



Unions and a “Just Transition”

Unions around the world are seeking a “just transition” to a more equitable system and a sustainable future. This means phasing out fossil fuel production and consumption and doing so with equity at the core.

Workers, labor leaders, and climate justice activists share common goals and face common obstacles to achieving them. As union activists we want to work together with climate justice activists. We want to connect workers’ issues with reversing climate change. We want to strengthen both labor and environmental organizations.

The work on climate change must not exclude or be at the expense of workers in the impacted industries. We have to support and engage workers and communities whose income depends on the extraction of fossil fuels. A tactic used to divide our movements is to tell workers to “choose” between good jobs and a healthy environment. In reality we all need meaningful and life-supporting work as well as a sustainable planet for ourselves and future generations.

Unions around the world are using the concept of “just transition” to organize,



educate, and form alliances to create systemic change for a sustainable future. To make a “just transition,” workers will have to participate in all decisions that affect their ability to provide for themselves and their families.

Many environmental groups are backing unions in their efforts

to support workers during the transition from fossil fuels. Examples include retraining coal miners who have lost their jobs for jobs with comparable wages and benefits, and support for gas workers who are transitioning to geothermal jobs.

It is important that workers participate in all decisions that



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



[SustainingAllLife.org](https://www.SustainingAllLife.org)



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affect their ability to provide for themselves and their families.

Classism, racism, sexism, and other oppressions confuse and divide people. They make it difficult for workers to unite and recognize their power. *Sustaining All Life/United to End Racism* offers tools to heal from hurts caused by oppression—including from internalized oppression—the negative messages about us, and about other oppressed people, messages that we sometimes believe and act out. Releasing painful feelings in a structured supportive setting helps us

think more clearly and act more effectively.

We can heal the divisions in our relationships, organizations, and movements. We can become more hopeful, flexible, and committed and better connected to all people. We can build united movements that both reverse the effects of climate change and make it possible for all people to provide for themselves. The transition to a just sustainable future is in our hands.





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

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—if we make some very large changes in our economy, our energy systems, and our lives in the next five to ten years. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis can be resolved only if we simultaneously address racism, genocide of Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on the groups targeted by these oppressions, and on other vulnerable populations (including populations of people who are elderly, disabled, and very young). Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of climate change, racism, and exploitation.

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

The role of oppression

The economic and political forms of our societies demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the earth. This results in exploitation and oppression. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) target everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we tend to act toward others in ways that repeat the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the mental and emotional harm we experience is the result of this passing on of hurt. Our experience is that though people are vulnerable

to acting in oppressive ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a person has been hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

The importance of healing personal harm

The mental and emotional harm done to us by oppression and other hurtful experiences interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the climate emergency.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other harmful behavior is neither quick nor easy work. Many of us resist this personal healing work. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the harm done to us by oppression. Some of us assume that we will never be free of this harm. In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts and address barriers to effective organizing. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing.

By releasing emotional pain in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.



For more information, see:

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