "Where are you from?" I said Montreal. And my professor said, "In Montreal last year, they had the biggest student movement since Berkeley," and all these things. I guess it just put a lot of things into perspective for me, where I realize my views may be seen as more radical. That being said, I feel

like I am more on that side of the spectrum, but I have seen a lot of people who are very much farther on that spectrum than I am. So, it's kind of trying to find a balance between that, and also realizing that within the context of Dartmouth and what I am trying to organize there, that radicalism, or just labeled radical, would be kind of social suicide for divestment. Dartmouth is just not a community where that would be accepted, and the campaign wouldn't be able to succeed. You just have to be radical without using the term radical.

*It's a label, you're right, and the best code word of course here, and a great word in its own right, suitable [illegible] to climate justice, and that works for me too. I mean I could ask you what is climate justice? I would be interested if you wanted to give a short personal definition of that. I also want to observe that it is a dilemma for - I'll say the word radical, it doesn't bother me - radicals in the movement because they know that these positions have to be pushed, like you said, to the maximum.*

Exactly.

*But they also know the movement has to be very broad, and they have to work with each other. You know, presumably I think people do understand that.*

Exactly!

*But there can be people - and I would respect that too - who are so angry, so frustrated, and it is hard to work with other people, or it is hard to look at that way. Time is short; there has never been a problem like this. This is the quintessential, existential, crisis of humanity. So, climate justice, what is climate justice?*

● To me, the thing about **climate justice** and how it is different from the typical environmental movement, is that - don't get me wrong - pollution, and toxic substance dumping, and issues that really started environmentalism are important and you want to deal with them as soon as possible, **but you don't have a deadline like you do with climate change**. Climate change is kind of this huge issue, and it's global, while historically environmental movements are more localized. It is this huge issue, but you also have this sense of urgency so you feel like you should constantly be working on it. I think climate justice incorporates that sense of urgency, but it's also acknowledging that there is climate change, and that there are a lot of negative impacts to be had as a result of that ranging from the social, to economic, to the political, and how typically speaking, people who are going to be victims or climate injustice are already victims of some other social injustice. So it goes along lines of privilege. Typically speaking, poor communities or ones where you will have more pollution from place to place, you won't really see that in a community right in the city. Or looking at a lot of coastal communities who are from the Third World, or the global South, who don't have the means to adapt to local climate change in the ways that New York might be able to, for example. **So, climate justice to me is just acknowledging that we have historical responsibility, a responsibility for future generations, acknowledging that there are all these other lines of privilege and injustice taking place, and acknowledging that there is urgency to this global challenge.**

*I want to ask you to respond on this kind of emotion that I think is very important. Can you talk about some of the emotions and the way you connect with all of this, in a very personal, emotional way, the issue of climate change, climate justice, and your experiences?*

I'll start with COP, maybe. So, people ask me how COP is and I don't really know what to tell them. You know, how much time have you got? When people ask me how it is, what I kind of try to say is: "In a nut-

shell, it is both the most devastating and most inspiring experience you ever go through. You get here and you just want to scream at everyone, and take every negotiator and shake them, especially Canadian negotiators until they understand how you feel, and how urgent it is, and how your heart breaks when you meet someone who's affected by climate change." I met Kandi Mosset in Rio and she just makes everyone cry every time she speaks – she's wonderful, I love her – but she was talking in Rio about how people in her community in North Dakota are dying from extremely high cancer rates because of shale oil extraction. Just that frustration of thinking, how can you possibly – you know, you as in the government – how can the government possibly just continue doing business as usual, and completely disregard climate change and issues when these people are so directly affected? That is so emotional, that is so heartbreaking. I felt that combined with a lot of other frustrations, like the fact that the stadium is the most complicated place to navigate, and how I can't get into meetings, and how everything is highly stressful when I am here.

Then it is also so inspiring, because I meet all these amazing people who are doing all these really, really incredible things – in addition to realizing that nothing is going to come out of these conferences, realistically. That is, honestly, one of the most inspiring take-aways I have from each and every conference.

The change that we actually need is not going to come from this stadium, or the stadium that we will be in during Lima or in Paris, just like nothing came out of Doha really. The change is coming from domestic action, from grassroots action. I think this is incredibly empowering because you realize that you have more power to change things than these negotiators do. So, it's kind of a mix of emotions, and I think I go between being super inspiring, and super inspired, and spitting out all these quotes about how we can change the world, and then also being really cynical. I think ultimately it is a combination of those two, and I think for me, on a broader note for the environmental movement, I do these things because I don't feel like I have any other choice.

*My TA is here, Summer, she is our first film operator. And so we have had that experience of students being exposed to this stuff. What would you say to a young person not yet an activist who begins to encounter the bad news and those feelings that could be fearfulness, sadness, depression on a certain level? How do you personally go forward with those, but what would you say to someone who's experiencing them, those things, so that they can somehow process? It is very important to process those feelings for anyone.*

You know, we are told we must take all of these actions if we want to stay within the **two degree threshold** of global temperature increase. If? Do we have a choice? Do we have another planet we can inhabit, let's not talk about that; there is no other planet. There shouldn't be a question about whether or not we should be taking action on climate change. I was doing another interview with some high schoolers back in Hanover, and they asked me, "So, what does a world with climate change look like to you? What do you think will happen if this doesn't succeed?" And I had never envisioned that. I had never thought about that because I refuse to accept that, I refuse to accept the fate that scientists are predicting for us because I refuse to believe that we cannot rise up to this challenge. To me, that is completely unacceptable. So it is kind of cautious hope, where I am cynical and **I AM A PESSOPTIMIST**, and I can see the immensity of what we are facing, but I have an unwavering belief that we can do this, simply because we don't have another choice.

Well first, I want to make a distinction because I don't really consider myself an activist, just because I feel like activists are people who show up at protests. I see myself more as an organizer because I help make

those things happen. So I like making that distinction. OK, so first of all it is okay to be depressed, but I think you should let that fuel you rather than discourage you. Channel those frustrations into actions. When we had that divestment event with Bill, it was the first time I think ever, or at least in a very long time, felt afterwards, "Wow, we are going to win, we are actually going to win this thing." The more you get plugged in to the climate movement, the more you realize that. Use those fears and that discouragement to fuel you, and to keep moving on with it, and realize that we are so interconnected, and there are so many people who are working together and having that support group is really important. To me, having friends outside of Dartmouth who are involved in climate activism from Boston to Oregon to California to Canada and everywhere, is just really great for me because I know that there are other people who are feeling the same frustrations that I am, and who I can vent to.

Something else that I think is very important – Bill McKibben's said this at Power Shift – that very few people can say that they're in the single most important place they can possibly be, doing the single most important thing they could possibly be doing. Whether you are at COP, whether you are at Power Shift, whether you are organizing divestment on any local level, whatever the scale is of what it is that you're organizing, that you are doing by engaging in the climate movement, to me, relates back to what I always think about. I think about what I am going to say to my grandchildren. Will I say that I did everything in my power to fight for their futures, or not? Knowing that I am doing my absolute best, that I can say that I did everything in my power, is just something that is very important to me. So, acknowledging that we've got this big challenge to face, but that we are winning in a lot of cases, is very important. So is celebrating our successes, and realizing that we have such incredible power. There's this quote by Margaret Mead – one I heard when I first started getting involved in leadership, and it is super cliché, but I love it. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, and indeed is the only thing that ever has." It's what I consistently tell myself.

*What would you tell young people? Is it fun? Is it enjoyable?*

(screams) Ah, I love it. The people who I help bring to Power Shift from Dartmouth, they know me, but they know me as kind of the person who is always constantly trying to push for change at Dartmouth. I don't really have any allies, or I am pretty much the only person who is involved in international environmental, just any activism beyond Dartmouth related to climate. And so, when we got to PowerShift, as I soon as I get there – you know, picture this, a couple thousand people in this massive convention center – we got there, and I immediately ran into Scott, who is a delegate with me here, who called me. "Leehi, how's is going? Awesome!" I just kept running into all these amazing people, whom I love, who are all here, and were doing these incredible things, and somebody from Dartmouth was saying, "Oh my god Leehi, you're vibrating, you're so excited." It is the best.

I have made the most incredible friends, and we've bonded over so much UN jargon and joke about Keystone. There's this shared sense of frustration, but also elation when things happen and when we succeed in some of our campaigns. It is just the most incredible movement because it is such a small world, and it is so interconnected, and so welcoming, and just so wonderful because you have this shared mission and shared goal. You are always working towards that goal. I have never met people who party as much as environmentalists, who work so freakishly hard all day and party hard all night, then work freakishly hard again the next day. It's this really great community where you feel like you are actually engaging in something that is tangible and real. A large majority of Dartmouth's student population is affiliated with a Greek society, but I

could not see myself rushing or pledging. Even though it's totally cool for someone to do that, to myself I think, "Why would I want to spend my time doing that when I could be doing all these other amazing things that have a real impact?"

*Is love at the center of this?*

● **I think love is a huge part of this.** I think it is something we tend to lose sight of some times, it is something I lose sight of because I get so absorbed in things, and I get so stressed that I forget about it. But I think that the climate justice movement is just such a great community, like this big massive family. I think part of it was moving to another country, but just realizing how everything is so interconnected, and I can talk about Cam [Fenton] about what I am doing, or campaigns. It is just this whole other world where you have all these inside jokes about jargon and acronyms.

*Tell us one.*

Oh god, there is this document circulating of UNFCCC pick-up lines that is really funny, like: "Girl... Your interventions make me want to raise my ambition." Not all of them are okay, it's unofficial, it is not like... anyway, some of them are stereotypical. Why did I talk about this?

*About the love.*

Just this wonderful group where people understand each other and we can make those jokes with jargon. I don't know. Have any of you seen this Tumblr, This Means Warsaw? It's really stupid, but basically it has like GIFs and it is just things that you would only laugh at if you were here. Like, "trying to find a room in the conference center," and "there are just people spinning in circles." I encourage you to see it because I just started to vent my frustrations, and it is getting a lot of followers because people associate with that, and it is hilarious. I am getting all these submissions from delegates saying, "Oh, you should put this in there," with some funny picture of something. Like, "When my inbox reaches zero unread messages." I think there is this sense incredible hope and discouragement sometimes, but it is also just so funny a lot of the time.

*Are there books that influence you? Or an article?*

Yes. There is an article by [Nikki Hodgson](#) called "Notes from the International Youth Climate Movement in Doha," and it made me cry. I read parts of it every time we give a speech or a presentation about my work here. It just kind of encompasses all those emotions that you feel while you're at a COP. [Beautiful Trouble](#), which is an anthology, is wonderful, I love it. But I think for me, I'm influenced more by the conversations I have had with people where I learn about their experiences.

*Think about a new person, like someone that is in their final year of high school or first year of college, what would you give them to read or to watch?*

Lots of clips of Bill [McKibben]. There is this really funny [83-second introduction to the climate negotiations](#), where it is a cartoon - I'll send you that - it is just a really good, informative, very basic explanation of what goes on here. There are Keynote speeches from PowerShift that I found particularly compelling like. Crystal Lameman's [speech](#) in Canada about her communities, about babies being airlifted constantly because they drink poisoned water. Kandi Mosset talking about her experiences. Bill [talking](#) about the challenges we face and yet what we can do. It's about the emotional reality of everything, and talking about those direct experiences rather than the statistics. You can talk about 60,000 deaths a day that they're expecting due to cli-

mate change, but that doesn't really speak to people as much as the story about one person whose life was completely upended because of climate change.

*Who are your climate heroes? I know it is a horizontal movement, but what inspires you?*

People I meet each and every day who are doing really incredible things. People who are fighting every day, and who are engaged in their communities, who refuse to give up. Ta'kaiya Blaney, I don't know if you know who she is; she is thirteen years old, she is from a First Nation community in British Columbia. She was in Rio, she led the walk out. Kandi Mosset is another one of those people, and Crystal Lameman. People who are going down fighting, and who refuse to accept these things.

*Super. Does anyone else want to ask anything?*

*[Climate Justice Project Member]: Yeah, I have a question. Similar to some things John asked, I am curious. A lot of times I talk about being involved in this movement, and people say, "Oh that's cool" like "that's your thing that you're into, you know? I'm into rock music. That's cool that you have your thing in environmentalism, you know? But I think I feel that I – and I am guessing you feel this way too – that "No, this isn't just my thing that I'm into. This is like the future that we are all a part of." But, how would you respond to that?*

So, a little bit about me: there is no reason why I should be involved in the environmental movement. Oh man, I used to dread my high school's mandatory camping trips. Dread it. If you're looking at my family, I am Israeli, and environmentalism isn't a big thing back home. My parents are always a little scared when I visit back home because they always have to make sure that they filled the compost bin, and make sure they're not throwing anything into the garbage. For a long time, it was like this little environmentalist thing I was doing and it was super cute, but not a career or anything like that. But I think that they are starting to realize that this is more than just a hobby.

I also think that part of the challenge is, something that I struggle with, is that this is such a big issue to me, and I always think that people don't really want to hear about it so I don't talk to them about it. In that case, it's important to meet people where they are at. For example, a lot of the premedical students who are here, those are people who, generally speaking, wouldn't be engaged in climate change, but because it has such a huge health component to it they are getting engaged in it. Looking from an economic perspective, divestment has a huge role in exposing the carbon bubble and its negative impacts on the economy.

It's hard, because you have all these feelings, and all these emotions, and you're so connected, and so invested in this movement, how can you translate that to somebody else? Right? And, I think a big part of reaching out is just having those conversations with people, one-on-one. That is something I try to do myself because I think I've just realized that a lot of my friends would be interested in hearing more about what I do, and would get involved if I were to reach out to them, but I am always so nervous about doing that and don't do it. And so, I don't really know if I have answered your question, but I think it involves a lot of talking to people about stories, but also being like, "Hey do you want to come with me to this cool thing? There is a trip to Pittsburgh, it's for a weekend event called Power Shift; it'll be fun, and you will be meeting all these people from all these other schools." It is just trying to convey that. When we had that divestment panel with Bill and Terry Tempest Williams, I spoke for two minutes about why I am involved in the climate movement. And, I didn't talk about the two degrees Celsius, and the emissions, and blah blah blah. I spoke about Kandi and I spoke about how I meet people who are suffering because of so many things that my country is doing,

so many things that we as a collective global community are doing, and that I just can't accept that, and that we need to act on this or else have that on our moral conscious. It's tough; I am not saying it's easy. It is just trying to have those conversations without being like, "Oh, hey. How's it going? Um, you're screwed. We have all these things to deal with." So it is a challenge, but I think it is becoming also more mainstream. Divestment is kind of letting people have those conversations more than they used to. But I totally feel you.

So you talked a little bit about the need to imagine beyond the avenues for change that are presented to us through various discourses. I am wondering if you could speak a little bit about this need to imagine beyond what is being presented to us, and maybe if you have any idea of what you would like to see in the future?

I am not the authority on all things that need to be done. But I think essentially what I mean by that is just not letting ourselves be constrained by what we think politically possible. I think to me, I just see a future where are actually taking significant actions on getting us past these issues. Not all these distractions and false solutions that we are actually taking, and not natural... NOT natural gases. That is not a transition fuel. I don't want to hear about transition fuels, I don't want to hear about how we need to slowly shift away from this. We don't have the time. If we truly care - IF, again - if, do we have a choice? But if we truly care about taking action and staying within that threshold, we need to do whatever needs to be done to get there. If that means completely overhauling the energy industry to be coming from renewables, as in wind and solar, and investing a lot into research to that to make that as low-impact as possible, then we do that. If it has to do a lot with developing new transport, like, just there's so much. We need to acknowledge the fact that we need to completely shift our way of living. And I think, to me, all of those different changes that need to happen are just reflective of the bigger change in terms of thinking. We need to completely change the system in which we live, we need to acknowledge the fact that neoliberalism has major flaws. And I think that was something people learned in 2008, but you would think that after the economic crisis that there would be a shift, and we don't necessarily see that happening.

So it is a lot about acknowledging that we need to shift the way we think, that we cannot continue being consumers, and living in an individualist society where the more you have, the more successful you are. It's not about the more you have, it's about quality versus quantity. But just shifting, we need to shift away from consumerist thinking, from individualist thinking. From this kind of finger pointing that happens here, which everyone... you know, we kind of joke that we're at the kids' table when we're at these negotiations. The cool thing about that is we get to throw food. Just enough of this childish, "I know that you should be doing this, this, and that," and just... get it done. This is something that I said in my Arctic Council speech - just stop talking about what we should do... Do it! Stop talking about what maybe is possible... Get it done! And I think in terms of even beyond what is possible, it is just, believing that that is something that we can reach if we work hard enough, and if we move enough. When you're thinking about solutions, you don't want yourself feeling limited by what you think is possible.

*You mentioned the "third realm of power."*

There is a sociologist who looked at realms of power; if I have direct power over you, so like I have coercive power over you, like I will fire you if you do this, that's the first realm of power. You are conscious of the fact that there is some power being exerted over you. But the third realm of power is when you are not even conscious of it. And so when there is a shift in the third realm of power, your world is essentially completely up-ended. Neoliberalism is an example of the third realm of power because you assume this is the way things

should be when in reality the world, our economy, can function in a million other different ways, but we assume that this is the way things are, that we can't change it. The third realm of power is something a lot of groups look at in terms of oppression because you don't even realize you're being oppressed. You don't even realize that there is this power over you. And that is the most... well that isn't the most powerful form of power, but it's the most influential one because it's where you don't even realize it is a part of your thinking.

*Do you study sociology in school?*

I am not a Sociology major. I really like Sociology. I am trying to study things that relate to the movement because I am trying to figure out how to best engage in it. So I did take - this was just on a whim - I did take a Political Sociology class on social movements studies last year. This semester I am taking a class on ideas, politics and crisis, and it looks a lot what paradigms and special interests influence policy and framing and how that works. It is an interesting class. I am also taking a social justice rhetoric class, which is not Sociology at all, but looking at social justice movements. These are just classes I have taken out of interest, and I'm trying to apply what I learn practically to the stuff I am engaged with here to make it as powerful, or as impactful, as it can be. I am not necessarily looking to study it, but it just kind of happens.

*Do you consider yourself a sociologist?*

No, I don't consider myself anything. I feel like when I am here people talk to me and they ask me, "Oh, so are you doing grad school?" And I'm like, "No! At least I am not nineteen like I was last year. But people are always kind of like, "Oh... you're a sophomore?" and "Oh ... you're in college? You're twenty?" But, I don't feel so young, so it's kind of an interesting place to be in. I am fully conscious and aware of the fact that I have a lot to learn about a lot of different things, and that is kind of what I am trying to do both in school and outside of school. So I don't consider myself an expert on anything. But there are a lot of things I like to share with the world, which is part of the reason why I am talking a lot, so I am sorry.

*You may not know the definition of sociology though. Sociology is the study of everything.*

I mean, I am a Sociologist in training... I don't know!

*That is the first principle; everything is interconnected. Same as ecology. So you don't identify as a sociologist. I am wondering how you do identify yourself or don't identify yourself?*

I tend to say global citizen. I do identify myself as a community organizer because that's what I do, but I try to steer clear of labels. Just because I feel that that shouldn't matter anyway. I mean, again, in media I might add some fancy things to sound more credible, but I try not to really define myself as anything. Same reason that politically, I don't think I am a liberal, or an independent, or a conservative. I just think of myself as having all these different ideas and different opinions about certain issues, so I try not to really identify myself with anything.



### Additional thoughts, Summer 2014

*What do you think it will take to secure a just climate treaty (and what would that treaty look like?)*

I think that we will only have a secure and just climate treaty when we have the political will to make it happen. And political will won't come without grassroots pressure, so in order to make a just, equitable, ambitious treaty happen, we need people power. We need a groundswell of concerned citizens rising up to the climate crisis and giving their all to fight this challenge. Some say that it will take a series of extreme weather events (at which point it'll most likely be too late to act on climate change) for such a critical mass to form, but I have more faith than that in humanity. Such a treaty, for me, would look like one that takes both future generations and common but differentiated responsibility into account. It's one that establishes emissions targets that are well below the amounts scientists tell us we need to meet in order to stay within a 2 degree Celsius warming. It would also allow unhindered sharing of intellectual resources relating to research on both renewable energy sources and energy efficiency. It will comprise both mitigation and adaptation. It is one that will have a true, equitable, and ambitious Green Climate Fund. It is one that will have more women than there currently are involved in its drafting process. It will most likely have complicated jargon, but I think it should be very simple. After all, ensuring human survival shouldn't be so hard, should it?

*What is your sense of how the global youth climate justice movement works? How is it doing, in your view? What is your vision of it for the future?*

Well, I'd first like to say that I think it's easy to lump the climate movement as one homogenous lump, which, of course, it is not. So my sense of how the global youth justice movement works is that it is a mosaic of different ideals, hopes, and beliefs. It is a community comprised of many smaller communities around

the world who, despite sharing different political opinions on various issues, come together for a common goal: a real, ambitious, fair solution to the climate crisis. It is a community whose members recognize that we are all inextricably bound together by our presence on this planet, by our identities as global citizens, by our acknowledgement of the immense challenge we face – and by the deep hope we hold for the future, for humanity to rise to the occasion.

How is the global youth climate justice movement doing? I can't really say. I think we are an incredible group of talented people who are bringing our skills together like we have never done before. I see fossil fuel divestment campaigns, Global Power Shifts, organizing at COPs, the People's Climate March, localized shale and fracking campaigns – and all of this progress is so beautiful and makes me so hopeful. But on the other hand, I see the road ahead of us – and it is a freakishly long one. We are still so far away from where we need to be, despite our noteworthy accomplishments.

My vision for the future of the global youth climate justice movement involves it becoming more sustainable and more productive. It is a vision in which we acknowledge our differences and our various approaches to the same issues, but where we don't let these differences faze us or slow us down. It is a vision where we continue growing, exponentially. It is also a place where we celebrate our accomplishments, using these successes as a way to sustain our ability to fight the good fight. Lastly, it is a movement where we not only believe that a better future is within our grasp, but know that we will reach it.

*What does "climate justice" mean to you?*

● **Climate justice**, to me, is very much about intersectionality. It's about acknowledging that those who suffer injustices relating to climate change and fossil fuels are very likely already suffering other forms of injustice. Climate justice is dismantling these systems of oppression. It's about recognizing the rights of future generations and those who have yet to be born, while also upholding principles of common but differentiated responsibility. Climate justice is about realizing your role as a global citizen, and about fighting for the rights of your fellow global community members. Climate justice is about refusing to stop until the job gets done. It's about recognizing that every single life matters, regardless of geographic location, age, race, ability, or socioeconomic status. Climate justice is knowing what the stakes are, and refusing to give up on our planet, on our collective future. Climate justice is acknowledging that we are all in this fight together, from the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation on the front lines of tar sands expansion, to Maldivian climate refugees, to indigenous Arctic communities, to the asthmatics living in the poor suburbs of Chicago. Climate justice is humanity.

*How do you see possible futures? What is likely? What is possible? What is ideal?*

It's funny, I am a very forward-thinking person, but I have never thought about different futures when it comes to climate change. I think of only one possible future: one where we have risen to the occasion and successfully solved the climate crisis. I frankly couldn't give less of a shit about what is likely, so I'm not going to talk about that. But I do see a future – a bright, prosperous, beautiful, clear, fair, clean future – as entirely possible. It's what's ideal. I cannot possibly see any other future.

*What gives you hope?*

Young people. Changemakers. Proactive idealists.

When we talk about the climate crisis, it's easy to get bogged down by the immensity of the challenge we're facing. The road ahead is, most definitely, not going to be a short or easy one. But when we band together and come to build a movement for positive change, it's hard to let the despair faze us. I have, of course, felt discouraged and disillusioned at times when it comes to climate change. But every time I may feel helpless I think about the growing movement of people fighting for a better future. And this makes me incredibly happy. PowerShift, Forward on Climate, XL DISSENT, divestment convergences, COPs, the People's Climate March - these are all, to me, gatherings where I meet my closest friends (and make new ones). Just thinking about these people, fellow climate warriors, gives me goose bumps!

“We can stop the madness”



## VOICES

From the 2013 Global Day of Action March in Warsaw, Poland



The clown brigade. Photo by John Foran

# VOICES

Warsaw COP 19 – November 6, 2013  
Interviews by John Foran  
Transcribed by Gaelen Vasquez and Holly Higgins

## Interview with Master Clune [Clown]

*Can you tell me – sorry, yes – can you tell me your name and where you are from?*

Ah, my name is Master Clune.

*Where are you from?*

I am from France with my friend, and we're here because we want more degrees for the climate, more degrees for more babies. Yes! Yes! We want more things and yes, everything is cool in the world. Oh yeah! So wear a smile.

*Thank you.*

## Interview with Ked-B [Clown]

*Hi, bonjour!*

Hi!

*Hi, can you tell me why you are here today?*

We are here to fight for climate warming. It's all around. We need to get outside. Need to get the maximum [temperature] for all future generations so they could be on the beach all the time. Would be nice, wouldn't it?

*That would be great! Can you tell me your name and where you are from?*

I have no name, I am from Clunista.

*From?*

I am Ked-B, this is my name. You can call me that if you want.

*Say you are from?*

*Clunista.*

*Clunista. Alright, thank you so much.*

*That was the militant clown brigade and they are in favor of warmer temperatures for the future babies that are coming and they are now looking at a Mercedes-Benz showcase car and they are bowing down before it in. And we are here at COP 19: Global Day of Action March. John Foran reporting for the iicat Climate Justice Project.*

## Interview with Jacob from Belgium

*Hi, can you tell me where you're from, please?*

I am Jacob and I am from Belgium.

*Can you tell us what you are doing here at this Global Day of Action March?*

We're actually here to make a political stand, and more or less to try to encourage politicians to make bold decisions that in my opinion they have to make, which are not always that popular, but in the long term really necessary certainly. It has to be now, not next year, not in five years, not in ten years. It's something that's urgent. So we urge them to act.

*And I see that you're here dressed all in black and your face has been made into a clock and you're carrying a coffin. Can you tell me what this is all about?*

This coffin is actually a clock that is a symbol of the time that has run out, it's not five before 12 midnight, it's five past midnight, even 10 past midnight, so it's more or less the symbol of the fact that even if we act now and we act really drastically, it will still have a great and enormous impact on our planet, on our climate. So we are going to bury it because the time has run out. We have run out of time and hopefully the alarm clock is going off for the politicians.

*What do you personally feel is possible then in the future? What could be achieved?*

You never know. I think that the human species – they only act if they are obliged to act. If you look at the hole in the ozone layer, it was only because of that hole and because everyone could really feel the difference and could feel it that people act. In Europe for example, we don't feel the differences that have already overcome a lot of countries in the South. If you go to Bangladesh, they will tell you that they feel it every day, the differences. We in the North use all the carbon dioxide. If you compare it to the South, it's not comparable. We have enormous responsibility towards the South and we just ignore that responsibility and that's something I think is really painful. And I think it's even more painful for people in the South if they are aware of the fact that it's not just something natural that they are having more floods, they have more drought, they have stronger hurricanes.

Personally, I think we should take our example from the Philippine negotiator here who gave a speech. **If you are not touched by that speech, you're not a real human being with feelings**, in my opinion. It's harsh to say that. For once let's not let the money talk but our hearts, our hope for a better future. It's a cliché but it's important in my opinion.

*Jacob, thank you. That was brilliant. Very beautiful.*

## Interview with Joe from Washington D.C.

My first name is Joe from Washington DC; actually went to school at the University of California.

*So what are you doing here in Warsaw, Poland, Joe?*

I am here with Greenpeace at the UN climate conference where countries are negotiating a deal to address climate change. Today, we are marching in the streets of Warsaw to show that there is broad support for serious action to address climate change.

I am marching with a group of Greenpeace supporters right now with signs of our friends and colleagues that have been put in prison in Russia taking peaceful action against an oil drilling rig in the Arctic. They're called the "Arctic Thirty" and we want to see them freed because we think standing up to the oil industry in the Arctic is an act of heroic bravery not something for which people should be put in prison for months.

*How does it feel to be here with all these people at this march? What's the feeling today?*

It's a great march so far and it's really nice to see so many people out here showing their support for climate action.

*I take it you're on the inside as well?*

I do communications work so I will be on the inside of the climate conference this next week.

*What expectations do you have for this particular COP 19?*

I think that we need to see serious steps from all the different countries here to begin to show that there's serious progress being made toward a climate treaty to be signed in Paris, 2015.

*I agree, that's what we need. Do you think there is much chance of seeing progress here?*

To be honest, I just got here this morning, I wouldn't be able to say too much about the progress that's been made. I know there have been conversations, but I would need to come back to you with an update.

*Let me ask something you may have thoughts on. What does climate justice mean to you?*

● **I think [climate justice] means a lot to a lot of different people.** To me it means, that at the core of how we as a society and as a planet respond to climate change, there needs to be an understanding that the people, the communities, the nations that are most vulnerable will be most impacted by climate change. That they who have done the least to contribute to the problem need to be at the forefront of the movement and they need to be uppermost on our minds when we are formulating policies and action to address climate change.

*How do we get climate justice?*

More marching in the streets like this.

*Thank you very much.*

#### Interview with Helena from Serbia

*Would you tell me your first name, where you are from, and what organization you are with?*

Helena from Serbia and my organization is Service Civil International. It's a peace organization.

*And you are holding a flag that says "Power Shift."*

Ha, yes. I am here with friends from Poland. Just before the COP, they organized the Power Shift for all of Eastern Europe. We were there, more than 400 young people from around 50 countries just before the COP. It was for four days – we had workshops, discussions, debates, actions.

*What was the best thing about Power Shift?*

The best thing about Power Shift is usually the common energy – or maybe synergy, I would say. All these young people from different parts of the world from different cultures that you don't know but you meet up once per year and you know that you are not just fighting for the same cause but also living for the same cause and its now I guess today and for the rest of our lives it's going to be climate justice.

*What message do you want to bring today to this march?*

There is one thing on my mind for a long time. It's not my message, but history will judge us. It's about what are you going to do next. Even if we don't do anything, we will be judged by history.

*What do you think the judgment of history is going to be of us in the end?*

I think everything is possible because if it's possible to destroy the planet then it is possible to save it. I hope, I guess. So it depends. I still hope there is this little bit of radicalism in everybody. That you'll wake up in some moment and you will really manage to show your power because we don't have other choices.

*What is your opinion of what is happening at COP 19?*

I am actually not following it much because it is too frustrating and I cannot do much from outside. Sometimes I feel that those people inside are not from the same planet. It's just unbelievable to me that it's even possible to have so-called negotiations with people there who are from the frontline communities and that you really don't care so much, I just don't get it. So, for me, it's an unbelievable process – I cannot, my brain cannot understand that.

*I hope your brain can answer this: What's the secret of success for this movement?*

Hahaha.

*It's just a little question.*

I don't know, I don't know.

*What's one thing? What's one thing you think is going to help make this a success?*

One thing. I need to think about this one thing. (long pause) I really don't know what that could be. The simplicity model, I don't know. Like we need to go, like just nature. Maybe nature. Just go back to nature. Like human nature and just, we need to go back to what we are.

*Can you tell me what, for you, the meaning of climate justice would be?*

● **Because I am not involved in the big political discussions I cannot change things at that level but I understand it as individual responsibility** – each of us to do as much as we can. For instance, if we know that somewhere, someone else is polluting a lot we need to do much more to reduce ours. It's not enough that we just live within our ecological footprint. But that you need to do much, much more. Consume less and live more simply. As an individual just try to do whatever you can do in terms of saving, not really saving, but not exploiting resources that much and joining movements and even political parties. I don't know. I think that we need to do everything that is necessary. **I am becoming a little bit pessimistic but even more angry. Hahaha, I don't know.**

*Those emotions are important.*

AFTER COPENHAGEN I was a little distanced for two to three years from climate and now I think I am getting, it's not even anger, it's *rage*. **Rage against the COP, rage against the corporations, rage against capitalism.**

*That's fabulous. Thanks.*

#### Interview with Josefe from Sweden

*Thank you for agreeing to speak to me. Can you tell me your first name and where you're from and what organization, please?*

My name is Josefe, I'm from Sweden, from the Green youth party.

*Why are you in this march? What brought you here?*

I am here, you know, to help the climate, to make a better planet for everyone to show what I think is right.

*Are all these people from Sweden with you?*

Yes. Everyone.

*From the Green Party. Wow that's impressive. Are you inside the COP too?*

Yes I am.

*How do you think things are going? What expectations do you have out of this COP 19?*

They have to make progress and make some choices for a better future and a green planet.

(Chanting in background: "What do we want? Justice! When do we want it? Now! Now, now now!")

#### Interview with Victoria from Sweden

*Are you from Sweden too? Green Party?*

Yeah and also Green students. About 50 people in total.

*Did you come on the climate train? Or have you been here a while?*

We came yesterday. Yeah, it was kind of a long trip. We came from different parts of Sweden and we joined up in the southeast and took a ferry over during the night, and arrived in the morning and then took the commuter train, then a bus for like five hours, got here, took some train, walked, and finally got to the place where we are staying. It took almost two hours until everyone was at the hostel. It would have only taken thirty minutes if we would have walked.

We are here to walk in solidarity with all the people who will be and already are affected by climate change. We all will be one day. We all need to change. We need a legally binding climate agreement and we all need to start reducing climate emissions in all countries and do something to really mitigate this change and we need to do it now! We should have done it yesterday. But that's why we are here. To try to show politicians and everyone in the world that we are many that stand up for this and we really want something to happen.

*Do you think something can happen at the COP?*

We are not that confident about it. I think it's very much talking and usually not that much comes out of it, but we must have faith, I guess, because someday something will have to happen or...

*What do you think is the best way to achieve that climate justice you talk about?*

● **That's a really tricky question.** We were talking about this earlier today, that actually pretty much all countries have acknowledged that we in the industrialized world and the richer countries have a climate debt. We have agreed to that in theory but not in practice and we really need to start taking responsibility for real, and change our societies, to start the real transition. That's the only way to get some climate justice. We who actually are rich and we who have all the means to do something, we need to do it. Just get on with it.

*What sort of climate activities are you involved with inside Sweden, inside your country?*

I am active in my municipality in the Green Party, and in my university with Green Students. We have a lot of different topics that we cover with all kinds of politics, but we do talk a lot about how to combine environmental and climate issues with other kinds of issues. For example, we have a high unemployment rate right now and we in the Green Party think that can be solved together with a lot of the environmental and climate problems. We can build for a sustainable future which will need a lot of people working, to build up the trains and rail tracks and changing the energy systems, building more effective energy-conserving houses, a lot of different things. And that would be a good way to employ more people in Sweden, for example. So these are issues we are working with in the municipalities. When we buy things in large quantities and make deals with firms, we should try to focus more on the sustainability issues so that it's not always just about the economics.

*Do you think that the Green Party can bring this about somehow in Sweden? Is there a chance for that?*

Well, now we are not the ones ruling the country. But we have our elections next year, both the election for the European Parliament and also the national elections in the autumn next year. We want to shift away from the parties ruling right now to get more power to start these transitions. It seems like a lot of people are kind of content with the situation. Hopefully something can happen.

*How do you see the future? The whole thing?*

Since I am studying Environmental Science, the future doesn't really look that bright. For my own working life, I think it looks bright since there will be a lot to work with. But the world and humanity are going down the wrong track right now. I just wish that we would face the real facts in time, before it's too late. So I guess, as I said before, you have to have faith. But it's looking kind of grim.

*I agree with you, but you know what? I think we are going to win.*

Yeah.

#### Interview with Almut from Germany

*Would you tell me your first name, where you are from, and what organization you're with, please?*

I'm Almut and I am working for Friends of the Earth, Germany.

*So why are you here in this march, please?*

We are here because nobody is doing anything about climate change, especially the governments that are debating in the conference. They are just talking and talking while climate change is going on. We are here to show them: "Hey you really have to act and you have to do something to stop or reduce the tempo of climate change."

*What do you think is the best way to get that message across to governments?*

Oh, different ways. It's not only demonstrations, it's also press work, talking to politicians, working from the ground also to show people: "Hey, it is a problem and there are solutions." Politicians are not doing enough to really embrace the solutions.

*You're from Germany and in the US we have the impression Germany is taking the lead in Europe. How do you look at your government's policy on the energy transition, for example?*

It used to be a country which really wanted to change and to get to a future without coal or nuclear power. But right now they are changing. They slowed down the building of renewable energies, and last year, we had an increase in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions because of our coal industry which was going up again. It's unbelievable! We are not as good as people think. Unfortunately.

*That is what I have heard. Do you have an opinion on the Green Party's role in the German future, in terms of what needs to be done for climate change?*

\*sigh\* I hope that they will find a way to get climate change taken as a very important issue, and back on the political agenda. If all of the other parties don't, I hope they will do that.

*How do you see the future yourself? Is this going to turn out well for the planet? Personally, how do you really see it?*

Hahaha. No comment. Hahaha.

*That's very eloquent.*

Hahaha. In Germany we say, "Hope dies last." It hasn't died yet, not totally.

*Not today?*

Haha, not at all. Today? No. Today there is more hope again.

*Thank you very much, Almut.*

#### Interview with Riene from Belgium

*So you have come from Belgium on the climate train with 114 people?*

From all of Belgium there were 800 but from our organization there were 114. They told me the train was 1 kilometer long. I don't know what I have to tell you but it was just really nice. It was nicely decorated inside the train and also some people brought a hammock and there was music and also debates and other things.

*What do you think about the COP 19 process?*

I don't know. I hope it will be a success but I don't know. I hope we have an impact too.

*I hope so too. Can you tell me in general, how you see the future?*

Mmmmm.... I hope enough people will... It's difficult to say in English but..

*Is it hard to say in Flemish? We can get it translated.*

No, let me think one minute. Haha. It's not only the English but also how do I tell this in one sentence.

*Yes, these are very hard questions. But I am asking everybody that question.*

Yeah, but I don't know how I should see the future because the politicians are doing very stupid things, so I don't know. We are trying to do our best. It's a small impact but we hope.

*I think you have done a great thing with the climate train and Belgium should feel great that you did that.*

#### Interview with Menel from Belgium

My name is David Menel. I am in a Marxist party in Belgium.

*And why are you here today, David?*

I am here today because it is very important – the climate is in danger! Many resources from the environment are taken by the big enterprises and they continually destroy the climate, the environment. It's dangerous for us because we are suffering from this. We are in worse shape than before; the Earth has been polluted and is still being polluted, for example.

*What is the solution here to the problem that is the COP?*

My idea is to achieve a lot of new systems for energy, but we must get together to collaborate.

*Do you consider yourself a member of the climate justice movement?*

Yes.

*How do you see the future? Do you think this could work out?*

Yes. I am optimistic. If I wasn't an optimist I wouldn't be here. For sure. I hope that by this kind of movement we will manage to move other people to come with us to here and say that this [pointing to the stadium where the negotiations are happening] is not their solution.

*You say you are optimistic. Why?*

Because in Belgium, but also in all of Europe, people are getting more confident to go on marches like this one and say "Stop, we won't believe you again and we want to stop capitalism from hurting us."

*Thank you very much.*

#### Interview with Guillaume (William) from Belgium

*What is your name?*

Guillaume. You can call me William in English.

*Where are you from?*

Belgium.

*And what organization are you with today?*

A youth organization from the PTB, an organization-party on the left.

*Is it a worker's party?*

Yes, workers, yes exactly.

*Why are you here today Guillaume?*

I hope to make things change. I think people have the power to change the situation. I hope my presence and the presence of all the youth here can change something.

*That's great. Did you come on the climate train?*

Yes, I came with the train with everybody. We were all in the same car; there were a lot of talks, games, body painting. It was just amazing and I am happy to go back with the train again.

*How do you see the future?*

I am optimistic. I think people will realize that nature is very important, the climate, the diversity of everything. We are a part of it. I think people will realize that and make something change.

*Thank you very much, Guillaume.*

#### Interview with Isaac from Belgium

*Could you tell me your name?*

My first name is Isaac. I am originally from Kenya but now I am a graduate student in Belgium.

*What are you studying in Belgium?*

I am studying Ecology.

*Wow! Are you here with an organization today?*

I am with an organization called UCOS in Dutch but it translates to University Comprehensive Development. It's a non-profit that partners with my university and they work on issues of sustainability and the environment. That's how I got my accreditation to attend the COP.

*What is your opinion of what is happening on the inside?*

I think there is a lot happening. I have not had the chance to attend any of the official talks but I have been doing more of the side events trying to see what is going on, what the new ideas are. I think the scientists are doing a good job on this climate change issue, but I am looking more for a political solution to it. I feel like the unwillingness of the politicians to compromise on the deal is political because everything is on the table, the facts are there, so the politicians should come to an agreement.

*How do you see the future? Is this going work out for the planet or not?*

I would love to be optimistic, but honestly, I am not so sure I am optimistic. Like I said, we *have* to find a solution so I am optimistic. But I am not so sure. We need a political solution. We might get close to it, but we may not reach our target.

*What do you think we have to do to get that political solution?*

In my opinion, probably grassroots movements need to be stronger because I think the politicians will probably listen more to public opinion back home. So, I think it is up to the citizenry of different countries to influence policy back home and to change their lifestyles so that the politicians can see that it is about their citizens and not just an abstract theory. I think public opinion is key in helping the politicians make decisions that would help.

*Thank you very much, Isaac, for speaking with me. Maybe I will see you inside.*

#### Interview with Patrick Bond from South Africa

*Well, Patrick, the march is almost over, what are your impressions of this march?*

GREAT SPIRIT AND GREAT DIVERSITY. If you're from this part of the world and you've just been suffused with hatred for a bureaucratic apparatus that they call socialism. I've actually talked to a lot of East Europeans about what an eco-socialism could be. That's the most inspiring thing to me because I haven't had that degree of open conversation with activists who can make a leap from the old myths about socialism to new necessities. I think that's really giving me a great sense of things. There are also a lot of international experts around here. People who are the top NGO experts on this or that and they are all in a fairly upbeat mode because the strategies inside are just not going to work. Not only is the big coal conference happening here but, for example, there is a "natural capital" conference happening next week in Scotland, a really big thing for privatizing nature, and there's already a good, interesting, and nuanced resistance. **Even though you don't expect in a little symbolic march like this anything to come together that threatens power the seeds of that threat are there.** We just had this very bad news about the Yasuni, the big Ecuadorian pilot project for the climate debt, failing. And yet I had a long talk with the Friends of the Earth chair who took over after Nnimmo [Bassey], she's from Croatia, and she was really into "Ok, we've lost that but let's explore the next set of strategies to get climate debt properly articulated." Lots of setbacks and low levels of improvement but it's definitely going to move forward.

#### Interview with Adam Greenburg from the United States

*We have Adam Greenburg of SustainUs here at the end of the march at the Global Day of Action. So Adam, how does it feel out here today?*

Well, there is a lot of energy! Despite the cold, I am feeling good, I am a little colder because I am fasting so I am trying to be cognizant of how my body expends energy. But yes, it's a great turn out, there are a lot of people here demanding climate action now. A lot of people here in solidarity with the Philippines. People are here from all over Europe and people are here at this COP from all over the world.

*You have been fasting now for how many days, Adam?*

I am on day five, I am at the end of day five.

*Tell me why you are fasting.*

Well we are fasting in solidarity with the people of Philippines and Philippine lead negotiator Yeb Saño. On day one here at COP 19, Yeb moved I think most of the plenary to tears with an incredibly moving speech. He talked about the destruction that is being faced by his home community and all throughout his country after super typhoon Haiyan struck, with hundreds of thousands displaced and many, many killed. And he spoke passionately about the human impacts that people were facing and about how as we increase climate change we are going to increase the destruction of these storms and the frequency of these storms around the world. Then he announced that he would fast; he went on a voluntary hunger strike, until we got results or until the COP ended.

SO WE ARE FASTING IN SOLIDARITY. A number of groups, immediately after hearing that, mobilized and organized solidarity strikes around that and the bottom line is that we are standing with the people of the Philippines and really with people impacted by the worst tragedies around the world. **The bottom line is people are dying** and we could make a change, we can stop the madness as Yeb said, right now if we want to, here in Warsaw. We need to act.

“I WANT A REAL ROMANCE!”



# Dear UNFCCC... I Think We Need to Take a “Break”

By [Fatima Ibrahim](#)



November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Dear [UNFCCC](#),

You may have heard through the grapevine that I've decided not to meet up with you in Warsaw next week. I thought I would write you a letter to explain why, as it would be rude to just disappear without a word.

I've grown a lot in your presence and our relationship has given me the chance to learn things about myself and other people that I wouldn't have had the opportunity to otherwise. During our time together I've cried lots but I've also laughed lots too! You've given me the chance to meet amazing people but despite all of this, I need a break!

I hope that this doesn't at all come as a shock to you as it was really nice seeing you in Bonn last June. In general you seemed a lot more relaxed, productive and really gave everyone a chance to talk — [even me](#)! However even in Bonn it was hard not to notice that some bad habits die hard. I am sure I've highlighted my concerns to you before, but until now it seems to have fallen on deaf ears so here's hoping that this letter will give you a chance to contemplate ...

[A few things] I DON'T WANT TO hate about you:

- You don't often give others a chance to speak... it's really hard to get a word in edgeways between you and your friends. Sometimes, I successfully get the chance to say a few words but even then you tend to talk over me. On other occasions I'm resigned to finding [innovative ways](#) of getting your attention! Although I don't like using these methods to be heard, it gives me lots of practice to get the attention of similarly hard to talk to people back home.

- Your friends... This is probably the biggest problem that I have with you. YOU ARE REALLY NICE and HAVE GOOD VALUES AND PRINCIPLES but you choose to hang around awful people. 'What people?' I imagine you're asking. Well let's not look too far behind us as we don't want to strain our pretty little heads, let's just think about Bonn. Your friend Russia was such a pain! He was always moody (despite all the beautiful sunshine and beer) and [clearly didn't want us to be together](#). I wanted our relationship to progress, for us to take our commitment to another level,

but he just wanted to disrupt everything and kept taking you off behind closed doors. Our relationship, if it's going to work, needs to be fair, open and honest. He just wasn't giving us a chance to do that. I don't want to say it's him or me but... (Whilst you're at it, it would be nice if you could consider ending your friendships with Canada and the USA too!)

- You don't like my friends!?!... I put a question mark because you often assure me that you do but I've yet to see the actions to prove it. You've met so many of my friends over the years, they have come from every corner of the world and if you gave them the chance you could learn so much from them - I know that I have. Far from loving them you've made it harder and harder for them to connect with you. Each year you reduce the number of them that are allowed to accompany us on our meetings - despite my protests otherwise!

- Your time management skills are nonexistent... My time management skills are bad too so I thought we'd be a match made in heaven but yours are nonexistent! Often you've missed deadlines, pushed back times you'd arranged to meet and probably even more annoyingly you've overshot your estimates on when you thought you'd be done with your work commitments! So often I've wanted to lay on the beach and enjoy the sights of the countries you've taken me to, but you insist on taking FOREVER to finish your work that it often means I have to fly home before I can say 'goodbye' properly.

- I don't know if I can deal with only seeing you once or twice a year... Finally, I'm a bit of a soppy romantic... and a bit needy too! I think I can deal with a long distance relationship, particularly because you update your Facebook/twitter pretty often, but I can't deal with how little I see you. If we want to build a strong foundation, build trust and be fair to ourselves and others, we have to see each other more often...one or two meet ups a year isn't a real romance but more of a fleeting one: **I WANT A REAL ROMANCE!**

I hope to see you soon as our time together has been brilliantly addictive, but I just need to give you space to work on some of your flaws.

With Love and hope of a reconciliation,

Fatima

P.S.

In the meantime I'm seeing other people.

“We are asking you to make a simple choice”



# Open Letter to the Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC

[By YOUNGO](#)

The constituency of youth non-governmental organisations under the UNFCCC



Ms. Christiana Figueres  
Executive Secretary  
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UN-  
FCCC)

8 November 2013

Dear Ms. Figueres:

We write to invite you to attend PowerShift Central and Eastern Europe – our invitation taking into account, however, our concerns regarding your engagement to **speak at the World Coal Association’s international summit** this year.

As you know, we as youth organise our own convergence ahead of the Conference of the Parties every year. Previously, we called it the Conference of Youth and we welcomed you to come and share your input, advice and support. We have appreciated and enjoyed your past attendance.

**We would like to invite you to attend once again.** This year, we have decided to call the event Power Shift Central and Eastern Europe, and your team have recently told us you are looking forward to attending. We would love you to join us on Sunday 10 November 2013 at Nowy Fort (StefanaCzarnieckiego 51, 01-541, Warsaw).

However, **it is with deeply held concerns that we ask you to attend PowerShift Central and Eastern Europe this year, as it disappointed us greatly to hear that you will also speak at the World Coal Association’s international summit.** PowerShift Central and Eastern Europe is a space for young people to convene and determine how we can demand a safe and just future. This youthful spirit of change is not, in our view, compatible with you speaking at the World Coal Association’s summit because:

1. The coal industry is one of the most carbon intensive in the world and it is also responsible for other dangerous pollutants in our air, soil, and water. Recently, the coal industry rebranded the same dirty energy as ‘clean coal’, but without seriously addressing its environmental cost. While we youth are meeting to talk about the hard work we all need to do to keep over two thirds of this industry’s proven fossil fuel reserves in the ground, the World Coal Association is meeting to do the opposite. The World Coal Association’s international summit aims to have a direct influence over the outcome of COP 19, and so to strengthen the dangerous role of fossil fuel energy in the UNFCCC negotiations.

2. It is our view – and will no doubt be the view of many within the media, and civil society – that the presence of a UNFCCC official (not least the Executive Secretary) at such an event represents a serious conflict of interest and critically undermines the legitimacy, perceived and actual, of the entire the UNFCCC process. We as youth do not accept the coal industry’s attempts to influence the global climate negotiations, to attack the bases of climate science, and to brand ‘clean coal’ as a viable mitigation solution. The World Coal Association’s goals are clearly contrary to the UNFCCC’s core objective to avoid dangerous anthropogenic climate change.

It is for these reasons we are gravely concerned that you will not only attend the World Coal Association’s international summit, but will also be a keynote speaker.

Moreover, we note with concern that your presence may not be in accordance with the impartial role with which the UNFCCC secretariat is legally bound under the Staff Regulations of the United Nations and Staff Rules (2002), in particular regulation 1.2 (a), (b), (f), (h). In 2004 the secretariat was warned by the SBI on its role as an impartial actor (after the Executive Director attended an international energy conference to endorse renewable energy) when it formally “took note of the concern expressed that officials of the secretariat should take care in their public statements to reflect the views of parties held by consensus, and not to appear to support only one side or another on contentious issues.” Clean coal is an extremely contentious issue amongst the member parties as well as civil society. We fear that, regardless of your words at the conference, your presence imbues political recognition and legitimacy to the proponents of this unproven and controversial energy source. We are certain that certain member states will echo this sentiment. Accordingly we would like to caution you that attending this summit is neither in line with the impartial role of the secretariat, nor is it an activity that is supportive of the core objective of the convention to avoid the dangerous impacts of anthropogenic climate change.

In the past, **you have been an inspiring presence at the Conference of Youth**. We appreciate the time we spend with you but are concerned about the stark contrast between the sustainable and just future we are trying to build, and the climate catastrophe the coal industry would have us worsen. It seems clear that this is a moment in which we all need to make a choice: either support youth and future generations or support the coal industry.

**You have passionately urged us to strengthen our messages and actions, to get angry, and to stay creative. We are doing so.**

Accordingly, we would like to respectfully invite you to attend our conference – **but only if you do not attend the coal summit**. We are asking you to make a simple choice: you either stand with future generations by joining us, or you stand with outdated dirty energy. The latest climate science has confirmed that most coal reserves are ‘unburnable’ if the world’s leaders are to keep the – already insufficient – promises they have made under the UNFCCC.

We trust that you will give our invitation due consideration. **We look forward to receiving your RSVP and confirmation that you will not be speaking at the World Coal Association summit.**

Yours sincerely,

YOUNGO

The constituency of youth non-governmental organisations under the UNFCCC

This entry was posted in [Blogs](#) on [8 November 2013](#) by [Marco Cadena](#).

“An opportunity to meet brilliant young organizers from all over the world”



# Reflections on Power Shift

By

[Emma & Clémence](#)



Global Climate Youth Meeting. Warsaw, Poland: 7-10.11.2013

## Push Europe Coordinators Emma & Clémence on their experience at Power Shift / COY9

After travelling many hours (29 hours for Clémence!) from Norway & France we arrived in Warsaw for the very first Central & Eastern Europe Power Shift / COY9 between November 7th and November 10th. For both of us it was our first COY event and we were pretty excited.

Power Shift Central & Eastern Europe was an opportunity to meet brilliant young organizers from all over the world. We were thrilled to meet new European faces. It made us reflect: how can we connect our forces better? The age-old question. Organising a European Power Shift in the coming months is already on the minds of some young people here.

Clémence had already met members of the Polish Youth Climate Network in Istanbul at Global Power Shift. Just being here in Warsaw and witnessing how much they have achieved in a few months was incredibly inspiring, and had her wondering how she can bring this energy back to France.

The venue, a military fort converted into an art gallery, was ideal for the event. The plenary, in the heart of the venue, had a beautiful glass ceiling. All around, rooms were used as spaces for workshops. There was always a place to reflect quietly if you needed time to chill out.



We also had the opportunity to participate in workshops on issues from divestment campaigning and high level policy work to urban agriculture.

One highlight for Clémence was a gender workshop, which brought together close to 40 young women. It was fascinating to compare our experiences as women in the climate movement, to reflect on what challenges we face on different levels, and on the ways to deal with them. Our views were sometimes different, and the discussion was thought-provoking and interesting for all of us.

The morning plenaries gave us the opportunity to reflect on the movement, and on the UNFCCC process. Hearing Meena Raman from Friends of the Earth International was a painful reminder we still have a long way to go before achieving real climate justice.

One highlight for Emma was putting our words into action. After 2 days of learning about issues and connecting with youth activists from all over the world there was plenty of time and opportunity to take action. Japanese activists collected photo messages to raise awareness of climate change at how, campaigners from PUSH Sweden coordinated a solidarity action with The Philippines as tragic events caused by climate change unfolded thousands of miles away with the message we stand with you.

Also throughout Saturday we created a video of an exciting race between dirty and renewable energy... you can imagine who won! Check out the video [here](#) & share it with your networks to show support for the Polish Youth Climate Network!

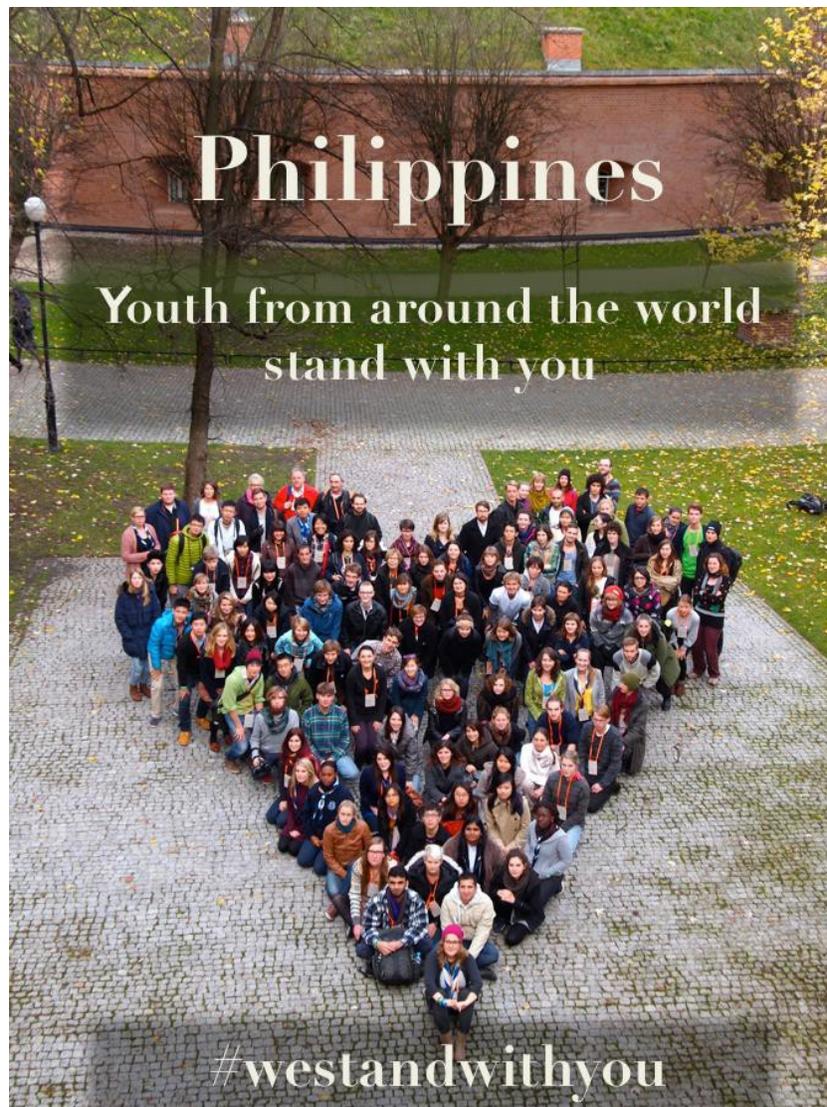
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The final day of COY9 / Power Shift Central & Eastern Europe was spent preparing for the COP here in Warsaw – to figure out how we could take our discussions forward as a movement. We focused on two things, the outrageous corporate takeover of the conference and Christiana Figueres speaking at the coal association conference. We spent time writing an open letter warning her if she attended the coal conference, she wasn't welcome at our Power Shift event (you can read the [letter](#) & [response](#) here). We began making action plans on the corporate takeover issue, [you can see what we got up to during the COP here](#).

The weekend was really inspiring: we hope the movement in Central & Eastern Europe goes from strength to strength. The bonds we've made at COY9/ Power Shift Central & Eastern Europe show we can work together as a more united movement, with a stronger voice, both in our home countries and internationally.

We are incredibly thankful for all the hard work that the Polish Youth Climate Network & friends have put into creating such an ambitious, creative and inspiring event. Dziękuję friends!

This entry was posted in [Preparations](#) on [15 November 2013](#) by [Koen](#).



“This broke my heart”



## POSTS FROM WARSAW

By

Hamzat Lawal



**Editors Note:** We interviewed Hamzat in Warsaw and have not yet prepared that conversation for publication due to technical reasons (we can't find our transcription!). Meanwhile, here are some of his posts home during the COP. When he discovered that Nigeria's lead climate negotiators were not present at COP 19, he wrote to the president (another letter is reproduced below) and asked that they be there. Three days

later, they arrived. Hamzat Lawal is an activist from Nigeria, passionate about the environment and how it contributes to Africa's development. He is a social media enthusiast and has contributed to advocacy efforts on shaping Nigeria's climate change policies while inspiring a grassroots movement through raising awareness. Hamzat believes that young people in the African continent is strategic in achieving the fight against climatic threats. He works for ICEED, Nigeria's leading energy and environment organization.

[November 15, 2013](#)

*FM 95.1 Abuja: talking Nigeria's role (or lack thereof) in Warsaw*

*I joined Kimberley Blessing Ijeoma on [95.1 Naija Info FM](#), a station that has 2.5 million listeners, to give an update on Nigeria's role in the UN climate negotiations happening in Warsaw, Poland.*

*We talked about why these international negotiations matter to Nigeria, how we are underrepresented here and what that means for our future. Spoiler alert: if you don't have a seat on the table, you will be on the menu. This is becoming a hot topic in the capital city, perhaps with increasing pressure our leaders will give climate change the attention Nigerian's deserves.*



[November 14, 2013](#)

*Whispers in the Corridor:*

### 'African Countries Plans to Walk Out of Climate Talks'

Four days into the climate negotiations, the African team comprising key continental negotiators and civil society organizations has hinted at the possibility of staging a walkout as the ongoing talk looks unambitious and low commitments on the part of polluter-countries.



This came to fore today at a strategic meeting between a team of African negotiators, Government delegates and the civil society organizations led by the [Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance \(PACJA\)](#). In the build-up to 2015.

Based on inputs from a PACJA spokesperson under condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, decried the non-committal posture of the developed nations on key issues as they relate to loss and damage, means of implementation and Green Climate Fund (GCF).

Mithika Mwenda of the Pan-Africa Climate Justice Alliance while expressing fears on a possible fruitful exercise in Warsaw has called on the African team to explore every viable means of accentuating the African position at the conference without ruling out the possibility of a walk-out as 'Africans cannot afford to go back home with peanuts after suffering under Warsaw's extremely cold weather'.

African civil society leaders present also hinted at a possible backlash of disenchantment and discontinuity with the entire UNFCCC process if concrete implementation terms and financing models are not arrived at this conference.

The Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA), a continental coalition of Civil Society Organizations from diverse backgrounds in Africa, it has

emerged as the most vibrant and largest Civil Society platform on climate change and sustainable development. With a membership of more than 500 organizations and networks, the Alliance brings together Faith-based Organizations, Farmers and Pastoralists' Groups, Community-based organizations, Non-Governmental organizations, Trusts, Foundations, among other sectors with a common goal of promoting and advocating for Pro-poor, climate-friendly and equity-based responses to climate change.

Editors' note: the walkout referred to here did happen, and some credit it with giving momentum to the decision taken a few days later by civil society, led by youth activists, to walk out of COP 19 as a symbolic protest at the corporate presence at the talks and the failure of the negotiations themselves.

[November 20, 2013](#)

### **Open Letter to Goodluck Jonathan: Take Action Now!**

Dear Mr. President,

My name is Hamzat Lawal, a proud Nigerian citizen, passionate about the environment and transformative change. I am writing you today as a concerned youth whose future and that of generations yet unborn is being threatened by the effects of climate change.

I humbly appeal to you as the Leader of Africa's most populous black nation, a father who loves his children and an environmentalist who is passionate about the well-being of the people. You should positively influence the ongoing climate talks and inspire other world leaders in taking actions especially in Africa.

Climate change will define our present and future existence, and you can be part of history by directly contributing to the world's response. At this crucial moment, political leaders are required to take bold steps in shaping our existence by protecting the ecosystems that hold up our societies. I strongly believe your leadership role would inspire other African and world Leaders.

A bill to establish the Climate Change Commission is currently awaiting your Presidential assent; this bill, if passed into law, would coordinate Nigeria's response to climate change and would give a positive signal to the global community while putting Nigeria at the forefront in tackling this menace.

Last year, many states in our dear country were ravaged with floods leading to the death of over 100 people. Millions were displaced, infrastructures

worth millions of dollars destroyed leading to temporary economic collapse, children were unable to go to school and water borne diseases increased. You immediately made a provision of N17.6 billion in direct financial assistance to the affected states and some federal government agencies for disaster management; funds that could have been directed to economic growth if we had a legal and institutional framework in place.

In your inaugural speech on May 29, 2011, you said, 'We must grow the economy, create jobs, and generate enduring happiness for our people. I have great confidence in the ability of Nigerians to transform this country. The urgent task of my administration is to provide a suitable environment, for productive activities to flourish. I therefore call on the good people of Nigeria, to enlist as agents of this great transformation'.

The recent [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#) report shows that Africa will suffer the most from climate change compared to the other continents. We are particularly vulnerable because our current capacity to adapt to climate change is considerably limited.

In recent years, average temperatures have soared. They are projected by scientists to increase three to four degrees Celsius within the next century if nothing is done now. The extreme weather that comes with temperature rises will destroy infrastructure and have undue impacts on agriculture and disease risk rates. Currently, agriculture accounts for over 60% of our labour and contributes to our GDP, both of which are threatened by climate change.

You promised transformative growth, development and 'A Breath of Fresh Air'. Now is the time to act on your promises by signing the Climate Change Commission bill into law.

The United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, has invited you to join other Heads of State in bringing climate change commitments to the Climate Change Summit in New York in September 2014. If you assent to this bill before going, you would put Nigeria on an enviable pathway toward building a low carbon economy; strengthening our resilience and bringing together the public and private sector, academia and other critical actors to chart a roadmap for sustainable growth and development for our great country, socially, economically and diplomatically with a guaranteed future for all.

[November 18, 2013](#)

**Nigeria REDD+ Negotiator – If Not Here, Where?**

I had a chat with Salisu M. Dahiru, Coordinator and lead negotiator on REDD+ under the Federal Ministry of Environment on his roles in the ongoing climate talks. REDD+, which is UN-speak for the negotiations on “reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries and approaches to stimulate action”.

[May 30, 2014](#)

## **Nigerian Democracy & Climate Change**

As part of Nigeria’s 15 years democracy day celebration, the President organized what looked like an interactive session with 1000 Youth Leaders across the country tagged ‘President Jonathan’s Day With Young Leaders of Nigeria.’ I presume his intention was to give a comprehensive and updated account of his administration’s [Transformation Agenda](#) and address burning questions from young Leaders from across the country, most especially on Job Creation.

[Nkiruka Nnaemego](#), [Oludotun Babayemi](#), [Unico Uduka](#) & I were among the few selected youth Leaders (activists) to attend the forum. We were really excited, hoping to ask Mr. President about his plans to address climate change issues and the Climate Change Commission Bill that has been passed twice by the National Assembly awaiting his ascent since 2010.

I believe that if Climate Change issues were adequately addressed, it would curb the rising insecurity challenges, create green jobs for over 600,000 youth annually according to a report by the [International Centre for Energy, Environment & Development \(ICEED\)](#) and put Nigeria on a path way towards a leading green economy in Africa.

At the event, there were lots of protocols and boring speeches by dignitaries but what first caught my attention was the 33 year old current Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Nurudeen Mohammed. Hearing about his accomplishments and role in the current government was inspiring. Also, the motivational talk by Tunde Kehinde, Co-Founder of [Jumia](#) – an on-line e-commerce store where you can buy virtually anything ranging from mobile phone to home appliances delivered to your door step was captivating. Lastly was an inspiring speech by Mr. Ashish Thakker, CEO/Founder of [Mara Foundation](#) who gave a short bio of himself about how he had to drop out of school to support his family at the age of 15, but yet, became one of the most successful Entrepreneurs in Africa. He also launched the [Youth Entrepreneurial Mentorship and Empowerment App](#) – an on-line community of experts to provide support to start-up businesses.

Finally, the time we were all waiting for – Mr. President took the centre stage and addressed Youth Leaders while launching ‘The Transformation Agenda’... *Reviewing Progress, Marching Forward*. The report gave updates of Nigeria’s Economic outlook ‘Rebasing Nigeria’s GDP’, our recent hosting of WEFA, Sovereign Wealth Fund, Job Creation – YouWIN, Diversifying the Economy, Food Security & Agriculture, ICT, basic infrastructural development and Environmental Sustainability among others.



*President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan GCFR responding to questions from Youth Leaders*

I was eager to lay my hands on the report to access the progress made in the Environmental sector, because to me, it is the bed rock of any successful government and a progressive country. Few minutes later, I got a copy and swiftly opened the section named ‘Environmental Sustainability’ hoping to see my government’s national commitments towards addressing climate change issues. The only quote that looks like a commitment reads ‘Nigeria negotiated the adoption of the Second Commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol (2013 – 2020) during the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change’.

**THIS BROKE MY HEART AS I WAS HOPING TO SEE A CLEAR PLAN,** legal/institutional framework on how Mr. President would work with various stakeholders including the private sector in addressing these pressing issues. It is not news that the recent IPCC report clearly shows that the African continent, most especially, Nigeria is prone to climatic disasters if urgent steps are not taken to curb our abusive environmental behaviours which includes; increase in Gas Flaring; Cutting Trees for firewood; Improper Mining; Oil Spillage among others.

What seemed like a planned attempt by Mr. President’s Aids to select some identified young people to ask questions as Youth Leaders was nipped in the bud by activists, as in the past, organizers would strategically appoint some

youth to ask generated questions making the administration look good and not really addressing pressing needs of the general population.

We (Nkiruka, Oludotun, Unico & I) tried to get an opportunity in the midst of all the shouting and confusion as we had similar questions in mind, but didn't get the opportunity to ask our President questions on his plans to address this immediate threat (climate change). This would be an opportunity to actually have the Nigerian government to diversify our highly dependent economy (dirty fossil fuel industry) while creating green sustainable jobs, generating clean energy/power, fighting terrorism and protecting our biodiversity etc and also, his position on the climate change commission Bill awaiting this Presidential ascent since 2010.

It is important to note that climate change does not only endanger the actualization of Nigeria's Vision 20:2020 or Mr. President's Transformation Agenda. It will also impede national growth and sustainable development in Nigeria and across the African region if we continue the attitude of 'business as usual'.



Some Youth Activists at The Forum. Photo Credit: Fresh & Young Brains Development Initiative

“The message of the walkout: *volveremos*”



# POSTS FROM WARSAW

By

[Natasha Weidner](#)



## Natasha in Havana is now Natasha in Warsaw!

I will be in Poland from Nov 8th to the 25th observing the United Nations COP19, an international summit to address climate change. My primary goal is to document the growing social movements for climate justice that are coming together at this conference. Follow me throughout the next two weeks as I meet with activists from around the world, uncover creative solutions to the climate crisis, and explore the city of Warsaw



The IICAT Climate Justice Project team at work interviewing a young climate activist



[November 20, 2013](#)

Here I am participating in an action organized by Connected Voices, a group that aims to spread the messages and perspectives of young people from all over the world to the UN climate negotiators. We're standing in the entrance tunnel to the conference, holding pictures with messages from young people who couldn't come to the COP but want their demands to be heard by the negotiators.



[November 20, 2013](#)

### *the race to the bottom*

The halls and meeting rooms of this conference center are swarming with activity. Everywhere you look, at nearly every hour of day or night, you can see people rushing around from meeting to meeting, typing furiously on laptops, huddled in group discussions, or just storming through the hallways with an air of urgency and importance. What is it all leading too?

It's extremely hard to say. The negotiations are in the usual deadlock - developing countries want funding to adapt to climate impacts, and developed countries won't provide it. Rumor has it that last night at 4am China and the G77 (an alliance of 77 developing countries) walked out of loss and damage negotiations, frustrated with the complete lack of ambition among rich countries to pay for climate-induced losses and damages in poor countries. Several countries have announced that they will abandon previous commitments to reduce carbon emissions. None of this provides much hope for an effective multilateral treaty to address the biggest challenge facing humanity.

Don't despair: as I've said before, there is hope. There is so much hope and creativity and joy and sexiness here, only it doesn't come from the negotiations. It comes from the hundreds of civil society members who are here fighting for a better world: the youth, the indigenous, the feminists, the educators, the organizers, the activists. Etcetera.

But we need a paradigm shift. There is a perpetual mood of disappointment in these halls, particularly disappointment with the rich countries that refuse to shift from business as usual and refuse to help the rest of the world. But what are we all expecting? That after centuries of exploiting the poor countries and the natural environment, the rich countries of the world are going to suddenly take the moral high road and reverse these historic trends? No way. We need to stop begging and compromising with the leaders of the rich countries, or we will be disappointed forever. It's time to stand up to these leaders, fight them, and make a plan for our future without them.

[November 20, 2013](#)

### **Climates Brasil video: Equity is hotter than Climate Change**

Check out [this video](#) that I made with some friends in the Brazilian youth delegation, in honor of "gender day" at the COP. We're celebrating female power, but we're also trying to spread the "sexify" movement (which is actually a thing in Brazil). The idea is this: how many people are going to care about climate change negotiations if we just sit around in suits speaking in acronyms? Probably not many. That's why we're dancing, laughing, and filling the halls with color and sexiness. Join us!

[November 21, 2013](#)

### **"Nature Does Not Negotiate"**

#### **Environmentalists Walk Out of U.N. Climate Summit in Warsaw**

As we began our show, hundreds of environmental activists walked out of the U.N. climate change summit in Warsaw, Poland, today over the absence of a binding agreement on curbing global warming. The move comes less than 36 hours after a group of 133 developing nations walked out of a key negotiating meeting amidst a conflict over how countries who have historically emitted the most greenhouse gases should be held financially responsible for some of the damage caused by extreme weather. "Our message to our political leaders is that nature does not negotiate," says Greenpeace Executive Director Kumi Naidoo. "You can't change the science, we have to change political will."

[November 23, 2013](#)

### ***volveremos***

On Thursday we walked out of the COP along with hundreds of other members of civil society, with the message that we are fed up with the hypocrisy and ineffectiveness of this year's conference, and that we will be back next year for COP20 with a stronger movement behind us.

At least 12 major NGOs at the conference joined forces for the walkout, including Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Fund, and Friends of the Earth International. Many will not be returning to the conference.

The walkout has been seen by some as "giving up" on a decent outcome of COP19, but I don't see it that way at all. If you ask me, walking out was

the most effective way for civil society to draw global attention to the issues at the COP - overwhelming corporate influence, lack of ambition among the developed countries, and the hypocrisy of the UNFCCC secretariat - without getting our badges forcibly taken away. Had we tried a more aggressive action inside the conference, such as a sit-in or occupation, it may have received the same attention, but it also would have certainly led to us being kicked out of the COP, possibly arrested, and never allowed to return to future COPs. This, in my view, would be counterproductive.

The walkout was picked up by mainstream media around the world. I hope that it will have a mobilizing effect; that people will see it as a call to action, to build the grassroots climate justice movement in our own neighborhoods and countries, so that leaders of civil society can return to next year's COP in Lima with more people power behind them. That's the message of the walkout: *volveremos*.











“This is where shit actually happens”



# Thoughts from a Newborn Climate Activist

By

[Emily Williams](#)



My name is Emily Williams, and I am a climate-activist-academic-explorer-artist. I work as a campaign director for the California Student Sustainability Coalition and am a recent alumnus of UCSB with a B.S. in environmental studies.

I want to travel/get-to-know, experience, change, beautify the world, and every day I realize it's a little more complicated than that. This blog is dedicated to my travel to and experience at COP 19—the 19th annual Conference of the Parties, or UN Climate Talks, in Warsaw, Poland.

## Day -1

### **Before the plane**

Tomorrow, I hop on the plane to go to Warsaw, Poland. I have little to no idea what awaits me. I've been reading up on the UNFCCC process for months now, looking into previous COPs to get an idea of this one, communicating with youth groups such as YOUNGO, and yet I still cannot imagine what I will be experiencing in about 24 hours.

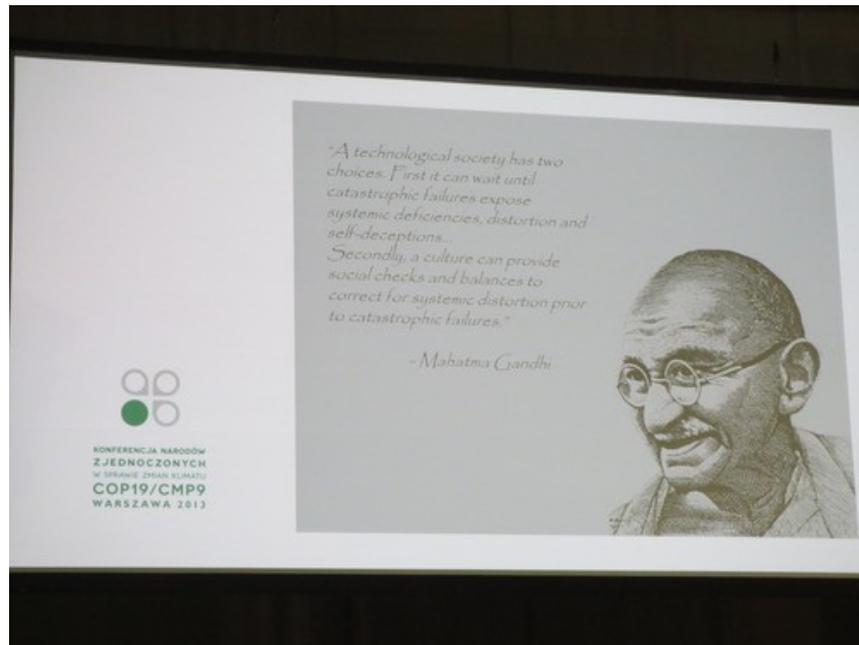
I feel very lucky indeed to be traveling to COP19. I remember back in Spring having spoken with John about being interested in attending and being a part of this incredible team of climate activist researchers who are going. He said that if I could get the money to buy a plane ticket over there, I could be a part of it. Some paycheck later, I'm sitting in my room, purchased plane ticket on my laptop, and it sunk in—I'm going to the UN climate talks in Poland. Poland. Who has been to Poland? I know no one in my family, and none of my friends have. All I can say is that I am a mix of nervous and excited to get over there and start meeting people.

## Day 1

Day 1 of COP19, and already, it is a sobering process. I actually sit here now in the opening plenary, and have listened to speaker after speaker talking about how important it is to create real, global solutions on climate change. Various members have done their best to illustrate the incredible toxic nature of pollution, the fact that we're at 400PPM of CO2 emissions, and the fact that whole societies will be destroyed.

Particularly touching was a video made of the two Polands. There is a Poland, here, in Europe. Yet there is also a Poland in the Christmas Islands. The video was shown to the whole opening plenary, and was groups of children from the two Polands who sent each other letters and described their home. Yet you saw in the video that with increased sea level rise, the island Poland would be no more.

Yet, seeing the various actors working so hard to put together inspiring speeches, using emotional tactics of videos of children and having the delegation breathe in an indicating that they're breathing in 400PPM, is also disheartening. Because you know the process is blocked, held by corporations, and has this guiled face of sustainable, progressive, equitable-minded people while the inside of the process is a corrupted climate conference run and funded by the very industry it's trying to fight.



Following the video was a presentation on the findings of the IPCC report. Included was the following: "Renewable Energy costs are generally higher than their fossil fuel counterparts, but in many places renewable energy is already economically competitive."

So you've got the economics behind the solution, you've got the delegates talking and talking about how important it is to work for our FUTURE GENERATIONS. So what's the problem?! Why is nothing being done? Oh, that's right, the industry that owns our worlds' governments—the fossil fuel industry.

### Day 2:

*That was the fastest jet lag I ever got over*

True enough, I am over jetlag. After having spent 2 nights in Poland, 9 hours time difference from California, I'm over my jetlag! That may be because my first night was a sleepless one, and last night I was only per-

mitted 6 hours, but it has driven me to a state of exhaustion in which jet lag has no room to reside.

In all seriousness though, today was my second full day of COY (Conference of Youth), or PSCEE (Power Shift for Central and Eastern Europe). It's been this incredible adventure in which you activists from in fact all around the world come together and share ideas. Yet there has been an incredible difference between this one and the 2 American Power Shift I've attended. The American ones, with attendance in the thousands, always feel like a production; there are 10 workshops at a time to choose between, breaks of 5-10 minutes, short lunches, anonymity in the crowd where no one interacts. (I must mention though that they are fabulous—incredible keynotes, inspiring workshop, real campaigns that result from it). Yet the CEE one, with an attendance of 100-200, feels more inclusive. People get to know you, you get to know people. There are long breaks and even longer lunches, and it focuses on building a network by allowing people the time to meet and share their life stories. After 2 days, I feel that I know these people so well and would be so incredibly happy to organize with them at the drop of a hat.

I'm also learning a lot. I had gotten to a place before I left where I didn't feel I was learning. Then the night before I got on the plane, I met with the divestment group at De Anza college, which recently had a win. They made me realize that perhaps the hardball tactics which the UCs have been using are not the most strategic; perhaps we should be candid with the Regents after all. Since that moment, I have felt indeed like a newborn climate activist. I've been introduced to new ideas such as "Intergenerational Equity" (or *inteq*) and the feasibility of youth approaching their countries' ministers and delegates and sharing their viewpoints (no way I'd ever get near Todd Stern). Yet being here and talking with people makes me realize that the things I take for granted and the systems I accept are in fact a product of the culture I live in. Simple enough, right? Well, it took me this long.

With that, it is time I get a restful night sleep. We'll talk more about *Inteq* later.

### Day 3

I sit here, at the end of what has been an incredibly long, yet productive and inspiring, day at COP. That word 'inspiring' I would never have thought to add as a qualifier for what is this generally frustrating process that brought people's hopes up and amounts to nothing. Maybe it was the sleep, maybe it was the food—after all, getting enough of both of those is enough

to turn anyone's experience from miserable to brilliant. But I think it's something beyond that; I got a clearer view of what this is all about, and feel like I've found a place in all this mess.

So what, you may ask, brought this feeling about? First off, I want to tell you about the little restaurant we found near the venue. For the sake of keeping it secret for as long as possible so that it continues to be a relaxing, peaceful getaway, I will not disclose its location here. Yet for lunch, a small group of us decided to leave the stadium and find some food. Upon exiting the venue, a waft of cold, brisk air flowed into my lungs, fresh after hours in the stuffy recycled air. A brisk walk brought us to this hole in the wall—a vegan little place that may be called hipster were it not in Europe. I love these the best—places that are even more special because they're found in the heart of big city industrialization. 1 yerba mate and grilled veggie sandwich later and I was a transformed person.

Walking back into the conference, I also felt like something had changed. I viewed it with a new light—opportunity. No, I'm not naive and I still know that this place is "the place where nothing ever happens." But still, it was an eventful day.

It started with YOUNGO spokescouncil, which is a daily meeting at 8AM at the COPs. YOUNGO is what is recognized by the UNFCCC as the youth constituency. It's made up by all youth that want to be part of YOUNGO. Spokescouncil is a place to share the happenings for the day and vote upon matters. There was a rather heated vote which left sour tastes in mouths. Following that was the rather hectic making and printing of fliers for a divestment side event and a lot of running around, including a trip over to the "US Pavilion." Yes, that's right. The US has a pavilion, not just an office. Then lunch.

But after lunch, I went to a side event on the Carbon Bubble, where I met Mark, one of the co-directors of the Carbon Tracker Institute and probably one of my biggest geek heroes (if you don't know what I'm talking about, check out "Unburnable Carbon"). Then followed a meeting with the English youth (UKYCC) and American (SustainUS) as well as various other hodge-podge characters like yours truly. We started to plan out our side event on divestment to take place Friday. Then, having realized I left my voice recorder (on) at the other event, I ran to the other side to go find it. Luckily it was still there, and still recording—can't wait to see what mysterious conversations I may have caught.

Well, friends, it was this forgetful moment that led to a multitude of things going right. I clarified the panel I'm to facilitate tomorrow (Inter-

generational Inquiry, for Young and Future Generations Day—more to come on that tomorrow). Then, as luck would have it, upon exiting the building, I found myself next to none other than one of the American delegation. He gave me his card; next stop, meeting in the US Pavilion.

Yes, I'm tired. And yes, my feet hurt. But I also feel like I know what I'm doing. I'm at COP19, in Warsaw, Poland. And even though I'm not totally sure what I'm doing, I believe it's going to make a difference.

### Day 5

#### at the [corporate] COP

Today marks the half-way point of COP19; the middle of the time scale of the UN climate debates, the beginning to the few days of rest after week one of climate theater; the entry to the heat up in what is the world's greatest spectacle and debacle.

Why do I say all this? The COP is supposed to be a convening of the parties to reach an international agreement on what to do about climate change; it is supposed to create a mechanism or process to deal with the impacts of climate change in an equitable fashion and lay out a plan to avoid further catastrophe. Yet I'm convinced that of the delegations, most are here for the performance...for that is what it is—a grand theater spectacle in which the delegates play out their roles long practiced, and are focused more on their tailored suits, when to laugh, and sounding and looking good on camera. The content of their words is of utmost importance. But the impact of their actions? That is not of importance.

It is quite sickening realizing this. What makes it even more sickening is the fact that this is the "Corporate Cop." The COP is made possible by Emirates, BMW, and IKEA. The bean bags you sit on in the halls are provided by Emirates with pictures of iconic symbols of globalization and capitalism that have reached the far corners of the world and are now our national monuments instead of the vast natural beauty that once stood in its place. The apples we're eating are laser-engraved with "COP19/CMP9." (Though apparently they are local and thus may have been good-intentioned.) The petroleum and gas unions have booths on the main level, while youth groups' booths were sent down to the level below. And, the Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC is the keynote speaker for the world coal summit to begin on Monday.

This has become a corporate COP. It's funded, influence, permeated, and infiltrated by corporations, for a grand theatrical finale that (spoiler alert!) ... will amount to nothing.



The Corporate COP apple. As the world is eaten away outside from climate change, the COP stays comfortable and insulated within its negotiating bubble.

So where's the hope in this? How am I somehow still in good spirits? This may sound cheesy, but it's because I'm inspired. I know that the solution will not come directly from the COP—in fact, when finally we reach meaningful action on climate change, the COP will be the last thing to react. It will be the movement, civil society, youth, who put pressure via various campaigns on the COP to de-corporatize. I know exactly what I must do. I must return home and put even more effort into divestment; I must rethink the divestment campaign as well and have it reflect the needs of the GLOBE, and not just the global North. I must rethink what it means to fight for global justice and ask those most affected what they need. And I must stay a part of YOUNGO throughout the year and work on influencing my delegation throughout the year, before they get to the performance, before the dress rehearsal, and direct them. I must be the director when the actors are still forming their characters. Only then are we going to see some change in how this all works.

### Day...?...at COP

Here I am, with only two days left at the COP, and I find myself disoriented, unsure of how the time passed so quickly, and unsure of what day it is. I began this blog with such energy and was ready to write my

thoughts down daily to be able to reflect on the COP process and provide insight to those not on the ground as to what's happening.

And yet, I have not done so.

Maybe the lack of blog posts reflects the nature of the COP—fast paced, exhausting, with things happening so quickly that you don't realize exactly what just happened in what negotiating room. Yet, despite this, the COP also moves with an excruciatingly slow pace. I find myself wondering what exactly 200 nations could be discussing that it takes 2 weeks to figure it out and yet nothing tangible has been agreed upon.

Today is the closing of the ADP—the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action. It's actually the body, if you were to choose any, that really focuses on the heart of the COP. It basically is the platform on which countries will finally agree to binding outcomes that limit their emissions ([see the prezis](#) created by UKYCC). One neat thing that came out of it was that negotiators actually mentioned intergenerational equity, which is a concept that's been pushed forward by youth which calls on countries to recognize their duty to leave behind equal resource access and opportunities to the future generations as those that they enjoyed. It was truly a win, at least the biggest win we might expect to see.

Today is also finance day. Yesterday was gender day. There are all these themed days that are meant to surround a certain issue and come up with important decisions. Gender day was interesting as there was a panel of all females who are in powerful roles and are making real change.

What it boils down to is this—the aspects that have most impressed me thus far are people working outside their limits, requirements, and expectations to push forward a cause they're really passionate about. Youth, Mary Robinson, Yeb Sano. These people were not required to say the things they say nor do the things they do, and yet they've all gone above and beyond to effect some sort of true change because they recognize no one else is going to do it.

Moral of this blog: if you want something to get done, find out who else wants it too and just do it.

So what am I going to go do? The ideas raised here, and the impact of meeting people from all around the world with very different realities than my own, have made me think a lot about why I fight for what I fight for, and how I may consider those people affected by my actions. Divestment for instance is not merely a global North issue; we must think about how our

investments affect the rest of the world and think about how to use it to be in solidarity with others.

I am also going to write a book. That's right. A book. Perhaps a novella. But since I graduated I've been itching to use my brain and parse out my thoughts. In the year and a half I have left of working, before grad school, I will write thoughts into a book. The drafted outline is as follows:

In the year 2013, humanity faces the greatest threat it has ever faced—a global genocide; an inhuman governing body; and a decision to place its head on the chopping block. The genocide is the chocking of the world's and humanity's life systems by the vast degradation of its resources as caused by the fossil fuel industry, and beyond that, as caused by its government. Its government is not comprised of human beings, however, but is known as Capitalism, fueled by a culture of consumption. And humanity places its naïve head on the chopping block, believing that the blade will not fall so long as humanity clings to its god—money.

This book by no means is objective, nor does it cite every conclusion or fact back to a source. Ideas are debatable, conclusions may only hold true for some societies in certain circumstances. Feedback is welcome, and debate is how we will actually arrive at a said future.

### [I just walked out of the COP](#)

That's right; in protest, I just walked out of the COP. Yet I was not alone. Instead I was surrounded by 800 other members of civil society (the name given to those who are non-governmental), all of whom were fed up with the process and recognized that nothing was getting done inside. Our leaving was done in protest to the sheer unwillingness of countries to adopt actual plans and pledges that would have a real effect on climate change, as well as in response to the corporate hold of this COP.

Protestors wore shirts labeled on the front “#COP19 Polluters Talk, We Walk” and on the back “#volveremos We Will Be Back.” Because at COP 19, the polluters talk, ventriloquists with their hands controlling the mouths of the big countries' mouths, and in turn civil society has no voice; hence, we walk out. However, on the back, it was to show that we will be coming back to COP 20, with a new plan in place and new determination for how we are going to tackle this problem.

The walkout was done in response to wide-spread frustration about the inefficiency of the COP process, and the realization that civil society was doing no good by being in there. Yet afterward we converged in an outside-the-COP convergence space, a beautiful old building with tons of countries represented by the civil society who sought its refuge. We convened and talked about why we did the action and spoke to next steps. It is now our responsibility to do something about this—influence our policy makers at home and put renewed pressure on the process to achieve some sort of tangible result. But moreover, it was a chance for us to brainstorm how to work together and pool our resources to make the strongest, global-North-South, solidarity-driven, strategic, and powerful movement. Because this is where shit actually happens.

“I’m at a loss for words”



# Cultivating Climates of Resistance

By

[Ben Liddie](#)



### [11th Nov 2013 \[part 1\]](#)

I can't help but think that choosing Poland, out of all countries, to host COP 19, was strategic. I mean, where better to host a heavily corporatized conference that makes a mockery of global justice by serving as an institution through which wealthy, neoliberal, colonial, and imperialist countries maintain their status as such?

Poland has terrible energy and emissions policies, and it is known that the government takes a strong anti-climate stance. The atmosphere is hardly welcoming; hardly the space to complete the work that must be done this COP to ensure an equitable, ambitious, and legally binding treaty by 2015.

Happenstance that the first day of COP 19 fell on Polish independence day, when it is known that thousands of neo-Nazis and nationalists swarm the city to clash violently against police and counter-resistance movements to assert their desire for a "pure" Poland? And the conference just so happens to be about two weeks earlier than previous years? Maybe. Maybe not.

It could be that the UN took advantage of Poland already being heavily militarized because of the tens of thousands of right-wing extremists in the city, and because of the maybe or maybe-not-already sidelined Schengen Agreement for the weeks during COP that will reduce travel into the country. It could be that the social tension and violence surrounding this event were also strategic to kicking off the COP 19 atmosphere and putting the safety of many Delegates and Civil Society members at serious risk.

Who knows...

### [11th Nov 2013 \[part 2\]](#)

Feeling profoundly sad for the condition of the Philippines and neighboring areas right now. I'm at a loss for words... I don't know how to express this heart-sinking feeling that is eating me from the inside out.

And the fact that Yeb Sano is going on hunger strike until there is a suitable agreement in sight, slowly killing himself in the public eye, the fact that maybe the heart wrenching detail he went into might not have been enough to elicit an emotional response to the devastation that is only just being assessed there, the fact that three youth delegates were de-badged for standing in solidarity with his nation, the fact that so many of the delegates were able to stand up today and lie blatantly about their intentions to "change" business as usual to secure the treaty we need to see, the fact that the conference space is a corporate space, the fact that the only people there speaking out are consistently silenced, the fact that the voice of youth is a token and not the voice guiding the delegates to the future we all need,

the fact that this conference structure is to maintain the current atrocious power dynamics of the world, the fact that so much fucking money is being spent on this, the fact that

they have gotten away with this for so long is unbearable.

[14th Nov 2013](#)

Cross-sections of animals who have ingested cigarette butts.



-NoButts.org

[28th Nov 2013](#)

don't know why i like this so much. i'm not a fan of the beach but this looks nice.



[28th Nov 2013](#)

everything is sort of weird and sad and i want to sleep next to you

[28th Nov 2013](#)

"It's not simply about knowing your worth. It's about having the strength to never accept less" —Paul Carrick Brunson (via [rainydaysandblankets](#))

“What does it all amount to?”



# ¡Volveremos! / We Will Return The State of Play for the Global Climate Justice Movement

By  
John Foran



THE WARMEST NOVEMBER EVER RECORDED, WORLDWIDE. The strongest typhoon ever to hit land. The previously nonexistent Northwest Passage in the Arctic opened. The latest climate reports telling us that climate change is not coming, that it's already here. The data on global warming and severe climate impacts mount up inexorably. Meanwhile at the nineteenth annual U.N. climate summit, the COP19 (Conference of the Parties) in Warsaw, Poland, between November 11 and 22, 2013, a lot happened but little was achieved. I was in Warsaw with my co-director Richard Widick of the International Institute of Climate Action and Theory ([www.iicat.org](http://www.iicat.org)), and a team of five UC Santa Barbara students and alumni, calling ourselves the iicat Climate Justice Project. Richard focused on filming interviews with some of the COP's more powerful players among the delegates, corporate lobbyists, and experts for a feature documentary on the battle for a global treaty. The rest of us interviewed young activists and filmed demonstrations inside and outside the COP for another documentary project and a book of their voices.

A negotiator from the global South moved people to tears. Two climate scientists got very political. Negotiators for the more than 100-nation strong Group of 77 staged a walkout from one of the closed sessions in frustration with the global North's lack of ambition or generosity. Then global civil society matched this with the biggest walk-out of participants from a COP ever seen. **What does it all amount to? What is the state of play in the negotiations?** What are the prospects that the global climate justice movement can pressure the nations into the kind of serious negotiations that will be required for the 2015 deadline of a binding climate treaty that takes into account the urgency of the science? This essay will explore these questions as it charts some of the high and low points of the Warsaw COP, including the situation leading up to it, and the prospects for a stronger global climate justice movement going forward.

#### *The run-up*

In late September the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a "[Summary for Policymakers](#)" derived from its much-anticipated Fifth Assessment Report (AR5). Its findings are as definitive as science can be: "Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, sea level has risen, and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased." The report goes on to conclude in the measured that characterize IPCC reports but which nevertheless state the deadly facts:

Human influence has been detected in warming of the atmosphere and the ocean, in changes in the global water cycle, in reductions in snow and ice, in global mean sea level rise, and in changes in some climate extremes. This evidence for human influence has grown since AR4. It is *extremely* likely [emphasis added] that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century....

Continued emissions of greenhouse gases will cause further warming and changes in all components of the climate system. Limiting climate change will require substantial and sustained reductions of greenhouse gas emissions.

Meanwhile, on June 25, 2013, in the steamy heat of Washington, D.C., Barack Obama unveiled his administration's new climate action [plan](#), stating "The question now is whether we will have the courage to act before it's too late. And how we answer will have a profound impact on the world we leave behind not just for you but for your children and your grandchildren."



*President Barack Obama wipes perspiration from his face as he speaks about climate change at Georgetown University in Washington, Tuesday, June 25, 2013. Photo and caption: Charles Dharapak/AP*

He also proclaimed "We've got a vital role to play. We can't stand on the sidelines." The Obama climate plan rests on a combination of enforcing existing or enacting new Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations for emissions from new and existing power plants, new federal government targets mandating energy efficiency and renewable energy, and a variety of lesser measures. Interestingly, and to its credit, the United States has registered an [11 percent drop](#) in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions since the peak year of 2007; the country is now about on par with its 1990 levels. While bold compared to the lack of ambition on climate in his first

term, Obama's plan is far from the breakthrough needed at the COP, despite praise for it from the U.S. climate negotiator Todd Stern, who [said](#) the president's plan would help him in his work, because it demonstrated U.S. seriousness on the issue.

"The more that they see that the United States is acting with vigor and determination, the more credibility and leverage we have internationally, there's no question about that," Stern said, adding that negotiators from other countries had already responded to the comments Obama has made on climate change since his re-election in 2012. "Any sign – and this certainly is – of strong presidential action and strong leadership on this issue [has] a very positive effect and translates into a boost for our credibility."

In the days after Typhoon Haiyan's devastation of the Philippines, Walden Bello, a member of the Philippine House of Representatives and a board member of Greenpeace International, wrote in *The Nation*:

For a time earlier this year, it appeared that Hurricane Sandy would bring climate change to the forefront of President Obama's agenda. It did not. While trumpeting that he was directing federal agencies to force power plants to cut carbon emissions and encourage movement toward clean-energy sources, Obama will not change the US policy of nonadherence to the Kyoto Protocol, which Washington never ratified. Although 67 percent of Americans believe in climate change, Obama does not have the courage to challenge the fanatical climate skeptics in the Republican Party and the business establishment.

Washington's military-led relief effort in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan should not obscure its fundamental irresponsibility regarding climate change, not only when it comes to curbing emissions but also on the matter of aid to developing countries suffering the consequences of the carbon-intensive economies of the developed world. Large-scale compensation is out of the question, says State Department envoy Todd Stern, who also said at a London seminar in October that "lectures about compensation, reparations and the like will produce nothing but antipathy among developed country policy-makers and their publics."

Or, as Bill McKibben recently [put it](#), under Obama, the United States has become a "global-warming machine."

Elsewhere, the national-level political news was not good for the planet. In **Australia**, the Labour Party that had instituted a successful if not universally popular carbon tax was ousted from power in favor of a climate-denying prime minister who professes to believe that climate change is not real (much like the majority of elected Republican Party congresspeople in the United States). The new prime minister, Tony Abbott, considers the science "[absolute crap](#)" and called his predecessor's legislation of a carbon tax a "so-

called market in the non-delivery of an invisible substance to no-one," [saying](#) it was "basically socialism masquerading as environmentalism, and that's why it's going to get abolished." Citing the country's retreat from nuclear power following the 2011 Fukushima meltdown, **Japan's** new government [announced](#) it was reneging on its previous Kyoto Protocol greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of 25 percent under 1990 levels by 2020. Japan is now going for a target of increasing emissions by three percent by 2020! In the **Maldives**, climate justice hero Mohamed Nasheed, the "[Island President](#)" who had spurred delegates to take action at the Copenhagen, Cancún, and Durban COPs, was denied election in a hard-fought and dirty [campaign](#), removing one of the most eloquent and prestigious voices for a strong treaty from the crucial COPs that remain in this decade. **Canada's** awful Harper administration dragged the country's reputation further into the mud with its all-out extraction frenzy in the Alberta tar sands fields, a dystopian dead zone of pollution and climate wreckage. **China's** industrial growth continued apace, pushing its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to a global annual record, while its citizens choked on the pollution its development entailed. In fairness, 2013 was perhaps the year when both the Chinese citizenry and government said they had had enough and that strong measures are now needed to rein in the "economic externalities" caused by China's rise in the global economy. Chinese solar production, for both domestic and international markets, remained the strongest in the world, an achievement deplored by both the United States and the World Trade Organization on the grounds that it was the result of "unfair trade practices." Even the European Union's climate champion, **Germany**, which pulled off the miracle of generating one-half of its electricity from renewable sources on one fine summer's day, saw its emissions rise as lignite coal picked up the slack caused by phasing out nuclear power.

Host Poland, for its part, retained the dirtiest, coal-fired electrical grid in all of Europe, and arranged for the World Coal Association to hold its annual summit during the two-week long COP, while the COP itself was underwritten and sponsored by fossil fuel corporations like Lotos (whose brand was stitched into the handsome shoulder bag given freely to all inside the COP) and emissions-leading countries and industries such as Emirates airline, whose logo graced the comfy beanbag cushions that weary participants slept or worked on as the COP went into its second week.

So the outlook going into Warsaw was not bright, although the scientists had clearly indicated that this COP had to start to reverse some of these trends, or else the strain put on the planet's climate and its people would sooner rather than later become too much to bear.

### *Plenaries, Side Events and Climate Trains*

The brand for this COP, chosen by the host country, was “I care.” Beata Jacewska, Poland’s head negotiator, picked up the phrase for her remarks at the Opening Plenary on Monday, November 11: “I care for the Earth. I care for climate. I care for the outcome of this negotiating process, of this conference. I care for the future. I care. Do you care?” The plenary featured the usual statements of welcome, a heartwarming and polished [video](#) of young children in a Kiribati village named “Poland,” and grand speeches full of promise. The problem, of course, is that most countries, including China (regularly) and the United States (sometimes) say the right things, but none of the big emitters actually does anything. The COP itself can be seen as a terrain of struggle, with the progressive nations locked in mortal combat with the vested interests of the wealthy North and the developmental ambitions of the so-called BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa).

Then, in the middle of the proceedings, **something new happened**, providing the first sign that the world might not stand idly by while the COP took only baby steps in the negotiations. The chief delegate from the Philippines, Naderev “Yeb” Saño, [addressed](#) the assembled nations with [these words](#):

To anyone who continues to deny the reality that is climate change, I dare you to get off your ivory tower and away from the comfort of your armchair. I dare you to go to the islands of the Pacific, the islands of the Caribbean and the islands of the Indian Ocean and see the impacts of rising sea levels, to the mountainous regions of the Himalayas and the Andes to see communities confronting glacial floods, to the Arctic where communities grapple with the fast dwindling polar ice caps, to the large deltas of the Mekong, the Ganges, the Amazon, and the Nile where lives and livelihoods are drowned, to the hills of Central America that confronts similar monstrous hurricanes, to the vast savannas of Africa where climate change has likewise become a matter of life and death as food and water become scarce. Not to forget the massive hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico and the eastern seaboard of North America. And if that is not enough, you may want to pay a visit to the Philippines right now....

What my country is going through as a result of this extreme climate event is madness.

**The climate crisis is madness....**

It is the 19<sup>th</sup> COP, but we might as well stop counting, because my country refuses to accept that a COP30 or a COP40 will be needed to solve climate change. And because it seems that despite the significant gains we have had since the UNFCCC was born, 20 years hence we continue to fail in fulfilling the ultimate objective of the Convention. Now, we find ourselves in a situation where we have to ask ourselves – can we ever attain the objective set out in Article 2 – which is to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interfer-

ence with the climate system? By failing to meet the objectives of the Convention, we may have ratified the doom of vulnerable countries.



*Yeb Saño. Photo by Ben Liddie.*

We find ourselves at a critical juncture and the situation is such that even the most ambitious emissions reductions by developed countries, who should have been taking the lead in combating climate change in the past two decades, will not be enough to avert the crisis. It is now too late, too late to talk about the world being able to rely on Annex I countries to solve the climate crisis. We have entered a new era that demands global solidarity in order to fight climate change and ensure that pursuit of sustainable human development remains at the fore of the global community's efforts. This is why means of implementation for developing countries is ever more crucial....

We cannot sit and stay helpless staring at this international climate stalemate. It is now time to take action. We need an emergency climate pathway....

This process under the UNFCCC has been called many names. It has been called a farce. It has been called an annual carbon-intensive gathering of useless frequent flyers. It has been called many names. But it has also been called the Project to save the Planet. It has been called "saving tomorrow today." We can fix this. We can stop this madness. Right now. Right here, in the middle of this football field.

I call on you to lead us. And let Poland be forever known as the place we truly cared to stop this madness. Can humanity rise to the occasion? I still believe we can.

Saño's speech moved people to tears in the overflow hall where I sat. There was nothing to match its power and import in the last two COPs in Durban and Doha which I attended. Saño's words drew up a glar-

ing contrast, often noted by its critics, between the official COP where middle-aged men (mostly) in suits show up year after year to fumble their mandate to do something historically meaningful, and what we might call "The People's COP," the efforts of global civil society to inject reality and creativity into the discussions. In a telling sign of the UNFCCC's increasingly hard-liner instincts to stifle strong civil society input, Executive Secretary Cristiana Figueres issued a five-year ban to three young activists who had gone into the Plenary with banners of solidarity to escort Mr. Saño out of the hall. This formed part of a wider pattern of exclusion and dismissal of civil society, which had already taken the form of severely restricting the size of civil society delegations, and would be followed by the Executive Secretary's appearance at the World Coal Association summit a week later as a keynote speaker. Figueres would leave Warsaw with her reputation severely damaged in the eyes of a wide swath of civil society.

While the negotiators dithered and dined, civil society took up its responsibilities as best it could. At the formal side events, there was the usual small-scale thinking and self-promotion by the countries and corporate greenwashers, but there were also some bright exceptions. There was a lively forum on the 350.org-inspired fossil fuel [divestment movement](#) that swept U.S. universities in 2013 and was moving into other Northern countries, most notably the United Kingdom, as the 2013-14 academic year opened. Young representatives from the global South effectively got across the point that in most of their countries such a campaign would have little traction, unless coupled with one based on truly adequate sustainable development funds and technology for their countries' efforts to adapt to climate change and extreme weather catastrophes.

Kevin Anderson and Alice Bowes, climate scientists at the [Tyndall Centre](#) in Manchester, England, did what more scientists need to do: they not only analyzed the climate problem, they used their knowledge to confront the political problem that lies beneath it, a vision already signaled in the subtitle to their well-attended side event: "Global Carbon Budget 2013: rising emissions and a radical plan for 2 degrees." They gave a sobering presentation of the numbers: we have an atmospheric carbon budget remaining of about 1,000 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub> for a 66 percent chance of staying under two degrees Celsius (the upper limit agreed by the COP, although itself quite possibly too high for humanity). The world is are putting up about 35 gigatons a year right now, annual emissions rose 3.5 percent per annum for the ten years before 2008, and despite the recession, have continued to rise 2-3 percent every year since. Then they got down to the policy implications of our predicament:

- Avoid 4 degrees at all cost
- The global North needs to cut 70 percent of our emissions over the next decade
- Only the richest several percent of the world population need do radical mitigation
- Market solutions won't achieve any of this

As they noted, "we're not short of capital, just the initiative and courage." Even more stunning are the political implications that Anderson [drew](#) just before the Warsaw COP: "Today, after two decades of bluff and lies, the remaining 2°C budget demands revolutionary change to the political and economic hegemony." Anderson said in another [interview](#) during COP19: "I'm really stunned there is no sense of urgency here," pointing out that what's needed is leadership, courage, innovative thinking, engaged people, and difficult choices. And who's providing all this at the moment? The question hung pregnant in a room filled with seasoned climate justice advocates.

Some of the people who do possess these virtues were on the "Climate Train" that was organized by European activists to bring undelegated reinforcements into Warsaw overnight on Friday, November 15 for the big global day of action march the next day. Chris Williams, a U.S. eco-socialist who rode the train, provided my group with a lively personal account of the heady atmosphere as people debated and shared stories all night, celebrating (with beer) their movement's vitality, decorating themselves with face paint and making placards for the march:

Over the course of the 18-hour train ride, a glimpse was offered of the kind of positive alternative that exists, if people can build the movement for climate justice more widely. Each carriage was organized by different environmental and left-wing groups, with two stewards appointed to each. While organizers had hoped for 500 passengers, more than 750 rode the climate justice train to Warsaw. Each carriage was adorned with banners, flags and posters proclaiming the politics of different groups; even the toilet doors had polite multilingual handmade signs detailing appropriate and considerate usage. Nutritious food was provided and served from a food car taken over and run by dedicated activists; drinks and food were served throughout by Oxfam and a local organic brewery. All train announcements were made in three languages, and a train carriage was set aside as a "debate car."

This proved entirely superfluous, because debates and discussions raged the length and breadth of the train, long into the early hours of the morning: about how to build the movement, what position to take on different issues, what could be expected from the climate talks in Warsaw and how the demonstrations might affect them. The hopeful, energetic and tremendously inspiring atmosphere couldn't have been more different to

the pall of futility enveloping the official COP19 talks at the stadium in Warsaw. The train ambience was multinational and multicultural in the best sense of those terms, comradely and with a vivacious spirit and energy that was infectious as people shared thoughts, food and stories (Chris Williams, [Warsaw Climate Talks Go Up in Smoke](#)).



*Climate Justice train detained for two hours and searched at the German-Polish border by Polish police and dogs. Caption and photo by Chris Williams.*



*French research chemist, after face painting, contemplates the journey ahead. Photo and caption by Chris Williams.*

### *Movements: Climate Justice Youth Continue to Step Up*

The mood of the next day's march, though held under a gloomy November sky, was anything but somber. Several thousand activists from all continents paraded down one of Warsaw's main boulevards from the Soviet-era Palace of Culture over the Vistula River to the National Stadium, where the COP was being held. They chanted, sang, and testified in support of real system change to solve the climate crisis. A clown brigade tailed the heavily-armored police who lined the route and accompanied the march, disarming them with their antics, hugs, and kisses. The march ended in the dark at a nearby amphitheatre where speeches were made pledging mutual solidarity between the global labor and climate justice movements (there are some hopeful recent developments in this respect discussed at the end of this essay). Then we melted into the night, some to attend the traditional wild NGO party in downtown Warsaw, others, such as myself, left to process the depressing news that Nasheed's bid for president in the Maldives had fallen short by less than two percent of the vote that very afternoon.



*Photo by Corrie Ellis*



*Photo by Corrie Ellis*

The people we talked with offered some amazing stories. There was Hamzat Lawal from Nigeria, who arrived at the COP to find that his country's most experienced negotiators were inexplicably absent in the first week. This prompted him to write an open letter to the country's president, and to our (and his) surprise, the negotiators suddenly arrived for week two.

We met Silje Lundberg, chair of Young Friends of the Earth Norway, an organization with 6,500 members, who has been a climate activist since the age of twelve. Literally a force of nature, Silje seemed to be everywhere, speaking at press conferences (including [the one we organized with young climate activists](#)), side events, and after actions.

We also listened to the life story of Surya Karkat, a student at the College of the Atlantic in Maine and member of the dynamic and creative [Earth in Brackets](#) organization, who told us how he and five friends had started first one, then three schools in Nepal, his home country, dedicated to the holistic education of their students that fosters an appreciation of their environment and the threat posed to it by climate change. Earth in Brackets, it was explained to me, chose their name to reflect on the fact that the most promising pro-

posals for treaty text at the COPs are put in brackets while they are being negotiated, and at the end of the day, most are dropped when there is no consensus in their favor.

David Gawith, a New Zealand youth activist, told us how he helped start up [Connected Voices](#), a project that brings into the COP the words of young people on the front lines of climate change who don't have the resources to be there in person, especially those from island states like Kiribati, Palau, Tonga, Samoa, Tokelau, Nauru, the Solomon Islands and the Marshall Islands. From a small class project, in two years, the organization has grown into a flourishing [global group](#) engaged in this valuable justice work.

One of the more spectacular "actions" of COP19 took place on the UNFCCC-designated "Gender Day" when a group of young Latin American women (and one North American, Natasha Weidner of our iicat team) danced their way through the corridors in an attempt to "Sexify" the COP by drawing attention to the rigid formality of the negotiations, their dull maleness, and jaded delegates, making a joyful comment on the lack of any serious consideration of gender inside the negotiations (the same can be said for youth and for communities marginalized by poverty, race and ethnicity, sexuality, and excluded voices in general). The action was [videotaped](#), and ended with the statement "Equity is Hotter than Climate Change," leaving viewers to ponder for themselves this provocative and controversial intervention.

Emily Williams, a recent graduate of UC Santa Barbara and another member of our team, became very involved with the UNFCCC youth constituency YOUNGO. One of the working groups was trying to foreground the issue of "Intergenerational Equity" or "Inteq" – the heartbreaking realization that these negotiations must take note of a fundamental constituency, the world's young people, and the billions who will come after most of the negotiators have passed from the scene. Emily recounted a meeting the group had scheduled with the U.S. State Department envoy Trigg Tally, whom they caught coming out a meeting on his way to another meeting. They made him stop for the time it took him to eat a sandwich and explained the importance of the concept, asking that he at least not block its inclusion in a final text. When delegates from the global South in fact did broach the idea in the next meeting, the U.S. was able to say they knew about it and found it "interesting." Indeed, one of the final documents approved in Warsaw made reference to "future generations," the [first mention](#) of the concept since the creation of the Convention did so under [Article 3.1](#) back in 1992. Of such (well-planned) chance encounters the seeds of the unforeseeable may sometimes grow.

Each COP is preceded by a COY, a Conference of Youth, at which youth attending the COP, along with young activists who are not delegated to enter the COP, spend three days getting to know each other in workshops, trainings, and pre-COP organizing work. Many of the connections made will be taken forward in the two weeks of the COP, and later as activists return home, now friends with like-minded people in different parts of the world, able to stay in touch through social media to strengthen their ties and build stronger global movements. Another member of our team, Ben Liddie, put on a workshop that showed people how to make [patches with a message](#).

But there were also points of tension in the youth movement over such issues as whether to work for climate justice within the COP or protest its inability to deliver a fair and ambitious treaty – no surprise when people from so many places and viewpoints gather together, most of them for the first time. Overlaid on these competing perspectives are tensions between activists and organizations from the global North and global South (though even groups from the same country or region can have very different analyses and aims). These tensions mirror the inequalities found in the U.N. negotiations themselves, yet tend to be dealt with markedly better by the movements than the countries. One angle of thinking about these divides is between the more privileged groups from the global North who have access to resources to attend the COP, and those from the global South, who may not, inevitably leading to less diversity inside YOUNGO (one imagines, of course, that this playing field will be somewhat more level this December at COP20 in Lima, Peru). Luke Kemp, a researcher with the Australian National University and Coordinator of the Inteq Group, told me that another key debate surrounds the question, “What is the aim and function of YOUNGO? Are we supposed to be simply a meeting place for diverse youth groups to meet, share ideas and discuss (a kind of mini-UNFCCC of sorts), or are we supposed to be something greater, an integrated body for youth that can effectively participate in and influence the international political process?”

The divisions inside the movement between **“radicals”** and **“reformers”** constitute a debate between those who believe that the climate crisis can be addressed within capitalism and those who conclude that managing the crisis will require societies to go beyond capitalism into something else. Another important debate focuses on critical tactics for dealing with the climate crisis. Some young activists are eager to dialogue directly (when this is possible) with their own country delegations to influence negotiating positions, while others hope to move delegates through actions designed to point out their biases and limitations. Still others show up primarily to build a radical, even anti-capitalist, oppositional

global movement that sees no avenue for change through the COP process. The Canadian Youth Delegation, for example, who were very active at the Durban and Doha COPs in 2011 and 2012, opted not to sink precious time and resources into attending COP19 and instead to stay focused on pressing climate justice work in Canada.

Our film shows how much better the movement is than the Parties to the Convention at working together, making progress, foregrounding the science, representing civil society and future generations, fighting for a just treaty, and so forth. (filmed by Summer Gray and viewable at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbtdXFeEUXk>), and

These differences can come into play in YOUNGO, which operates by consensus, and which requires the agreement of all for its actions and statements at the COP. Lots of energy can be expended trying to navigate the dilemmas that arise, as both moderates and radicals see their initiatives watered down in order to achieve consensus, with proposals blocked by one group as too radical or by another for not being radical enough ("radical" in this context, or in any context, for that matter, has diverse and nuanced meanings, and though I consider myself a radical when it comes to climate and social justice, I feel it is important to work constructively with everyone and to be equally critical of oneself as well). Relations between the youth climate justice movement and the "elders" of the more established climate justice movement are another point of division for analysis. These tensions played out to some degree in the walkout by civil society that was the political culmination of the Warsaw talks, and are complicated by the more general question of what happens to these activists after they are no longer "youth." How does their gradual entry, year by year, into the larger movement, shape that movement?

As these tensions came to a head in the first week of the COP, an extraordinary meeting was organized for the middle Sunday, when the COP itself is not in session, for people to air their differences. As a 58 year-old college professor, I was not in attendance, but I know that the discussion went on for more than seven hours, and I note that the youth movement's willingness and desire to confront such differences and come out stronger is vastly superior to that of their elders in the national delegations. For this movement to actually advance, it is crucial that these barriers be overcome, yet I am left with little doubt that almost everyone in the movement is aware of this and willing to try.

### *The Walkout and the Convergence Space*

Youth activists engaged in many creative, hard-hitting symbolic actions in Warsaw. There was an auctioning off of the climate to well-dressed corporate and financial bidders. There was a passing the hat skit where activists dressed up as negotiators came up with small change for the Green Climate Fund, and where one iicat team member tore up a dollar bill to give half of it to the fund. There was the Red Dot campaign of those fasting in solidarity with Yeb Saño, who said he would maintain his fast until something meaningful was accomplished on the issue of Loss and Damage from climate-driven extreme weather events. A humorous button-driven campaign called “WTF – Where’s the Finance?” that gave out colorful buttons that summed up the feelings of many toward this COP. And there was the tug-of-war staged between civil society and corporate lobbies, as Earth in Brackets’ Nathan Thanki explains in his excellent assessment of the COP19 actions, “[Designing for Activism](#),” with the rope representing “the climate (what this fight is about).”



*Photo: Jeff Beyer.*



*Tug of war action. Photo: Nathan Thanki*



*Ben Liddie's half dollar contribution to the Green Climate Fund. Photo: Ben Liddie*





Below: Getting the Red Card: Big Coal is kicked out of the COP/. Caption: John Foran. [Photo: Luka Tomac](#)

There was also a **major protest** on Monday, November 18 outside the meetings of the World Coal Association where the crowd loudly expressed their outrage at the bald-faced hypocrisy of the Polish government's energy policies (although large numbers of the Polish people – as much as [80 percent](#) – want action on climate change) and the presence of UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres as keynote speaker. Figueres [told](#) the summit: “Let me be clear from the outset that my joining you today is neither a tacit approval of coal use, nor a call for the immediate disappearance of coal. But I am here to say that coal must change rapidly and dramatically for everyone’s sake.” A group of scientists held a [press conference](#) to debunk the notions of “clean coal,” carbon capture and storage, or a sustainable future based on fossil fuels: “Avoiding dangerous climate change requires that the majority of fossil fuel reserves need to stay underground.... Current trends in coal use are harbouring catastrophic climate change.”

The movement also had messages for the coal summit. The German green group Urgewald, along with the Polish Green Network, BankTrack and CEE Bankwatch Network released a [report](#), *Banking on Coal*, that documents how “American, Chinese and British banks are currently the biggest investors in coal, and if all the investments pay off then there is no hope of saving the planet from the ravages of global warming. ‘It is

mind-boggling to see that less than two dozen banks from a handful of countries are putting us on a high-way to hell when it comes to climate change,' [said](#) Heffa Schücking, one of the report's authors. 'Big banks already showed that they can mess up the real economy. Now we're seeing that they can also push our climate over the brink.'"



*Photo by Joel Stonington*



*Protest at the World Coal Summit, held in Warsaw the same week as the COP. Here, a healthy lung and doctors triumph over coal lobbyists. Photo and caption: Corrie Ellis*



*Demonstrators say that coal can never be a clean source of energy. [Photo](#) and caption: Matt McGrath, BBC*

**The climax of COP19**, and not just from the standpoint of civil society, but of the whole two-week long summit, was the walkout on Thursday, November 21, the day before the negotiations were scheduled to finish. Seeing no meaningful progress in the talks, finding themselves excluded from the process on many levels, and witnessing the blatant corporate presence – even sponsorship – at the COP, hundreds of activists staged a walkout from the National Stadium, most of them vowing not to set foot in it again. Estimates of the crowd's size ranged from 300 (undoubtedly an underestimate, as 300 white t-shirts were distributed before the action and hundreds of those who walked out didn't have them) to a high estimate of 800. By any reckoning, a significant portion of all civil society delegates to COP19 simply walked out. There were about 8,300 participants at COP19, and of these approximately 1,500 were representatives of civil society NGOs and organizations. Our camera team of Summer Gray and Corrie Ellis made a [video](#) that captures the elevated mood of the participants as they turned their backs on the Warsaw COP.

We had witnessed some of the preparations for this the day before in the Convergence Space, an old two story building with rooms for the movement to use during the COP. The walkout was conceived and planned by the more radical of the young activists and youth organizations, but it came to enjoy broad appeal (it had a predecessor in the mass walkout of civil society at the Rio+20 meetings in Brazil in June

2013). In addition, veteran organizers from Friends of the Earth, Oxfam, ActionAid, the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance, the Bolivian Platform on Climate Change, LDC Watch, the International Trade Union Confederation, the Philippines Movement on Climate Change, and (unexpectedly) the World Wildlife Fund, among others, lent the names of their organizations to the action, and Kumi Naidoo, the executive director of Greenpeace, turned up to deliver the principal remarks at the press conference that preceded the walkout. At 2 p.m. precisely, groups of activists who had met up in many corners of the cavernous National Stadium started to walk out, converging on the ground level of the building which led to the exits. We filmed as they streamed by, in their hundreds, happy with their decision. The mood was defiant; the white shirts said "Polluters talk, we walk!" and on their backs, "Volveremos!" ("We will be back.") The messages were clear, passing judgment on the complete inability of the UNFCCC to advance the treaty process at COP19, and signaling that this walkout was tactical, that the movement would return, with renewed force, to the 2014 COP20 in Lima, Peru, where Latin American civil society and the governments of Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Cuba, and others might make their more radical demands for climate justice heard and felt inside the COP.



Demonstrating outside the COP after the walkout. Photo: John Foran

At the Convergence Space afterwards, a strange and truncated debriefing occurred, facilitated by senior figures in the major climate justice organizations, and one couldn't help but feel that the energy and work of the youthful activists who had made it happen was not fully acknowledged. Yes, there was gratitude to Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace for attracting the media to the press conference before the walkout, but the conception and execution of the walkout belonged to the youth. The number of people who had a chance to speak about the walkout was limited to just a few, and the opportunity for the group of 100 or so activists to plan ahead dissipated. I was reminded of Anne Petermann's [bracing critique](#) of the "Big Green" male leadership at the Occupy action on the very last day of Durban's COP17 in 2011, when the same leadership encouraged those who had been sitting down for several hours and making lots of noise just outside the entrance to the big plenary room where delegates were making their final proposals, to leave the hallways peacefully at the request of the UN security forces so as not to be de-badged and prevented from returning to future COPs. And yet, the great civil society walkout at Warsaw must still be seen for what it was: a major event and statement laid down by a movement that is still too small to do what it needs and wants to do. For now, as Hugo Chávez once said.

The convergence space itself was used throughout the two weeks to host talks and meetings, make posters and plan actions. The perimeter of the largest room was graced with floor to ceiling posters of the history of the COP, one poster for each meeting, its name drawn from film history to capture the spirit of that particular COP. The whole exhibit, called "Climate Talkies" was the work of Chandra Bhushan, Deputy Director General of India's Center for Science and Environment. Thus the first COP in Berlin, in 1992, was represented by *Great Expectations*; Kyoto 1997 featured Al Gore as James Bond in *Live and Let Die*; the 2007 COP13 in Bali was captioned "The End is Near" from **Apocalypse Now**; Copenhagen in 2009 starred Obama, Angela Merkl, Gordon Brown, and the leaders of India and China in **The Full Monty** ("No Plan, No Money, No Underwear"). COP17 in Durban was immortalized by **Waiting For Godot**: "Nothing Happens. Nobody comes, nobody goes. It's awful." And Warsaw? It was well summed up (even before it started) as **Dumb and Dumber**, a place where "Dumb happens," and a chilling illustration of Voltaire's epigram about the Lisbon earthquake of 1755: "**Men argue. Nature acts.**"



Photos: John Foran



*Decisions, post-mortems, and encomia: what was agreed and what was not at COP19*

In the UNFCCC's concluding [press release](#), Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres expressed cautious optimism about the outcome of COP19: "We have seen essential progress. But let us again be clear that we are witnessing ever more frequent, extreme weather events, and the poor and vulnerable are already paying the price.... Now governments, and especially developed nations, must go back to do their homework so they can put their plans on the table ahead of the Paris conference. A groundswell of action is happening at all levels of society. All major players came to COP19 to show not only what they have done but to think what more they can do. Next year is also the time for them to turn ideas into further concrete action."

The UNFCCC was particularly proud of progress on the reforestation project known as REDD+, and maybe there is something to this. A group of observers from the Vermont School of Law offered [this assessment](#):

One of the more significant outcomes of this week was the package of decisions, known as the Warsaw Framework for REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries), that the COP approved to provide a formal framework, safeguards, and funding in hopes of cutting deforestation in half by 2020 and halting it by 2030. Every schoolchild knows that the forests are the world's lungs: this is the UNFCCC's smoking cessation program.

REDD+ has been implemented on the ground by various development organizations, including the World Bank, USAID, and the World Wildlife Fund, in a somewhat haphazard and experimental fashion since its conception in Montreal in 2005 and development in Bali in 2007. It was met with serious criticism by indigenous peoples around the world as another form of colonialism, with Bolivia in particular championing to keep market mechanisms out of this mitigation activity. This new version of REDD+ hopes to address those concerns. The safeguards included for biodiversity, ecosystems, and indigenous peoples' territories, livelihoods, and rights are commendable. It may even serve as a mechanism for governments to more formally recognize indigenous land rights. Hopeful thinking? Perhaps. We will have to watch carefully how the new REDD+ decisions improve its implementation on the ground.

Hopes, indeed. One wonders how many forests will remain after taking seven more years to cut the rate of deforestation by 50 percent and then 30 more to stop deforestation altogether. "And yet," as John Holloway likes to say. And yet...

"Warsaw has set a pathway for governments to work on a draft text of a new universal climate agreement so it appears on the table at the next UN climate change conference in Peru. This is an essential step to

reach a final agreement in Paris, in 2015," [concluded](#) COP19 host President Marcin Korolec, who was embarrassingly dismissed as Poland's Minister of the Environment during the COP, apparently for [comments](#) he made about a new shale gas project that were not deemed sufficiently enthusiastic by his government. Beata Jacewska, Poland's head negotiator, has [said](#) that "coal has to be part of the solution."

As in Doha at COP18, though a modest amount of new text was generated, COP19 did not advance the treaty process to any degree remotely likely to achieve what is needed by 2015 (or 2020, or...). Loss and Damage made it into the text as an area where substantial funding should be made available in the aftermath of climate-induced extreme weather disasters, and was applauded by some, including Yeb Saño and the [Third World Network](#), as a major accomplishment. The latter hailed it as a "landmark" decision that "lifted the general gloom that had been prevalent during most of the two-week negotiations," noting that estimated damages from natural disasters worldwide have doubled from about \$200 billion a year ten years ago to \$300-400 billion a year now. Yet efforts to establish loss and damage as the third pillar of fighting climate change, alongside mitigation and adaptation, fell short of this objective, as it was placed "under" the adaptation working group's charter, after hours of negotiation were spent debating the word "under," which the global South had to accept in exchange for only a pledge to review its final institutional location in 2016. And, of course, no funds have yet been allocated to the new "[Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage Associated with Climate Change Impacts](#)."

Hard battles were fought within and between the global North and South that hinged on such nuances of wording. The negotiations on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action that are supposed to lead to the new global treaty saw jousting over whether the two groups continued to have "common but differentiated responsibilities" as in the foundational documents of the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol, with its binding emissions reductions on the North only, or whether, as the Durban Platform itself indicated, all countries would have to make such commitments, most importantly, the major Southern emitters of India, China, and Brazil, among others.

U.S. negotiator Todd Stern was [pleased](#) with the outcome (always a bad sign): "I think we had a good outcome in the end. It was quite a tough negotiation." But the so-called "path" to a climate deal is well behind schedule. The global North had the word "commitments" for emissions reductions watered down, in a move seconded by India and China, to "intended nationally determined contributions," substantially weaker legal language which leaves a fair amount of room for evasion. Furthermore, countries agreed to announce

their commitments only in the first quarter of 2015. There were no pledges made by the North to the Green Climate Fund for the next seven years, postponing the day of reckoning to 2020, by which they had agreed in Copenhagen to come up with \$100 billion annually for adaptation, a figure that is clearly ambitious only for them, and not for what the world needs now or will need by then, when the real costs of inaction will be in the trillions of dollars annually (compare the inability of the wealthy countries to fund the GCF with the estimated \$500-700 billion they provide annually to fossil fuel corporations by subsidizing their operations). As the Third World Network's assessment of the outcome concluded, all of these issues will be "the subject of very intense talks [in 2014], with meetings of the ADP track scheduled for March, June, and December.

Movement figures saw the outcome as the latest in a string of bad COPs. The Philippine human rights group IBON International titled its [press release](#): "Commitments lost, ambitions damaged," and concluded, "Despite the tremendous pressure to come up with positive results, the Warsaw climate talks delivered no substantive outcome and instead allowed dirty energy industries to undermine the fundamental objectives of the UNFCCC itself." Climate Justice Now! campaigner Alex Rafalowicz briefed activists in an e-mail that the take-away point for Warsaw was: "The difference between this 'outcome' in Warsaw and 'no outcome' in Warsaw is 'virtually nothing.'" [Alden Meyer](#), the director of strategy and policy for the Union of Concerned Scientists who has missed only one of the 19 COPs, said, "Loss and damages is big but we have the bare minimum in the rest to keep going."

It's hard to see anything else of much substance in the [final decisions](#), even though the main press release is titled "UN Climate Change Conference in Warsaw keeps governments on a track towards 2015 climate agreement." If this is true, the agreement is going to lock in planetary ecocide. As The Guardian's Graham Readfearn [notes](#):

There's a gap that's getting wider in the global climate talks taking place in Warsaw between the near unanimous pledge to keep global warming below 2C and the ability of current policies to achieve the goal.

When I say gap, I really mean a chasm. And when I say chasm, I mean a huge, gaping, canyon-like hole big enough to either eat a planet or at least lose an Earth or a carbon dioxide swamped Venus down there for a while.

## *Futures*

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is convening world leaders “along with business, finance, civil society and local leaders” to a special “Climate Summit 2014: Catalyzing Action” on September 23 in New York, [with the words](#): “I challenge you to bring to the Summit bold pledges. Innovate, scale-up, cooperate and deliver concrete action that will close the emissions gap and put us on track for an ambitious legal agreement through the UNFCCC process.” He went on:

My big idea is not new. Nor is it, in the larger sense, mine. But it is an idea that will be one major focus of my work next year, and one in which I believe deeply. In 2014, we must turn the greatest collective challenge facing humankind today – climate change – into the greatest opportunity for common progress towards a sustainable future. Next year is the year for climate action....

Countries have agreed to finalize an ambitious global legal agreement on climate change by 2015. But there is a steep climb ahead and 2014 is a pivotal year for generating the action and momentum that will propel us forward....

The science is clear. Human activities are the dominant cause of climate change. We cannot blame nature....



Image: <http://www.un.org/climatechange/summit2014/>

We now know it is possible to close the emissions gap. We must build on this momentum.

This Summit is meant to be a solutions summit, not a negotiating session. I have invited all Heads of State and Government, along with leaders from business and finance, local government and civil society.

I am asking all who come to bring bold and new announcements and action. I am asking them to bring their big ideas.

Until then, I will continue to put every effort into mobilizing political will, moving financial investors, influencing business leaders and motivating people everywhere to do all they can....

Future generations will judge our action on this issue. In 2014, we have the chance to step over to the right side of history. Let's take it.

The Secretary-General's bold invitation is of course welcome, but his telling placement of business and finance ahead of civil society and local leaders suggests that the hoped-for breakthrough into progress on the treaty is rather unlikely. The summit might be better titled "Climate Depression 2014: Paralyzing Action." On a promising note, there is ongoing planning in radical U.S. climate justice circles for a "People's Summit" to take place in New York at the same time, where rather than a conventional protest and demonstration against the UNFCCC governments' lack of seriousness on the issues, the movement will craft and offer "bold and new announcements and action" and "big ideas" of its own.

Then there is the Venezuelan proposal to host a series of encounters for global civil society under the rubric of a "Social Pre-COP" in the course of 2014. As Claudia Salerno, Venezuela's lead negotiator (who had hit her hand on the table so hard in Copenhagen that it began to bleed, "[to show](#) how developing countries are bleeding"), said at a meeting which I attended: "A situation of madness requires a little craziness," adding, "We are not afraid to fail.... [There is] nothing to lose, and maybe a lot to gain."

The Pre-COP idea was designed to consist of a convention of youth in March and of indigenous activists in May, followed by a conference on the economics of Buen Vivir (Living Well) in July, and the Social Pre-COP itself in mid-October – all with the aim of strengthening the capacity of civil society to make an impact in Lima. This is a bold initiative, and [a risk no doubt worth running](#) as long as the post- Chávez Venezuelan government, revolutionary as its legacy may be, does not impose itself onto the process. In fact, the February-March opposition street protests against the Maduro government appear to have moved the process onto the back burner, and [its ultimate fate](#) looks up in the air (in a manner of speaking). The [latest information](#) announces two pre-COP events, now set for July 15-18 and November 4-7 in Caracas.

Another **major new initiative** is the [Global Climate Convergence](#), proclaims "People, Planet, Peace over Profits" and is seeking to build "collaboration across national borders and fronts of struggle to harness the transformative power we already possess as a thousand separate movements springing up across the

planet," and whose first big campaign was a "Mother Earth Day to May Day" 2014 call for simultaneous education and direct action events across the United States. The basic idea is to create a lasting collaboration between climate activism and other forms of social justice, including progressive labor, indigenous organizing, and the fledgling ecosocialist movement in the United States, and ultimately, no doubt, beyond. Convened by chair of the Green party of the United States Jill Stein in the fall of 2013, this call resonates with the formation of the new U.S. ecosocialist organization [System Change Not Climate Change](#), which aims at shifting the momentum of the climate justice movement in an anti-capitalist direction by starting "[a far-ranging discussion](#)" within society: can stopping climate change be compatible with an economic system that is flooded with fossil fuel profits? Can we create a safe and healthy planet for all human beings while simultaneously allowing ever-expanding resource extraction, endless growth, and the massive inequalities that come along with it?"

● **The most important events of 2014** may well be the unglamorous, under the radar organizing that will take place at all points of the compass as the global justice movement does the hard work of building itself into a force to be reckoned with. There are innumerable networks of world citizens already involved in this movement building. Our task is to entwine these networks around a re-imagined vision of climate justice, big enough to include everyone from the young radicals to the long-standing and slower moving NGOs, institutions from local governments to schools and universities, communities of faith, labor organizations whether unionized or not, indigenous movements, and intergenerational activism. Our demands must be made with an unyielding insistence on a binding plan for radical emissions reductions, generous and unconditional technology and financial contributions to adaptation efforts, and solidarity in the face of the inevitable climate chaos to come.

We have no option other than to take up the challenge of building the current global climate justice movement into a social movement strong enough to confront the biggest threat the global community has ever faced, and into a force strong enough to defeat governments backed by the largest corporations in the history of capitalism, in the process countering the massive disinformation campaign and cultural inertia that these state and economic elites rely upon to control us even as their own scientists are increasingly blunt about the risks. *Now more than ever, the cry for "System change, not climate change!" must echo forcefully in the halls of the COP, and far beyond. ¡Volveremos!*

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