

# Climate Convergence Opens with a Prayer and a Call to Action

September 20, 2014



The Climate Convergence—an opening session on Friday, a hundred meetings on Saturday, a huge march and Occupy the U.N. Climate Summit on Sunday, and other actions on Monday such as #FloodWallStreet (Stop Capitalism. End the Climate Crisis.)—began in New York City on Friday night with an indigenous prayer, speeches from climate activists, and a powerful call to action to save the planet. Organizers have worked to make this a turning-point event.

The Climate Convergence has come to New York to challenge, protest, and attempt to change the climate policies of the corporations, national governments, and the United Nations which is holding its Climate Summit this week in New York.

For Sunday's march, some 500 buses are bringing protestors from around the country, demonstrators will line up on 26 city blocks, and there will be 29 marching bands. Some 2,000 other climate events are taking place simultaneously in 160 countries. Organizers predict that 100,000 will march in New York on Sunday, September 21 in the biggest climate action in American history.

While the opening sessions speakers came from a range of movements, experiences, and perspectives and presented no one point of view, theory, or analysis, what came through loud and clear was the need to change our planet's course, because if unbridled capitalism, corporations, and consumerism continue to dominate our discourse, ideology, and practice we are headed for a disaster that could destroy the planet and the human race. We provide here some excerpts from the opening session talks to give our readers a feel for the movement.

Tom Goldtooth of the Dakota people in Minnesota and a spokesperson of the Indigenous Environmental Network opened the meeting by reminding the gathering that the indigenous movement "has never been idle" in its work, a reference to the Idle No More movement. He in turn called upon Josephine Mandamin (Anishinaabekwe), an Ojibway woman also known as Grandmother Water Walker who is noted for her work to protect the Great Lakes and other waterways, to offer a prayer.

First speaking in her native language and then in English Mandamin said, "The creator gave us the duty to take care of our mother the earth the way we would take care of our own mother or grandmother.. She called women the "water carriers" and told the climate activists, "We are women are the water carriers, the life carriers. The little droplet of water is what unites us all." She told the group, "We have come here to speak to the powers-that-be, to the corporations about the climate

issues and to ask, 'What are you going to do about it.' And I ask you too, 'What are you going to do?'"

Jill Stein, the physician and former Green Party presidential candidate who chaired the opening session told the crowd of some 500 that, "We are at a critical, transformative moment." Call for involvement in both direct action and electoral politics, she told the group, "The fundamental purpose of our coming together here is to leverage our work."

"This is the first time in my experience," said Stein, "that so many people from so many different movements have come together to put people, the planet, and peace over profits. We cannot fix the planet while the neoliberal capitalist system goes on."

Anne Petermann of the Global Justice Ecology Project has worked since 2007 to challenge the United Nations' climate policies. Tracing UN policies since 2004 in Argentina, she argued that "the United Nations' climate program had become completely market dominated." Her protests over the last half dozen years at climate summits in Bali, Durban, Doha led her to be permanently banned from the UN Climate summits. She told the climate activists that "The United Nations does what its corporate masters tell them to do."

Felipe Cornell, the Afro-Peruvian, Harlem bred, hip-hop legend better known as Immortal Technique gave a powerful speech about the need for environmental change before reading one of his moving poems. A powerful stage presence, Cornell told the audience, "We have to redefine what has been redefined for us—our humanity. We have been told that the earth belongs to us, rather than that we belong to the earth."

"I find these things transcending racial lines, because we are one human race," said Cornell. "Before race, class, and gender, we are all human beings who have to be caught in a non-sustainable system. We may divide ourselves by race, but we are united class."

Erica Violet Lee of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan who is active in the Idle No More movement talked about the indigenous peoples' conditions and struggles. "Our people live in poverty and without adequate health care, with inferior education, over-represented in the prisons, suffering economic hardship and facing racism everywhere," she said. "We are Idle No More, but that is just a new name for the indigenous resistance movement that has gone on so long. We get up in the morning and we say, 'We are still here, despite centuries of efforts to destroy us. We are still here.'"

"Violence on the land is directly related to violence against indigenous people and against indigenous women," said Lee. Lee read a moving poem dedicated to the Palestinian women of Gaza.

Nastaran Mohit, a New York city labor organizer and Occupy activist, talked as a socialist who had only recently come to the environmental movement, driven by the experience of Occupy Sandy in response to the devastation of super storm Sandy. "It was Occupy Sandy that turned me into an environmental activist," said Mohit. "Occupy Sandy was Occupy Wall Street's first opportunity to connect with low-income communities." Mohit challenged the audience to work with such economically marginal groups.

Finally, the featured guest of honor, Oscar Olivera, a leader of the Coordinating Committee en Defense of Water and Life, and one of the three principal leaders of the Cochabamba Water Wars, talked about how the largely indigenous and working people of Bolivia "had fought and won against Bechtel, the World Bank, the Bolivian government, and the military." Olivera emphasized the need to be able to explain complex ideas to society's underdogs. He also emphasized the need for new forms of organization. "We organized horizontally," he said, "without leaders, without presidents, without

political bosses, without parties, and without the employers. The people made the decisions.” Finally, said Olivera, one has to set the educated and organized forces in motion, one has to mobilize.