



# New Haven/León Sister City Project

*Fall 2019 Newsletter*

## Climate Emergency: Return to a Safe Climate

by Chris Schweitzer

It's truly incredible to write this headline, that we've stumbled into such a tragic and growing disaster. What's more incredible is the calm that dominates society in spite of the news of the ongoing destruction.

Ten years ago New Haven/Leon SCP started working on preventing a climate disaster in Nicaragua. Initially there were questions whether climate change fit within the mission of the organization. Now - with the growing number of dire warnings from the UN and leading development and science organizations - it's clear that every family, organization, and government needs to address climate disruption if we hope to have any kind of livable future.

Of course, marginalized communities like the ones NHLSCP works with in Leon, will face the greatest challenges. These communities have poor or non-existent infrastructure, and they are having to face increasing droughts, storms and heat waves with very limited resources. Many in Central America - as evidenced by the stream of migrants heading north - are already being displaced by changing weather patterns (see "Examining" article on p 5).

It is important that we in the global North take responsibility for the damage our economies have done. We have allowed corporations to treat the Earth as disposable. The huge plastic masses poisoning our oceans are just one example of this selfish neglect. We need to create a new model - and new lifestyles - that will respect ecosystem limits and return us to a safe climate.

We are seeing a general awakening in the public and within organizations that climate change is an important challenge. Much of this new attention seems to be related to the more dire UN warnings, the call for a Green New Deal, and increasing youth activism.

So the present challenge is to engage and mobilize those who are worried about climate change, and make climate

### Contents:

P.1 Climate Emergency: Return to a Safe Climate

P.2 Youth Take the Lead on Passing Climate Resolution

P.3 NHLSCP Launches Climate Justice Project

P.4 Climate Justice graphic

P.5 Examining Climate Change: Rural People, Agriculture and Migration

solutions a priority. This - and not climate denial - is the real challenge as most Americans recognize climate disruption as a threat.

We - with the New Haven Climate Movement - are working with a growing number of youth and adults to pressure the City government to greatly increase climate change mitigation efforts.

But we also recognize the need to help families in Goyena and Troilo prepare for more droughts, heat waves, and storms (even though any adaptation effort will be futile if we don't cut GHG emissions). So much of this newsletter is focused on a new Climate Justice Project which will try to turn local Connecticut energy towards addressing climate challenges in Nicaragua. We hope many of you will be involved in both our local climate efforts and our climate justice projects. There really is much to do - and many great projects to create!



Emergency Resolution article in New Haven Register, and Erendira Vanegas speaking about climate justice at September 20th rally in New Haven.

## Youth Take the Lead on Passing Climate Resolution

*On August 1st about 90 NHCM supporters turned out for a Board of Alders hearing on a Climate Emergency Resolution. Below are excerpts from testimony from two youth.*

### Adrian Huq: Testimony

Good evening. I'm Adrian, I'm 16, and a high school senior in New Haven, and I work with New Haven Climate Movement (NHCM).

We're facing a direct existential threat. But we know that not all of us are equally impacted. Communities of color and low income communities are often the hardest hit by climate change. It forces people from their homes, and increases hunger and poverty. We need to do our part here to protect our city's people, including protecting ourselves and our families.



***"A livable climate and social equity should not be seen as radical concepts. This is our future, our city, our planet, and our people. I urge you to make the right choice, especially for our children and young people"***

The projects we currently have implemented in our city are to PROTECT rather than PREVENT. These efforts are not enough, and not nearly at a fast enough pace to align with the rapid environmental destruction. The climate resolution sets the fast pace we need to cancel our emissions.

You might be wondering, what is New Haven's action going to do for the huge global issue? Well, a win here can inspire other cities in CT and influence national mobilizations. We have power and all movements must start somewhere.

I hope I can be proud to say that our city took action before it was too late to lessen its already known impacts. Or will we miss the opportunity to do something while being one of the biggest cities in one of the most

wealthy states when it could be slowed by dedicating just 0.1% of our budget to the crisis? That to me, would be a shame.

We need to see strong action from New Haven to set an example, take a step forward to protect our land and people, and reflect the wishes of our community. We must make our very living and health a top priority. A livable climate and social equity should not be seen as radical concepts.

This is our future, our city, our planet, and our people. I urge you to make the right choice, especially for our children and young people. Thank you.

### Julia Kosinski: Testimony

My name is Julia Kosinski and I am 16 years old. I live in Hamden and I have attended school in New Haven since pre-school. I spend most of my time in New Haven and I truly love and appreciate this city. That is why I am here today and why I urge you on behalf of the City of New Haven to recognize the Climate Emergency we are facing. We must acknowledge the scope of the peril to our planet, to our homes, and to our lives so that we can mobilize and respond to this crisis with the appropriate scope, scale, and speed.

I can relate to this emergency. Two years ago I began to have a lot of trouble breathing. I had never felt that kind of stress in my lungs before, then all of a sudden I had asthma. I was so confused and frustrated, and it turns out that I have this condition in common with thousands of others in New Haven. According to a 2017 Yale Global Health Justice Partnership study, New Haven ranks seventh nationally among cities with the highest asthma prevalence. While asthma can

develop due to a number of factors, it occurs especially due to declining air quality and extreme weather conditions that climate change exacerbates. And asthma disproportionately impacts our cities' marginalized communities and people of color.

Alarming asthma rates is just one of the many ways that New Haven's residents are already impacted by climate change. That is why this is an emergency to me. I can't think of using a less dramatic word to describe it.

***"We must acknowledge the scope of the peril to our planet, to our homes and to our lives so that we can mobilize and respond to this crisis with the appropriate scope, scale, and speed."***

New Haven must declare a climate emergency, and act accordingly, because climate change isn't a single issue. It's a justice issue, it's a health issue, it's a human rights issue, it's the issue of our lives and future— it's an emergency right here that we can solve if we recognize it and take action. We can't wait for others to make a plan elsewhere, we have to make a plan for ourselves.

When someone is having an asthma attack, they need an emergency inhaler or a trip to the emergency room. Likewise, this emergency requires immediate action. I am calling on you all to declare a Climate Emergency so we can move quickly on to finding and implementing real solutions.



Julia Kosinski and Alissa Boutviseth at climate emergency rally in June.

## NHLSCP Climate Justice Project

NHLSCP works with two rural communities in Nicaragua displaced by Hurricane Mitch in 1998. *Both communities struggle to overcome historic poverty and oppression, and climate disruption presents a significant new challenge.*

The Climate Justice Project works with US and Nicaraguan communities to build a healthier more just future.

**Climate Justice:** A call to:

- Recognize the damage we've done to local and global ecosystems through burning large amounts of fossil fuels.
- Limit that damage as soon as possible and move to live within natural system limits to protect future generations.
- Help vulnerable communities globally - who've done significantly less damage - prepare for climate extremes (sea level rise, droughts, extended heat waves, extreme weather) and to address their local environmental, public health, and justice issues.

**Climate Solutions:** Actions to create healthy resilient communities globally:

- Work with local communities to identify vulnerabilities and develop projects that increase resiliency, reduce GHG emissions, and include other benefits (public health, jobs, etc)
- Commit real resources recognizing that climate solutions work is essentially cleaning up problems generated in the global north.
- Develop respectful relationships with vulnerable communities and build on local knowledge and wisdom and embrace creativity as we all work together to take on the unprecedented challenge of climate disruption



## Eight Reasons to Declare Climate Emergency for Nicaragua.

1. Long term impacts of Hurricane Mitch on community mental and emotional health, which are visible in rural Goyena and Trolío communities even today.
2. Many families make less that \$2000 per year - barely enough for food and clothing, so climate expenses may overwhelm them.
3. Very limited infrastructure, like good roads, so heavy rains often shut down communities.
4. Most rural communities are heavily dependent on agriculture, so very vulnerable to weather extremes.
5. Nicaragua as a whole is very poor, so the government lacks resources to help communities prepare for or respond to climate shocks.
6. Nicaragua is burdened with unfair international trade policies which inhibit higher wages and better environmental policies.
7. Many international NGOs recognize that climate change is already making people more poor, so there is a need to stop it from creating more global suffering.
8. Higher temperatures and intense rain events are already increasing spread of diseases like malaria and dengue.

### Ways to Support Climate Justice Project

- Spread the word, or organize a gathering to look at climate justice opportunities.
- Donate to NHLSCP to support new climate justice projects. Contact: 608 Whitney Ave., New Haven, CT 06511; [www.newhavenleon.org](http://www.newhavenleon.org)

## NHLSCP Climate Justice Project

### Climate Justice Work in Global North...

Gather resources and people committed to taking on climate challenge.

Take time to explore our communal history and responsibilities... and what mistakes got us here.

Immediately reduce greenhouse gas emissions to lessen damage.

Ensure climate projects prioritize reducing impacts on the most vulnerable locally and globally.

Understand that climate disruption will be expensive, either in creating just solutions or responding to climate chaos if we fail to act.



### Potential Climate Justice Projects in Global South:

Project Idea: Clean cookstove installations, to reduce GHG emissions, improve health, and reduce fuel costs.

Project Idea: Cool Schools, to create cooler learning spaces for teachers and families as local temperatures increase.

Project Idea: Community Tree Planting for shade, income, community cooling, food, and carbon capture.

Project Idea: Crisis Response Resources including solar, communication tools, water resources, etc., to prepare for coming extreme weather events.

Project Idea: Drought Resistance, including water storage and solar wells to help communities adapt to a hotter drier environment.

**People Needed to Learn, Create, Build, Design, Fund, and Collaborate.**

## Examining Climate Change: Rural People, Agriculture and Migration

*Emily Kelly, ViviendasLeón Social Advocacy and Research Intern - Summer 2019*

To accurately assess the impacts of climate change, one must look at how it affects people of all levels of society. Research consistently shows that marginalized communities are disproportionately impacted by climate change than other communities. This is especially apparent in Central America, where indigenous populations, rural communities, and women and children are currently experiencing the brunt of the changing climate.

According to some estimates, half of Central Americans live in poverty, with a third living in extreme poverty. Extreme poverty is especially prevalent in rural areas, where people rely more heavily on their environment for water, food, shelter, medicine, and energy.

Research shows that families living in poverty usually occupy the least desirable, and therefore cheapest, land, which is more prone to climate impacts like mud slides, flooding, and water contamination. As climate change worsens, so will rural families' ability to continue living on their land.

In Central America, this threat is especially dangerous to the rural population whose livelihoods are mostly agrarian. It is estimated that the unpredictable weather caused by El Niño (2018/19) led 2.2 million people to lose their crops. The Mayan highlands, home to many indigenous groups, is especially vulnerable, with a 2014 study finding them to be the most vulnerable area in the region to climate change. In the highlands, extreme weather events are more destructive and costly and increasingly

wide fluctuations in temperature and rainfall can destroy crops.

This area of the highlands that stretches across Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and parts of southern Mexico is highly vulnerable to climate change is called the Dry Corridor. The Dry Corridor can also be characterized by high unemployment, limited and seasonal labor demands, and low and irregular wages.

Climate change and the resulting interruptions for agrarian communities can be a major driver of migration. One study found that of the Central American migrants turned away at the US border, 50% had worked in the agricultural sector before migrating. Their main reasons for migrating were unemployment and economic hardship, followed by low income and poor working conditions. Of the Guatemalans interviewed, most said that poverty, unemployment, and crop loss were the main reasons that they attempted to migrate.

Since men account for the largest group of people who attempt to cross the border, the women who stay behind are left with twice as much work. It can take months for families to start receiving remittances from their migrated relative, so in the time waiting, those remaining in their home country must still maintain their livelihoods. For rural women whose husbands have emigrated, this can mean taking on the duties of their husbands, such as running the family farm, as well as continuing to carry out their domestic responsibilities, like taking care of their children.

Climate change also puts women and children at risk in terms of their health. Central America has high rates of child and maternal mortality and morbidity, with high levels of malnutrition and inadequate access to



Children - gathering for the afterschool program in Trolío - will grow up in a very different more hostile climate.

food, drinking water, health services, and education throughout the region. Extreme weather events often damage the infrastructure for communication, sanitation, electricity, and water, leaving these communities even more marginalized. This isolation from health services and communication networks creates a favorable environment for the spread of infectious diseases, which have also been shown to be associated with changes in climate. Negative effects on health can equally be attributed to the widespread drought and loss of crops in the area.

Indigenous groups usually fall within the rural, agrarian population of Central America, but experience even more marginalization due to social prejudices. These people usually rely on traditional knowledge about farming practices, but climate change is rendering their knowledge less and less useful.

Climate change is much more than just an environmental problem. For marginalized communities and individuals, this is a major disruption that can be felt throughout many aspects of their lives. As more and more research is pointing to this imbalance in the effect of climate change on humans, action must be taken to protect these vulnerable groups from worsening environmental, financial, and health problems.

New Haven/León Sister City Project  
608 Whitney Avenue  
New Haven, CT 06511  
www.newhavenleon.org nh@newhavenleon.org 203.562.1607



*NH/LSCP supports education  
and sustainable development in  
Nicaragua and New Haven.*

### **Thank You for your ongoing support!**

### **Make a Plan to Amplify Your Impact**

If you would like to extend your support of New Haven Leon Sister City Project to make a lasting impact, there are several gift arrangements to choose from. Making a meaningful gift is easier than you think. A gift in your will or trust, for example, is accomplished by adding simple bequest language to your will - and you'll join others already part of *New Haven Leon: Presente!*

Whether you would like to put your donation to work today or benefit us after your lifetime, you can find a charitable plan that lets you provide for your family and support NHLSCP.

More information at [newhavenleon.org](http://newhavenleon.org) on the Give page.



### **ROOTS OF MIGRATION: MOTIVES FOR MOVEMENT, THROUGH THE LENS OF NICARAGUA**

People don't migrate for the pleasure of it. What makes Nicaraguans move?

### **JOIN A DELEGATION TO NICARAGUA**

May, 2020

### **For Educators and People Who Want to Learn**

Contact Chris at [nh@newhavenleon.org](mailto:nh@newhavenleon.org) / 203.562.1607 for more information.



[New Haven/León Sister City Project](#) works to promote social justice, education and sustainable development in Nicaragua and Connecticut. For more information see [www.newhavenleon.org](http://www.newhavenleon.org); [www.facebook.com/newhavenleon](https://www.facebook.com/newhavenleon); email [nh@newhavenleon.org](mailto:nh@newhavenleon.org); or call 203.562.1607.

**[Donate to expand NHLSCP's critical work here.](#)**