

WHAT IS CLIMATE JUSTICE?



INTRODUCTION

This booklet is the first in a series designed by Quakers in Britain to explore one analysis of climate breakdown and how we might respond, known as climate justice. It's a term that is increasingly used in the UK, but one that is not so well understood. It challenges our status quo and imagines a different world – a world in which we recognise and address the inequalities and power imbalances that have led us here; in which we repair the harm we have done to one another and to the planet, and build a different, more sustainable, loving system of organising ourselves.

We have tried to make these booklets as accessible in language and content as possible, while offering plenty of links to other resources for those who wish to explore topics further. We welcome ignorance: for us, what's important is a curiosity to learn. While we will try to explore the topic of climate justice as comprehensively as we can, we will never be able to cover it fully. We hope these booklets will serve as a launchpad for you to begin your own journey of exploration into what taking action for climate justice might mean to you.

There will be six booklets in total, and each will be made up of three main sections: analysis, practical examples, and queries. The analysis section is intended to provide some basic content for consideration, along with lots of further avenues to explore.



The practical examples section shares information about grassroots groups and campaigns both in the UK and globally that you can draw inspiration from or support. Finally, the queries section offers some questions for reflection or discussion, individually or in groups, as a tool to process and integrate your thoughts about the booklet and its topic.

As a companion to the booklets, we have put together a glossary of key terms, which you can find at www.quaker.org.uk/documents/climate-justice-glossary. Any terms followed in the booklet text by '[G]' appear in the glossary.

For Quakers working through these booklets, we recommend taking a look at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre's [Responding to Ecological Crisis](#)

resource. This has been designed to support Quakers to explore the spiritual underpinnings of the Quaker commitment to sustainability. It will tend to the 'personal' aspect of your journey through these booklets and complement the resources and promptings they contain.

As in the days of early Friends, we sense this is a time of prophecy and want to uphold the prophets in our midst and in the wider world. We must heed the Spirit's call to urgent action. Prophets are visionaries, calling out those in power, and reconcilers stand in the middle of conflict: in this both run great risk.

From the Epistle, Yearly Meeting Gathering 2021

As we embark on this journey, we are demanding courage of each other, looking to support each other, and, especially, seeking to hear and see prophetic voices and examples. We extend an invitation to all to embrace discomfort. Learning to see the wrong in our lives and in our society, and experiencing that inwardly, is a moment when we become truly engaged with transforming our lives.



ANALYSIS

1. Introduction: Why do we even need to talk about climate justice?

With stark warnings from the world's body of climate scientists (the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change or IPCC), and with forest fires, storms and floods around the world growing in frequency and strength, we find ourselves increasingly surrounded by examples of climate breakdown. We know action is needed to respond to this, but why are Quakers in Britain calling for it to be justice-based? In this first booklet, we will be exploring what climate justice is and why it's important.

Are you alert to practices here and throughout the world which discriminate against people on the basis of who or what they are or because of their beliefs? Bear witness to the humanity of all people, including those who break society's conventions or its laws. Try to discern new growing points in social and economic life. Seek to understand the causes of injustice, social unrest and fear. Are you working to bring about a just and compassionate society which allows everyone to develop their capacities and fosters the desire to serve?

Advices & queries 33

The Quaker faith is rooted in a belief in the humanity of all people and their right to life. The Quaker testimony to equality invites us to examine and challenge inequality in the world – not only its symptoms, but also its root causes.

The impacts of climate breakdown are not being felt equally: people who have benefited the least from the wealth of the fossil-fuel era are now suffering the most. Shocking statistics tell the story. For example, **the wealthiest 10% globally are responsible for almost 50% of greenhouse gas emissions**. We can also see it in the devastating loss and damage communities around the world have been experiencing for decades (which we'll be exploring in more detail in module 2).

This inequality is not new: the worst-affected communities are those that have been marginalised throughout history by economic exploitation and **racism** [G]. Most countries in Africa, South America and Asia have been systematically impoverished, their cultures undermined and their resources extracted for profit – first by colonial powers, then by transnational corporations.

Can we take action against climate breakdown without seeking to truly understand the causes of this inequality?

Justice stands on the idea that we are accountable for our actions because we require peace and prosperity in our society. These values have been broken due to climate change. [...] As our climate changes and its adverse effects destroy our communities across the globe, the unresolved questions of who is responsible and why there are no consequences for the harm caused inhibits peace and kills people.

Adrián Martínez, La Ruta del Clima

2. Exploring the origins of climate breakdown

Climate justice and indigenous peoples' movements sometimes say the climate and ecological crisis began in 1492 – the so-called 'discovery' of the Americas by Columbus. In the 15th century, the Pope gave Christian explorers permission to claim lands they supposedly 'discovered'.

This 'Doctrine of Discovery' required them to convert the inhabitants to Christianity and to 'vanquish' and enslave those who did not convert. In what became the United States, this developed into the 19th-century concept of 'manifest destiny' – the idea that God had given the United States a mission to expand its territory throughout North America. The Doctrine of Discovery incorporated into law the idea that some people have rights and others do not; that the Earth is essentially for use and domination by Western, Christian peoples.



Empires were expanded to fuel the industrial revolution in Europe, with more and more land being appropriated to produce materials like cotton for European use. This led to deforestation and habitat destruction on a massive scale. The scale of commodity production also required vast amounts of labour – a problem the colonising powers approached through mass enslavement and transportation of mostly African people. To justify these atrocities, a great deal of effort went into the development of 'scientific' theories of race and racial hierarchy. The peoples

of colonised countries were portrayed as inferior or subhuman to justify their enslavement and the destruction of their lands and ways of life.

These patterns of exploitation did not end with the colonial era. The power structures of **colonialism** [G] have remained, and transnational corporations and governments have continued to exploit lands and peoples in the interest of self-enrichment. The concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, along with a mindset focused on endless economic growth and expansion, has resulted in the overconsumption that is driving climate breakdown. Against this backdrop, it's difficult to look at climate change and breakdown without seeing the injustice inherent in them. So, although climate justice might be a concept that feels relatively new in the UK, at its heart is the importance of understanding and acknowledging our past.



Further exploration:



Written – [Global Witness: What is climate justice](#)
(in particular see [Bali principles of climate justice](#))



Audio – [Climate Justice Alliance: The roots of climate justice](#)



Video – [Mark Charles - Doctrine of Discovery - Truth & Healing Conference at Pendle Hill](#)

3. Unpacking climate justice

What we now recognise as a global climate justice movement has its roots in several different places, going back decades. These include:

- indigenous peoples and other environmental defenders resisting mining and oil and gas exploration and highlighting the ongoing occupation of their lands
- small island states at risk from rising sea levels calling for compensation at the UN since 1991
- the environmental justice movement in the United States, which highlighted

how pollution and environmental degradation primarily affect poor black communities.

For decades, climate justice campaigners have been focusing on solutions that put human rights and the living world at the centre, and which rebalance power away from corporations and towards communities. This has led to a few core principles that underpin the concept of climate justice:

- The climate crisis does not affect everyone equally, and we do not all have equal responsibility.
- Wealthy countries that caused the crisis, such as Britain, owe the rest of the world a huge 'climate debt' and must try to repair the harm they have done.
- The climate crisis is the result of an economic system based on exploitation of people and planet to create profit for a few. To solve the crisis, we need to change that system.
- It's not possible to separate the climate crisis from racism, economic inequality and other forms of oppression – they are all consequences of this same economic system, and each crisis tends to make the others worse.
- The climate crisis is not in the future – it is now. This means that our actions need to focus on dealing with its impacts as well as rapidly ending the fossil fuel era.

For more on this, take a look at the Quakers in Britain [Introduction to Climate Justice](#).

These core principles help us to see how some approaches can sideline or undermine justice. For example, by ignoring historical responsibility and blaming only recently industrialised nations like China; by supporting actions (presented as solutions) that enable corporations or wealthy countries to appropriate land for **carbon offsetting [G]**; or by presenting the climate crisis as a result of 'human nature' rather than a specific economic and political system. We'll explore these false solutions and more in modules 4 and 5.

With all this in mind, we suggest the following working definition to guide us through the booklets:

Climate justice is one analysis of climate breakdown and how we might respond. It asks us to focus on the root causes of climate breakdown by recognising the

systems of oppression that have led to it. These include oppression based on **class [G]**, race, disability, and gender. Climate justice aims to fundamentally transform the ways we relate to one another and to the planet, so that we may live as equals, in harmony with the earth.

NOTE: We know some of this may feel challenging and uncomfortable to read. We live in a world in which the dominant system of organising ourselves prizes individualism, consumption and wealth accumulation.

This system – often referred to as **capitalism [G]** – dates back to the 16th century, when the previous system of medieval feudalism began to break down and foreign trade grew. Europe then entered a new era of territorial expansion (through colonies), technological advances and wage labour.

Capitalism has spread to most of the world and influences all aspects of our lives – from the choices we make about how to use our time and what to prioritise, to what we take from each other and the planet in order to survive. Capitalist theories of how the economy works typically assume **gross domestic product (GDP) [G]** can increase indefinitely, and fail to consider ecological limits. The pursuit of **neoliberal [G]** ideology and policies has only made this worse.

Although this system's influence is widespread and deep, a central part of Quaker testimony is the refusal to participate in a lie. Just as over the centuries Quakers have refused to doff caps or swear oaths, might there be other practices we find ourselves compelled to refuse once we see them clearly?

Quakers have also been involved in work to build an economic system that values people and planet above profit. We'll be exploring the link between climate justice and work to build a new economy in module 3.

Further exploration:



Written – [Martin Lukacs: Neoliberalism has conned us into fighting climate change as individuals](#)



Audio – [Joseph Zane Sikulu: Be everything](#)



Video – [George Monbiot: Neoliberalism, climate change and migration](#)

4. Climate justice is global, but it's local too

Climate justice is often equated with global action against climate breakdown, relating to things that are happening in other parts of the world (e.g. cyclones in Mozambique or flooding in Bangladesh) or to the world more broadly (e.g. global warming and rising sea levels). But there are also many examples of climate injustice here in the UK.

As in our working definition of climate justice, the key to recognising climate injustice in the UK is understanding the role of class, race and, ultimately, who holds power and wealth. We can see this in our food system and in our relationship with the land: for example, who has access to healthy food or land? We can also see this in our basic living conditions: for example, who can afford to heat their homes and who gets to breathe cleaner air? And in the context of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis – who is being hit hardest?



Just as we explored the inequality of climate breakdown in the context of countries around the world, so too can we see inequality in the impacts of climate breakdown in the UK. We live in a relatively wealthy country, but one in which many live with high rents and insecure tenancies in damp, poorly insulated houses they cannot afford to heat. Here, too, the impacts of climate breakdown are worse for people in precarious living situations. And in every crisis – as we have seen with the Covid-19 pandemic – the impacts are worse for people who are already disadvantaged by our society: women, people of colour, disabled people.

Ultimately, climate justice requires us to see both the global and the local. Wherever we look, if we look closely enough, we can see **sacrifice zones** [G] populated by low-income and racialised communities.

The web of creation could be described as a three-ply thread: wherever we touch it we affect justice and peace and the health of all everywhere. So all our testimonies, all our Quaker work, all our Quaker lives are part of one process, of striving towards a flourishing, just and peaceful Creation – the Kingdom of God.

Audrey Urry, 1994, *Quaker faith & practice* 25.04

Further exploration:



Written – [Abigail Allan: No Choice, Climate Change and the UK's Working Class](#)



Audio – [My Albion: Four hundred years](#)



Video – [David Lammy: Climate justice can't happen without racial justice](#) and [Naomi Klein: Imagining a future without sacrifice zones](#)

5. Climate justice isn't just about the climate

Climate justice is often mistakenly understood as only relating to the cutting of carbon emissions. However, as we explored in our working definition, it asks us to focus on the root causes of climate breakdown. These are the same root causes that underpin many forms of injustice, be they economic, social, racial or otherwise. Seen in this light, climate justice is wide-ranging in its scope. It relates to how we live in right relationship with each other and with the planet, which includes peaceful relationships, economic and social equality, and love and respect for all. In this sense, there are many overlaps with

peacebuilding and with the **prison abolition movement [G]**, which are just as wide-ranging. Each requires us to explore the invisible social, political and economic systems in which we live. Without this, we cannot truly address injustice and inequality. And we cannot build the kingdom of heaven on earth.

It can feel overwhelming to think of climate justice in this way. Where do we begin? How could we possibly tackle it all? These are all natural and understandable concerns!

Our suggestion is to hold two things in mind as we grapple with these thoughts. First, we are not alone. Together we make up diverse, complex ecosystems for change, to which we each bring our different strengths. Deepa Iyer's tool to **Map Social Change Ecosystems** is a useful way to explore this. Second, we are not starting from zero. There are many who have gone before us and on whose shoulders we stand today. Pick one issue and take some time to research who has spoken truth to power on that issue around the world. If you dig deep, you will find there are many stories of resistance that have not been told widely enough.



Further exploration:



Written – [Adjo Florencia Jones de Almeida: Searching for a new foundation](#) (page 185)



Visual – [WILPF Climate Justice exhibition](#)



Video – [Teresa Parker, Ellis Brooks and Olivia Hanks: Invisible systems and structures underpinning the status quo](#)

6. How do we take action for climate justice?

We have talked about climate justice and what it is. But we also want to include a brief discussion of what we then do with that understanding. This brings us to exploring the concept of social action, which has many names and can take many forms. You might hear it called ‘activism’, ‘organising’ or – by Quakers – ‘witness’. You might be familiar with actions like organising or participating in strikes and demonstrations; taking direct action, such as blocking roads or occupying buildings; setting up community projects; taking legal action; or lobbying decision-makers. Forms of social action like childcare, emotional support, cooking or administrative tasks are less recognised, but are essential to building and sustaining movements for progressive change.

So, for Quakers in Britain, social action is any activity that is undertaken as part of a vision of a better world and as part of living truthfully – being part of a truthful relationship to the earth and those we share it with. Social action builds and sustains movements for progressive change through many different forms taken by many different people working towards shared aims.



Further exploration:



Written – [Fran Hicks: Mobilising and organising for change](#)



Audio – [Marian McNichol, Sam Donaldson and Bob Pickup: Exploring social action](#)



Video – [Cherise Bock: Courage, fear and care](#)

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

In this section, we highlight examples of grassroots groups and campaigns you might draw inspiration from or support. We have divided them into 'local' and 'global', but this can be an arbitrary distinction as both are interlinked. We use the terms here to help describe actions that are primarily focused on life in the UK (local) and actions that are primarily focused on life outside the UK (global).

Local

Tipping Point works to build a grassroots movement with enough people power to win climate justice. Its co-founders spearheaded the UK fossil fuel divestment movement and helped build some of the biggest grassroots mobilisations, actions and climate campaigns of the last decade.

Just Transition is a joint campaign by Platform, Friends of the Earth Scotland and Greenpeace UK. It seeks a well-managed phase out of oil and gas production in the North Sea by halting future oil licensing rounds and fossil fuel subsidies and ensuring Just Transition measures are implemented during the phase-out.

Fuel Poverty Action campaigns to protect people from fuel poverty. They challenge energy companies that overcharge their customers and unfair policies that leave people to endure cold homes. They also take action for warm, well-insulated homes and clean and affordable energy, under the control of people and communities.



Choked Up is a campaign started by three teenagers of colour in South London. Their campaign highlights the fact that communities in London do not carry the burden of air pollution equally, and it aims to enshrine the right to breathe clean air in UK law through a new Clean Air Act.

COP26 Coalition > Climate Justice Coalition is a UK-based civil society coalition of groups and individuals that mobilised around climate justice during COP26. They are now transitioning to facilitate and support wider climate justice work, and to provide space for coordination across struggles and locations.

Global

Extinction Rebellion Internationalist Solidarity Network (XRISN) is a growing network of radical activists based in the UK, but working in solidarity with partner networks across the world. It began to form after the launch of Extinction Rebellion UK (on 31 October 2018).

War on Want works in partnership with grassroots social movements, trade unions and workers' organisations across the world. It's a charity rather than an aid agency. It doesn't impose solutions to poverty; it fights the causes of global poverty, inequality and injustice.

Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice is a global alliance of grassroots groups and organisations engaging in UN climate talks and processes. Together they have drafted **the People's Demands for Climate Justice** and are developing teaching resources to explore climate justice.

London Mining Network is an alliance of human rights, development, environmental and solidarity groups working for human rights and sustainable development in communities around the world affected by the activities of mining companies based in or funded from London.

Insure Our Future is a global campaign that puts pressure on insurance companies to stop insuring fossil fuel projects.



QUERIES

In this section, we have put together some suggested queries for reflection or discussion, individually or in groups. You might like to use one of the resources we have shared in this booklet as a prompt for reflection and discussion.

We are conscious that the Covid-19 pandemic has made our lives even busier and more stressful. We believe social action should be energising and sustaining, so in these booklets we will try to weave moments of joyfulness (for example, suggestions of music to play) into the queries section. If you are gathering in a group to consider the queries, we also recommend incorporating food and building in time to check in with one another.

Friends across the world have long held a concern for us to live in right relationship with creation [...] Events of recent weeks remind us that climate crisis is here, and that it affects us already. There is so much to lose, and so much to gain. What more does love require of us here, and now?

From minute 33, Yearly Meeting Gathering 2021

- What inequalities related to the climate and ecological crisis can you see in the UK/where you live?
- Can we undertake climate justice work without building relationships with those who are directly affected by climate breakdown?
- Now that you have a fuller understanding of the wide scope of climate justice work, what calls to you?

Music to play:



Merua – Umalali, the Garifuna Collective



The Garden of England (Seeds of Love) – Sam Lee



Lugu Lugu Kan-Ibi – David Darling and the Wulu Bunun

WHERE NEXT?

Exploring Faith and Climate Justice runs from July 2022 to July 2023. Over the year we will explore the following areas:

1. What is climate justice?

July – August 2022

2. Loss and damage: exploring historical responsibility and reparations

September – October 2022

3. Climate justice and the new economy

November – December 2022

4. What happens if we don't focus on justice?

January – March 2023

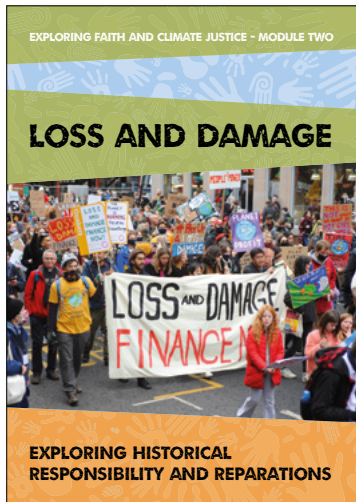
5. Living in right relationship with the earth

March – May 2023

6. How do we act in solidarity and friendship across social justice movements?

May – July 2023

The next module will explore how colonialism and climate breakdown should be met with historical responsibility and reparations.



Text in this colour, indicates a link to further information or resources.

Please go to www.quaker.org.uk/documents/module-1-what-is-climate-justice to click on the links and find the relevant further information or resources.

ADD QR CODE

Join **Quakers in Britain** and **Woodbrooke** on our year of learning and spiritual reflection about climate justice.

You can sign up on your own, or as part of a group or meeting at www.woodbrooke.org.uk/efcj.

For more information and resources visit www.quaker.org.uk/efcj.

Get in touch at climatejustice@quaker.org.uk.

This booklet was developed with support from Lucy Faulkner-Gawliniski, Neil Gibbons and colleagues at Faith for the Climate, and informed by a number of Quakers who helped to shape the project. We are grateful for the time and feedback they so generously shared.

Did you find this resource useful? To let us know your thoughts, to share a story of witness or to request support from Quakers in Britain, please email climatejustice@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1046.

For other accessible versions of this document please email: publications@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1162.

Published in 2022 by Britain Yearly Meeting, registered charity number 1127633

www.quaker.org.uk

