

Tools for Climate Organizing

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We Must End Oppression as We Work to End the Climate Emergency

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—and some big changes are needed soon to accomplish this. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism** believe the environmental crisis cannot be resolved without ending racism, genocide toward Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions as we work to end the climate emergency. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on the groups targeted by these oppressions, and on other vulnerable populations (including elderly, disabled, and very young people). These groups must be included in developing strategies and solutions to address the climate emergency. Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of both climate change and oppression.

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) among nations and tribes and among groups of people within nations and tribes, (2) widespread feelings of discouragement and powerlessness, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the environmental crisis at the level and speed needed for success, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of our economic systems. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these issues and others.

Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of both climate change and oppression.

* **Sustaining All Life (SAL)** is an international grassroots organization working to end the climate emergency within the context of ending all divisions among people.

United to End Racism (UER) is a group of people of all ages and backgrounds, in many countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal.

The role of oppression

Our economic systems are based on exploitation and oppression and they demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the Earth. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) affect everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once affected by oppression, we are pulled to act out on others the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the mental and emotional damage done to humans is the result of this passing on of hurt. Though humans are vulnerable to acting out oppression, oppressive behavior is not inherent. It arises only when a human has been hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

The importance of healing personal damage

The emotional harm done to us in our societies by oppression 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 environmental crisis. People would not cooperate with a society that exploits people and damages the environment if they had not first been hurt.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other damaging behavior is not quick or easy work. Many of us resist this work or justify our behavior because we feel hurt. Or we may survive by numbing ourselves to the damage we carry and by assuming that we will never be free of it.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. By releasing distressed feelings in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and oppression. (See page 6.)

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Sustaining Ourselves as Activists and Organizers



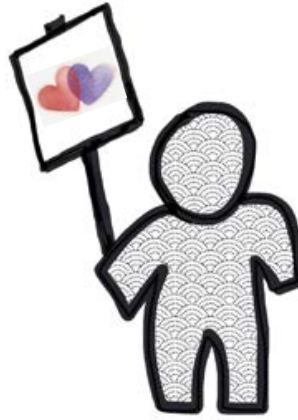
BATANGAS, PHILIPPINES • ANA LIZA (AL) CABALLES

Many important changes in our society have already been made by people coming together, speaking up, and uniting around common demands. We environmental activists and organizers care deeply about the Earth, its inhabitants, and our work, and we have made important gains. There is much to be proud of. But we can easily forget our accomplishments in the daily struggles of organizing.

The large corporations whose profits continue to be based on activities that are causing the collapse of the climate and the governmental bodies that support them, all fight against necessary changes in every possible way. They launch direct attacks on activists, organizers, and organizations. They lie, buy “experts” to support their lies, and flood the media with misinformation and lies. Their enormous profits give them resource to maintain the exploitive policies and practices that continue to harm the Earth and its inhabitants.

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In the face of this powerful opposition, many of us feel discouraged when our efforts to make change are not immediately successful. We may also feel powerless, exhausted, not smart enough, alone, and overwhelmed by what we need to do. When we feel these ways, it's hard to be motivated to make change.



We usually try to ignore these feelings and keep working for change, but without addressing the feelings we may sacrifice our own health and well-being. We may not be able to identify our own interests and connect them with those of others. We may even criticize, get angry at, or undermine each other. We may be unable to think of solutions and give up being activists, organizers, and leaders. We may no longer have the energy to do the work we care so deeply about.

We all struggle with living in an oppressive society. We are oppressed by and witness racism, classism, sexism, the oppression of Indigenous peoples, and many other oppressions, and we can't help but internalize their messages. Then this internalized oppression can make us doubt ourselves, feel inadequate, and struggle in our relationships with each other. Divided by this internalized oppression within or among our organizations and communities, we may compete with each other for power, control, recognition, or resources. This can keep us from seeing or acting on the common interest we have in a just and sustainable future.



HERMIT CRAB, IN YIGO, GUAHAN • TRESSA DIAZ



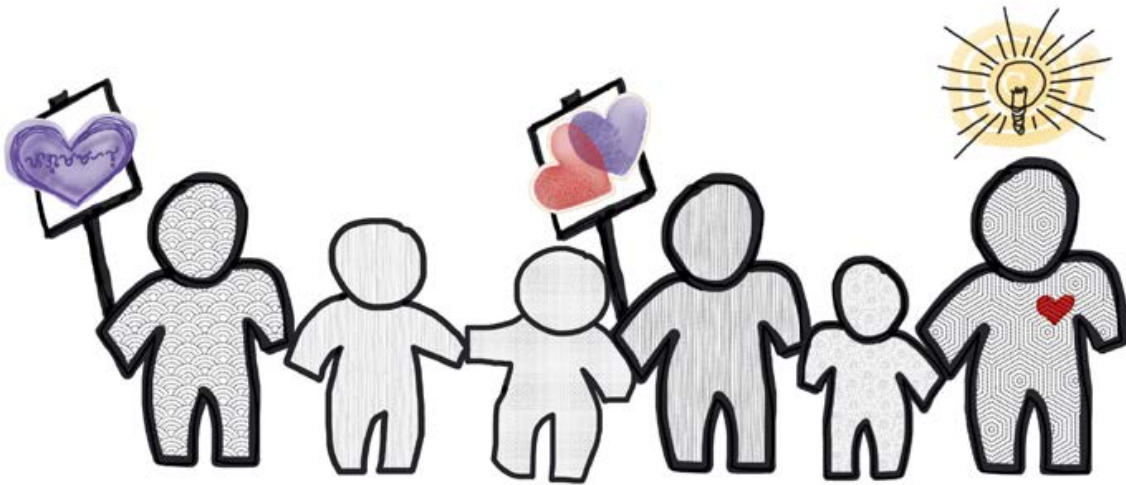
SANTA RITA, GUAHAN • ANA LIZA (AL) CABALLES

To face the challenges of climate change year after year, we need a strong support system. We need to build relationships in which we can pay attention to difficulties as they arise, overcome them, and move ahead. We need to undo the damage done to each of us by oppression, disconnection, and fear. If we do these things, we can sustain ourselves for the long haul, grow, thrive, and keep thinking as we do the work. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* teach people how to create these networks of support.



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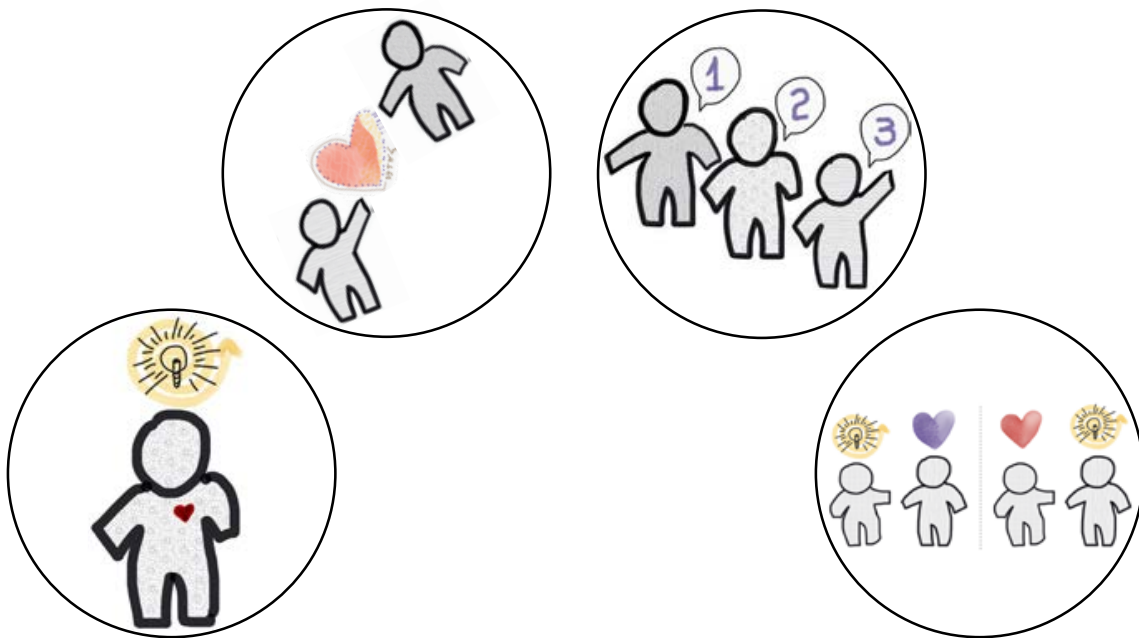
Re-evaluation Counseling



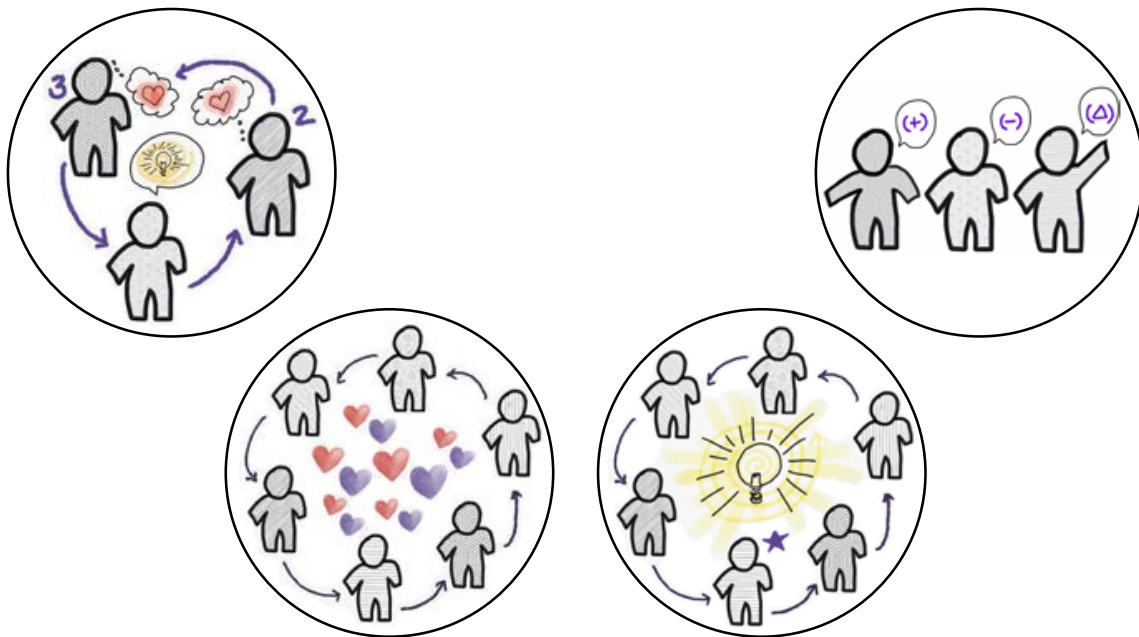
Sustaining All Life and *United to End Racism* are projects of and use the tools of **Re-evaluation Counseling**, a process whereby people of all ages, heritages, and backgrounds can learn how to exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from the effects of past hurtful experiences. Re-evaluation Counseling theory assumes that everyone is born with tremendous intellectual potential, natural enthusiasm for life, and caring, but that these qualities have become blocked and obscured as the result of accumulated hurtful experiences, which began early in our lives.

Any young person would recover from such distress spontaneously by use of the natural healing process of emotional release (crying, trembling, raging, laughing, and so on). This process is usually interfered with by well-meaning people who erroneously equate the emotional expression (the healing of the hurt) with the hurt itself.

When adequate emotional release can take place, we are freed from the behavior and feeling left by the hurt. Then our basic loving, cooperative, intelligent, and enthusiastic nature can operate more effectively in looking out for our own interests and the interests of others, and we are more capable of acting successfully against injustice.



Tools to Improve Our Functioning





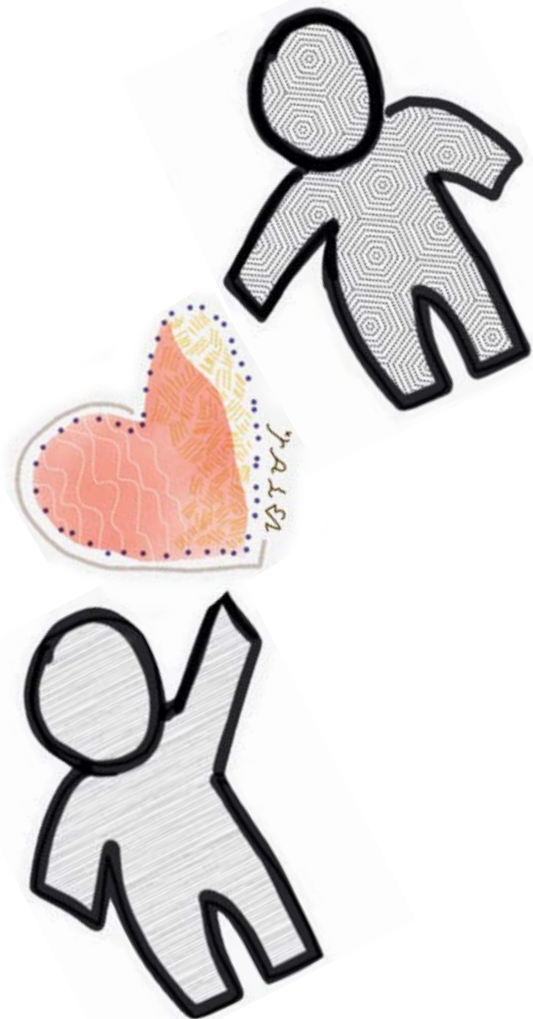
News and Goods

When a group meets, each person says what is going well—in their personal life, in the projects they are working on, and so on. News and Goods at the beginning of a group interaction pull people’s attention away from upsets, discouragement, and other preoccupations that make it difficult for them to think about the topic at hand and help them feel connected to each other.

Appreciations

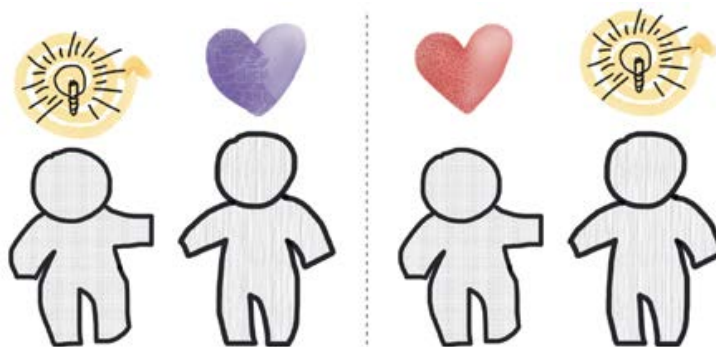
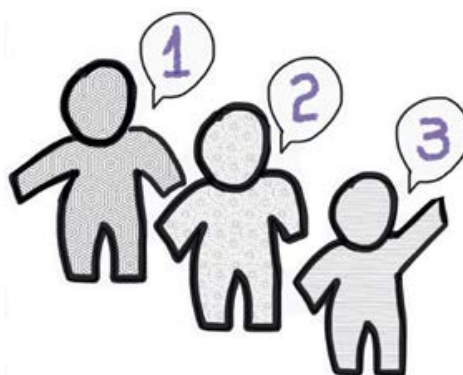
Everyone appreciates another person. No one is left out. Appreciation helps people realize that others know they have good qualities and something positive to contribute. It improves relationships. It helps people participate more fully in projects and discussions. Collective work goes better when people feel included, and appreciations are one way to ensure that they do.

It is easier for people to make changes, create new ideas, and correct their mistakes when they are pleased with themselves, and know others are pleased with them. Self-appreciation and appreciating each other help establish this inclusive environment.



Speaking order

In this format people from oppressed groups are given the chance to speak first, before members of groups that play oppressor roles speak. This interrupts societal patterns of domination. It makes possible meaningful communication between people in oppressed groups and those assigned by society to oppressor roles.

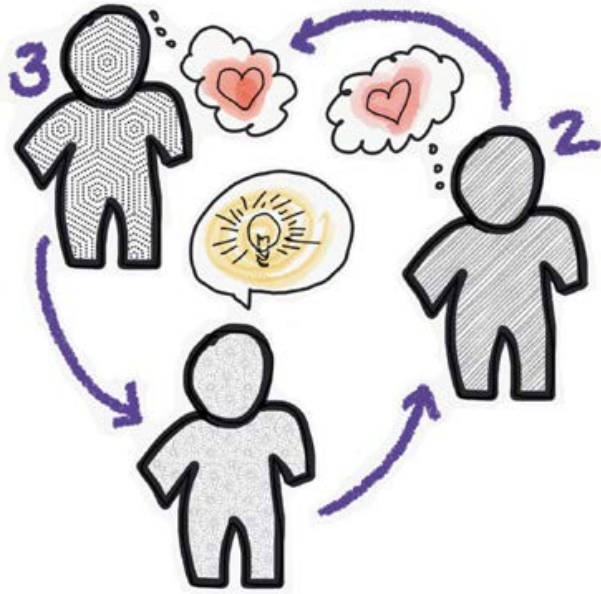


Sessions

Two (or sometimes three) people take turns listening to each other without interruption. (Sessions can be as short as a few minutes each or as long as the two people agree upon.) Each person gets an equal amount of time. The first person talks about whatever they want to talk about. The listener pays interested, warm attention without interrupting to give advice or comment or tell how they feel. Any expressions of emotion are welcomed and supported. (The listener can reassure the person who is talking that emotional release is part of a natural healing process.) After the agreed-upon time, the talker becomes the listener, and the one who listened first talks about anything they want to talk about. The listener never refers to what was said in the session, with anyone.

Sessions release tensions that interfere with people's thinking and functioning. They drain off emotions that can interfere with people's ability to work together and discuss controversial matters respectfully. They give people a chance to rapidly absorb and process new information and to find and formulate their thoughts.

Having regular sessions gives us fuller access to our flexible thinking. It restores our good perspective about ourselves and others. We are better able to cooperate in relaxed, respectful engagement with others.

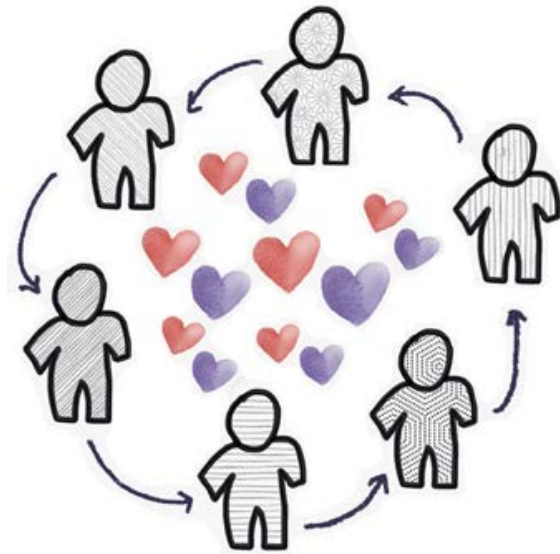


Think-and-listens

Three to six people take equal turns speaking their thoughts without response or comment from the others in the group. Those not talking listen with alert, aware, and interested attention. Listeners do not indicate agreement or disagreement with what is said and do not refer later to what was said. This allows people to think creatively without having to worry about criticism or arguments.

Support groups

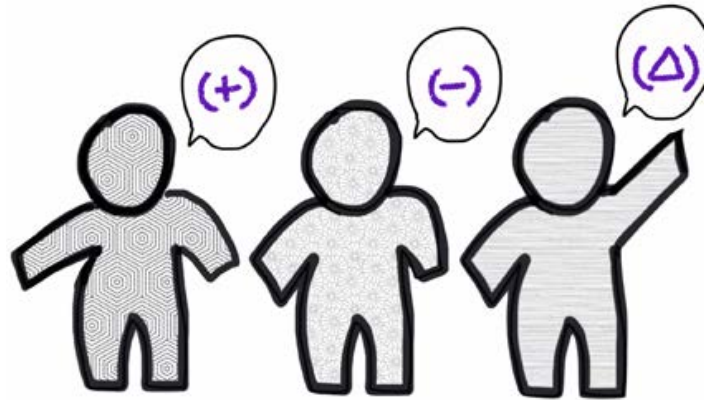
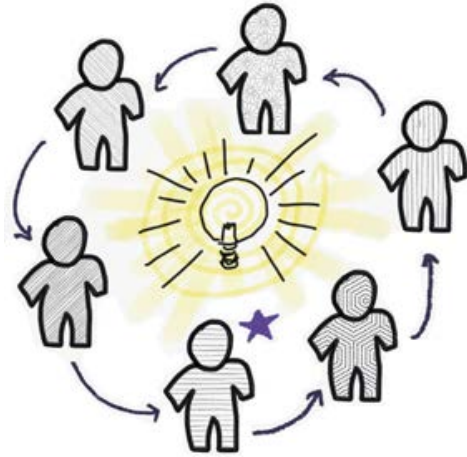
Three to eight people take equal turns listening to one another and encouraging each other to talk openly. Participants are encouraged to release any emotional tension that comes up. The group can be based on a specific constituency (for example, African-heritage people, women, young people) or on issues (climate change, educational change, and so on). A support group can also consist of a diverse collection of people.



Support groups provide the safety for people within a constituency group to work on how they have experienced oppression and how they have internalized it. Repeated meetings build safety in the group, allowing for increased openness and healing.

Discussion format

(1) There is a facilitator. (2) People discuss the topic, not the personalities or characteristics of the people in the discussion. (3) No one speaks twice until everyone has spoken once (no matter how much patience or encouragement it takes for people who do not speak up easily to participate). (4) No one speaks four times before everyone has spoken twice. Everyone is heard—especially those who don't tend to speak up. If time is an issue or some people dominate, each speaking turn can be timed.



Panels

People from an oppressed group communicate about the reality of their life experiences to people who are conditioned to take on an oppressor role. On a panel, in front of a meeting, they share details about their lives. One useful set of questions is (1) What is very positive about being a member of the group that you belong to? (2) What has been hard about being a member of the group that you belong to? (3) What do you wish people understood about your life as a member of this group? (4) What do you wish people would never do or say again to you or any other member of your group?

End the panel with a short, paired session for everyone. People in the oppressed group should have the chance to pair with one another and not have to listen to people in the oppressor role talk about their oppression.



KALACHUCHI, IN MANGILAO, GUAHAN • CECILIA LIM

Our Commitment

We recognize the clear evidence of dangerous and ongoing climate change resulting from the ever-rising temperatures caused by human activities.

We will face the challenge of finding ways to stop this and then acting on them.

We will support people to free themselves from hurts (especially those that leave people feeling powerless and alone) that keep them from playing any role in the struggle to preserve the world. In doing this, we recognize the role that all oppressions have played in creating the climate emergency and the need to act against all oppressions to find solutions.

We will learn how to move rapidly forward—together and with confidence—in our personal relationships and in public opposition to irrational policies.

We will assist each other to learn about and understand the current situation, including by getting involved with individuals, organizations, and Indigenous peoples working to stop climate change.

We will share our knowledge and practice, so that those who are working on climate change have tools with which to function more effectively.

We will continue to gather to discuss the situation, free ourselves from the ways we have been hurt, and develop new ideas, tactics, and strategies as quickly as possible.



OLO-OLO, LOBO, BATANGAS, PHILIPPINES • NIK LEUNG



CORAL, IN SANTA RITA, GUAHAN • CECILIA LIM



Sustaining All Life



For more information, see:

www.sustainingalllife.org or www.unitedtoendracism.org

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