



# CLIMATE JUSTICE ALLIANCE Just Transition Principles

*This short paper aims to articulate the shared analysis & principles held by members of the Climate Justice Alliance, recognizing that a Just Transition will look different in different places.<sup>1</sup>*

## What Do We Mean By Just Transition?

*“Just Transition is a principle, a process and a practice.”  
— Just Transition Alliance*

Just Transition is a vision-led, unifying and place-based set of principles, processes and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy<sup>2</sup> to a regenerative economy. This means approaching production and consumption cycles holistically and in a waste-free way. The transition itself must be just and equitable, redressing past harms and creating new relationships of power for the future through reparations. If the process of transition is not just, the outcome will never be. Just Transition describes both where we are going and how we get there.

## History & Context

Just Transition strategies were first forged by labor unions and environmental justice groups rooted in low-income communities of color, who saw the need to phase out the industries that were harming workers, community health and the planet—and at the same time provide just pathways for workers to transition to other jobs. It was rooted in workers defining a transition away from polluting industries in alliance with fence line and frontline communities.

The environmental justice (EJ) movement grew out of a response to the system of environmental racism where communities of color and low-income communities have been (and continue to be) disproportionately exposed to and negatively impacted by hazardous pollution and industrial practices. Its roots are in the civil rights movement, and are in sharp contrast to the mainstream environmental movement, which has failed to understand or address this injustice<sup>3</sup>. The EJ movement emphasizes bottom up organizing, centering the voices of those most impacted, and shared community leadership.

Building on these histories, members of the Climate Justice Alliance, many of whom are rooted in the environmental justice movement, have adapted the definition of Just Transition to represent a host of strategies to transition whole communities to build thriving economies that provide dignified, productive and ecologically sustainable livelihoods, democratic governance and ecological resilience.

### Some of the movement leaders who have built a strong foundation for Just Transition



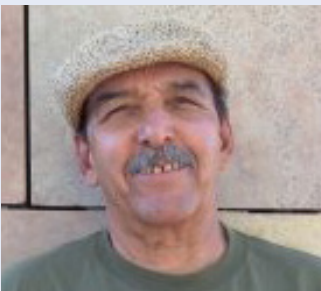
*Connie Tucker, Southern Organizing Committee for Economic & Social Justice*



*José Bravo, Just Transition Alliance*



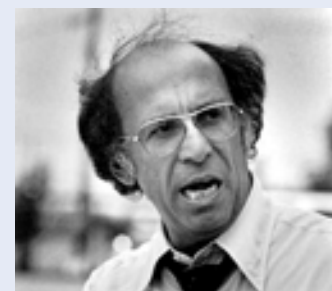
*Pam Tau Lee, Chinese Progressive Association*



*Richard Moore, Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice and Los Jardines Institute*



*Tom Goldtooth, Indigenous Environmental Network*



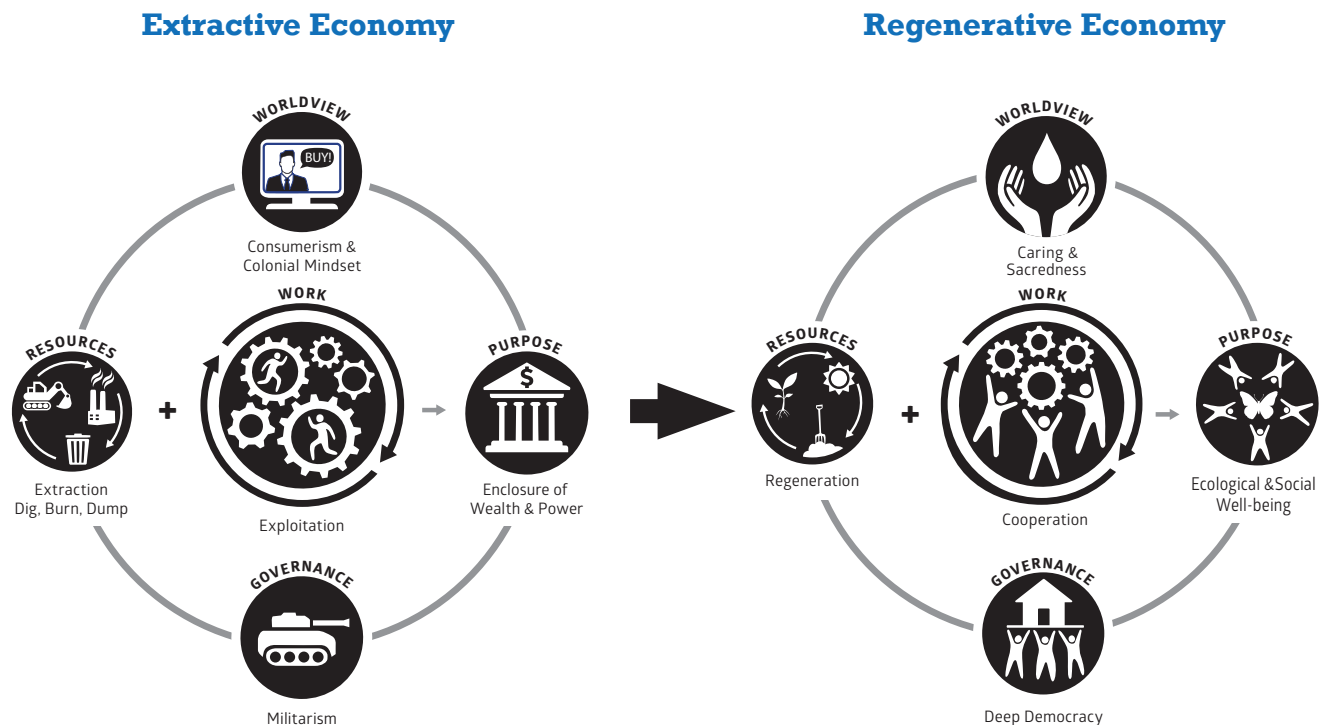
*Tony Mazzocchi, Oil, Chemical & Atomic Workers International Union*

## Analysis, Framework and Strategy

After centuries of global plunder, the profit-driven industrial economy rooted in patriarchy and white supremacy is severely undermining the life support systems of the planet. Transition is inevitable. Justice is not.

We must build visionary economy that is very different than the one we now are in. This requires stopping the bad while at the same time building the new. We must change the rules to redistribute resources and power to local communities. Just Transition initiatives are shifting from dirty energy to energy democracy, from funding highways to expanding public transit, from incinerators and landfills to zero waste, from industrial food systems to food sovereignty, from gentrification to community land rights, from military violence to peaceful resolution, and from rampant destructive development to ecosystem restoration. Core to a Just Transition is deep democracy in which workers and communities have control over the decisions that affect their daily lives.

To liberate the soil and to liberate our souls we must decolonize our imaginations, remember our way forward and divorce ourselves from the comforts of empire. We must trust that deep in our cultures and ancestries is the diverse wisdom we need to navigate our way towards a world where we live in just relationships with each other and with the earth.



## CJA Just Transition Principles

*There are existing principles, including the Principles of Environmental Justice and Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing, that have been important in guiding our work. The Just Transition principles below are an attempt to consolidate and synthesize various Just Transition principles from among CJA members and allies, built off the deep work and discussions amongst ourselves. Understanding that Just Transition will look different in different places, we believe a core set of shared principles can strengthen our collective work.*

### **A Just Transition moves us toward Buen Vivir**

Buen Vivir means that we can *live well* without *living better* at the expense of others. Workers, community residents, women and Indigenous Peoples around the world have a fundamental human right to clean, healthy and adequate air, water, land, food, education and shelter. We must have just relationships with each other and with the natural world, of which we are a part. The rights of peoples, communities and nature must supercede the rights of the individual.

### **A Just Transition creates Meaningful Work**

A Just Transition centers on the development of human potential, creating opportunities for people to learn, grow, and develop to their full capacities and interests. We are all born leaders, and a regenerative economy supports and nurtures that leadership. In the process, we are transforming ourselves, each other, our communities, and our society as a whole. Meaningful work is life-affirming.

### **A Just Transition upholds Self Determination**

All peoples have the right to participate in decisions that impact their lives. This requires democratic governance in our communities, including our workplaces. Communities must have the power to shape their economies, as producers, as consumers, and in our relationships with each other. Not only do we have the right to self determination, but self determination is one of our greatest tools to realize the world we need. The people who are most affected by the extractive economy — the frontline workers and the fenceline communities — have the resilience and expertise to be in the leadership of crafting solutions.



## **A Just Transition equitably redistributes Resources and Power**

We must work to build new systems that are good for all people, and not just a few. Just Transition must actively work against and transform current and historic social inequities based on race, class, gender, immigrant status and other forms of oppression. Just Transition fights to reclaim capital and resources for the regeneration of geographies and sectors of the economy where these inequities are most pervasive.

## **A Just Transition requires Regenerative Ecological Economics**

Just Transition must advance ecological resilience, reduce resource consumption, restore biodiversity and traditional ways of life, and undermine extractive economies, including capitalism, that erode the ecological basis of our collective well-being. This requires a re-localization and democratization of primary production and consumption by building up local food systems, local clean energy, and small-scale production that are sustainable economically and ecologically. This also means producing to *live well* without *living better* at the expense of others.

## **A Just Transition retains Culture and Tradition**

Capitalism has forced many communities to sacrifice culture and tradition for economic survival. It has also defaced and destroyed land held as sacred. Just Transition must create inclusionary spaces for all traditions and cultures, recognizing them as integral to a healthy and vibrant economy. It should also make reparations for land that has been stolen and/or destroyed by capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, genocide and slavery.

## **A Just Transition embodies Local, Regional, National and International Solidarity**

A Just Transition must be liberatory and transformative. The impacts of the extractive economy knows no borders. We recognize the interconnectedness of our communities as well as our issues. Therefore, our solutions call for local, regional, national and global solidarity that confronts imperialism and militarism.

## **A Just Transition builds What We Need Now**

We must build the world we need now. This may begin at a local small scale, and must expand to begin to displace extractive practices. We must build and flex the muscles needed to meet our communities' needs.



## What Just Transition is NOT: False Solutions

We understand that as frontline communities, we are often faced with navigating many contradictions. We have seen that the fight against climate change has now become a big business opportunity. In this context, it is important to recognize approaches that will only worsen our ecological and economic crises. We call these “false solutions.” The following definitions of false solutions offer a political compass for our movements, knowing that we will engage more deeply in the nuances of various solutions in front of us in our regional and organizational contexts.



### **False Solutions extract & further concentrate wealth and political power**

Carbon trading and other market-based incentives are presented as “economically and politically viable” strategies to address the climate crisis. Unfortunately, this makes the false and dangerous assumption that the laws of nature are subordinate to the laws of capitalism. These undemocratic mechanisms prioritize maximizing profit for those at the top at the expense of the earth and people. These do not move us toward a Just Transition.

### **False Solutions continue to poison, displace, and imprison communities**

Nuclear, fracking, “clean coal,” incineration and even prisons are offered as economic transition solutions to the climate crisis, but only continue to harm the health of people and the planet. The path of extracting, transporting, processing, and consuming these technologies is paved with communities riddled with cancer, reproductive and respiratory disease, among other devastating health impacts. These false solutions turn low-income communities, communities of color and Indigenous communities into sacrifice zones. These do not move us toward a Just Transition.

### **False Solutions reduce the climate crisis to a crisis of carbon**

The climate “crisis” is a symptom of a deeper crisis: resource intensive industrial production of the dominant dig, burn, dump economy. Addressing only carbon emissions without challenging the growth-at-all-costs economy doesn’t resolve the real crisis. This is not to say that carbon doesn’t matter, but it is not the only thing that matters. Techno-fixes like titanium oxide cloud seeding or injecting carbon into the sea bottom are solutions for making money off of the climate crisis more than they are solutions to the climate crisis. It is unclear that these technologies will even work. It is highly likely that they’ll have unintended consequences. These efforts avoid the real solutions of reducing pollution at the source. These do not move us toward a Just Transition.



## **Solving the Climate Crisis: It is possible. It is necessary. There are no shortcuts.**

There's no silver bullet. As we know, it will look different in different places. And let's remember: Transition is inevitable. Justice is not. Let's get to work.

### **Endnotes**

1. The drafting process involved consolidating various principles developed by CJA member organizations -- Just Transition Alliance, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, and Movement Generation -- and discussions by CJA pilot site anchor organizations. CJA staff developed a first draft and got feedback from CJA member organizations at the Growing Our Power national convening in St. Louis and through online comments. A drafting team made up of CJA members and staff, with additional input from the Steering Committee and Pilot Site reps, finalized this working draft.
2. By extractive economy, we mean an economy that relies on the extraction of labor, of natural resources, of culture and of community.
3. Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (Westview Press, 2000).
4. By whole communities, we mean to include workplaces, homes, schools, implying that we are workers, we are community members, we are whole people.



# CLIMATE JUSTICE ALLIANCE

## COMMUNITIES UNITED FOR A JUST TRANSITION

[WWW.CLIMATEJUSTICEALLIANCE.ORG](http://WWW.CLIMATEJUSTICEALLIANCE.ORG)



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