WHERE PEACE MEETS CLIMATE JUSTICE: A TOOLKIT FOR TAKING ACTION



This toolkit was produced and published by War Resisters' International's in 2026, and designed by Andrew Metheven.

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INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is about the relationship between militarism and the climate crisis. Many of us will have been taught to think about these "issues" as separate, isolated from each other, but the underlying premise of the material in this resource is that we – antimilitarist activists, climate justice organisers, movement educators, trainers, writers, researchers, whatever we are – need to think and act as if they are the same. After all, they have a lot in common:

- Both militarism and the climate crisis serve as a direct threat to life on our planet,
- They are both rooted in decisions made by relatively small groups of people,
- Their impacts are felt most fundamentally by the poorest and most marginalised communities,
- Their causes are rooted in capitalism, extractivism, colonialism and exploitation,
- Powerful people have an active interest in maintaining the "status quo" that makes transformation impossible.

So militarism and the climate crisis have a lot in common – but they also directly interact, reinforce, and amplify one another. Militaries emit vast quantities of greenhouse gas emissions, their equipment and tactics are used to restrict movement across borders, and enforce ongoing access to raw materials, infrastructure and labour.

However, we are not going to spend much more time or ink exploring the hows and whys of the relationship between militarism and the climate crisis – there are lots of other great resources that do this, including a **Short Primer on Militarism and the Climate Crisis**, written and published by War Resisters' International in 2024. We have included some definitions, and a list of other useful resources at the end of this introduction, but if you're already asking yourself "aren't these completely separate issues?", then stop here and go read a Short Primer, or some of the other brilliant resources we've listed.

So in this toolkit we're not going to focus on what the problem is, we're going to focus on what we can do about it. How do we build movements that are able to respond to these incredible challenges? How do we act in solidarity with those most impacted by these twin, interrelated threats? Where do we find allies? What does empowerment look, feel and sound like?

In just a few years a huge amount of work has been done to increase awareness and knowledge within our movements, but also to build relationships and campaigns. War Resisters' International has been a part of these spaces for several years, and it is exciting to see more and more individuals and organisations recognising the need to take action at the intersection of peace and climate justice.

This resource is one indication of this growth. When we wrote a **Short Primer on Militarism and the Climate Crisis**, we felt confident in our analysis of the problem – and this made up 90% of what we included in that publication. We included a short chapter offering advice to readers wanting to explore incorporating these issues into their campaigning and activism, but we knew that what we had written was insufficient, because we were acutely aware of the limits of our own knowledge and experience.

This resource is an attempt to remedy that shortfall. We want to gather together some of the learning of our movements over the last few years. The material in this booklet is a testament to the growth and increased confidence of our own work, and that of our friends and allies in the peace and climate justice movements.

We have structured this resource around the same ten headings we used in a Short Primer, but expanded significantly on the material covered. We have also illustrated many of the sections with new case studies and examples from around the world, and included a range of tools for use when facilitating strategy meetings and workshops, and a list of other related resources to find elsewhere.

The ten sections are:

1. Educate ourselves and our movements
2. Start with stories
3. Build an analysis of the problem that's relevant to you
4. Remember we don't have to go "head on"
5. Decolonise and demilitarise ourselves
6. Help to weave a new narrative
7. Build relationships with others
8. Challenge decision-makers
9. Help to build resilient communities
10. Sustain yourself and others around you

A lot of the ideas in this booklet aren't ours. In particular, many of the facilitation tools have been developed by activist-trainers from around the world, and shared generously with our movements. Where we are aware of the original writer we have referenced this.

We hope this resource serves as a useful guide to expanding your work and activism at the intersection of anti-militarism and climate justice. If you have any questions, feel free to contact us via info@wri-irg.org.

In peace and solidarity,

The War Resisters' International Climate Justice Working Group

KEY RESOURCES

- A Short Primer on Militarism and the Climate Crisis, War Resisters' International: https://www.wri-irg.org/en/story/2024/short-primer-militarism-and-climate-crisis
- Conflict and Environment Observatory guide to Military Emissions: https://ceobs.org/projects/military-emissions/
- Global Climate Wall: How the world's wealthiest nations prioritise borders over climate action, Transnational Institute: https://www.tni.org/en/publication/global-climate-wall
- Earth's Greatest Enemy, a documentary by Abby Martin: https://earthsgreatestenemy.com/
- Resisting Green Militarism: Building Movements for Peace and Eco-Social Justice, report by Nico Edwards, Dec 2023 (World Peace Foundation, Tufts University): www.worldpeacefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Resisting-green-militarism-final.pdf
- Decarbonisation as Warfighting Opportunity: Military Climate Governance, the Green Transition and Struggles for Socio-Ecological Justice, doctoral thesis by Nico Edwards, March 2026 (University of Sussex): https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.31681303
- Transition Security Project also have lots and lots of key resources on this intersection – maybe worth simply linking to their homepage: https://transitionsecurity.org/

KEY CONCEPTS

MILITARISM

Militarism can be understood as "the preparation for war, its normalisation and legitimation." How do societies prepare for war in times of peace? How do governments, bankers and arms companies justify huge investments in fighter jets and warships while funds for national healthcare, social housing and education echo hollow? Most simply, militarism refers to the processes by which war and armed conflict become possible. These are material processes, such as the allocation of defence budgets, the production and trade of weapons and the construction and maintenance of armed forces and international military alliances. But militarism and militarisation are also processes of the mind: the need for a national army, a military industry and a bloated defence budget must be argued for and justified somehow. As such, militarism also involves the attitudes and social norms, the cultural preferences and rhetorical tools that make war not only a political priority but a desirable social activity. Patriarchy, racism, capitalism and extractivism – the excessive extraction of the Earth's "resources", from natural goods to animals to people's labour – are all systems of power, harm and exploitation that inform the norms that make war desirable, even necessary.

CLIMATE CRISES

We use "climate crises" as an umbrella term for the broad range of environmental crises and conditions that we are faced with today. Though most visible in public debate and political policy, climate change and global warming from greenhouse gas emissions represent only one of these crises. Equally pressing are the ecological harms of species extinction, biodiversity loss and pollution (such as toxic and radioactive waste), all caused by human activities. Importantly, and as this toolkit makes clear, climate and ecological harms are always also social harms. The communities most exposed to climate shocks are often those with the least resources to respond and with the least responsibility for causing ecological breakdown. Similarly, climate actions that do not consider social inequities – such as the construction of industrial-scale wind farms on indigenous lands or large-scale mining of green transition minerals like lithium and copper devastating local lived environments – only perpetuate systems of social harm and injustice, and do as little for the planet as for most of its peoples. When discussing and thinking through these predicaments we often jump between different terminologies: climate, environment, ecology; change, breakdown, collapse, disaster, emergency, damage, crisis; action, adaptation, transition, justice, liberation... Whatever the terminology, our underlying message in this toolkit remains the same: to bring home the urgency, severity and lived realities of social and ecological harms not to justify more of the same economic, political and military solutions, but to generate just system-transformative change.



I. EDUCATE OURSELVES AND OUR MOVEMENTS

There are very few spaces where the links between militarism and climate change are being discussed. Even within social justice movements it remains a relatively niche topic, where – with so many issues and topics compete for our attention – it can feel like discussing and taking action on big systemic issues can feel particularly daunting. In response, education and knowledge-building need to be key parts of our organising strategies.

However, its not just in our movement spaces that this has been avoided; many of our national and international political and economic systems discount and ignore the impact of militarism and war on our bodies, other living beings, and on the planet as a whole. For example, in 1996 the USA successfully pushed for military emissions to be exempted from the Kyoto Protocol agreement. This was reinforced in the 2015 Paris Agreement, which said that reporting on military emissions would be voluntary.

As well as the direct impact on the accuracy of emissions data being reported by states, this also serves as an obfuscation, a way of ensuring that the impact of war and preparations for war is not included in the mainstream discourse around the climate crisis. This means that everyone involved in the climate crisis – from international negotiators, domestic politicians, staff of NGOs or activist organisations, grassroots organisers, or the wider public – are also discouraged from engaging with these issues, because there are very few mechanisms to impact the decisions being made. We are being quite explicitly told "this is not a concern".

Except it is a concern: the choices being made are having long term impacts on our ability to take action on the single biggest global crisis humanity has ever had to engage with. Part of correcting this is embarking in education work for ourselves, our movements, and decision-makers in the issues, making sure they have access to reliable, up-to-date information, and know how to use it effectively.

The landscape is changing, and the amount of research, analysis, discussion and debate on these issues is increasing every year. It is becoming easier to find accurate information, and organisations have an increasing capacity in speaking about and taking action on the militarised aspects of the climate crisis. At the same time, the impact of militarism and the climate crisis is constantly changing; the issues are live and will continue to evolve, so we need to be ready to learn new things.

How we go about educating our movements isn't a neutral activity, and how we go about it comes with a range of opportunities and challenges.

EXPERTS

Experts are really important – some people and organisations are dedicated to collecting, processing, interpreting and distributing information and data. However, this isn't everyone's role or comfort zone, and its probably not yours. Sometimes, the more we learn the more we realise we don't know, which can become very paralysing if we don't find ways to manage it –it is important to make sure we are using and sharing information in ways that are empowering and supporting further action. This is true for ourselves, and for others in our groups and movements.

Some ways we can support people to keep learning, while avoiding the "analysis of paralysis" include:

- Make sure people have space to ask questions – the cultures in our movement should support inquisitiveness, and questions and complexity should be welcomed and supported.
- At the same time, consider how you can avoid your movement spaces from becoming "competitive", where "who knows the most" becomes a form of hierarchy. If they already feel like this, consider how you can introduce a value for different experiences.

- At events and meeting make sure you have a range of different information materials available, including introductory and more complex publications and materials.
- Put time and energy into communicating key information and ideas in ways that are engaging and communicate clearly. When preparing materials or workshops ask: what information is key to this discussion? What is supplementary?

DIFFERENT TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

There are lots of different ways of gathering and presenting information, stories and ideas. They are all valid and important, but sometimes some might be more relevant than others, depending on the context and who you are communicating with, and with what aim.

Many of us will have a natural preference towards specific forms of information and knowledge – which do you think you prefer?

- Some people prefer an approach focused heavily on data and statistical information – its important to have the evidence to back up a claim, after all!
- For others, sharing lived experiences is more intuitive, a way of empathising with the lived experience of others. Sometimes “data” can feel like it gets in the way of the very direct, human cost of war and the climate crisis.
- Others are even less direct – art, music, story-telling and drama trigger a response that feels truly “real”.

CASE STUDY: WORLD WITHOUT WAR INCORPORATES EDUCATION INTO THE HEART OF THEIR CLIMATE CAMPAIGN

World Without War is a South Korean antimilitarist organisation. In 2024, we decided that our Summer Peace Camp would focus on climate change. The camp took place in August 2024 as a four-day, three-night event, and we designed it as a campaign-building workshop for activists. We explored many issues linking militarism and the climate crisis, including the relationship between war and the climate crisis, greenhouse gas emissions from the military and arms companies, greenwashing, and other topics. Using campaign tools such as the Pillars of Support, the Spectrum of Allies, the Problem Tree, and SMART goal setting, participants decided for themselves what problems to focus on and how they could intervene. The purpose of the camp was not only to educate participants but also to organise people who wanted to work together on this issue.

There was a strategic reason behind this design. For some time, people inside World Without War had been arguing that we should start a campaign on climate issues. As a result, we decided to launch a dedicated working group in 2025. Before doing so, we needed a space to explore different issues and to understand our own capacity—not only within World Without War, but also among the organisations and people we hoped to work with. Through the camp, we also gained a better understanding of the current state of the Korean climate movement, its internal debates, and the many different perspectives that exist within it.

As a result, we launched our Climate Responsibility of the Military programme in 2025. Based on what we learned from the camp, we decided that our first priority should be to pressure the South Korean government to disclose greenhouse gas emissions from the military sector. We formed a working group of four people, including one staff member from World Without War. At the same time, the working group began studying a wide range of materials and examining the experiences of countries that disclose at least some military emissions data through the UNFCCC. We also focused on a freedom of information campaign directed at the South Korean government. We brought together the results of this work in a handbook titled Military and Carbon Footprint: Korea's Homework to Solve. There were almost no Korean-language materials explaining the relationship between the military sector and the climate crisis, and above all, we wanted this handbook to become a useful resource for activists and policymakers. We published it to coincide with the Climate Justice March, the country's largest annual climate mobilisation held every September, in order to give it greater public visibility. In the same month, we also succeeded, for the first time, in including the military's climate responsibility in the official demands of the Climate Justice March.

After publishing the handbook, we realised that we also needed an educational programme to raise public awareness. So we decided to invest in turning this knowledge into permanent and transferable educational resources. We are now adapting material that was originally developed for experts and activists into a curriculum for young people in general. The curriculum is built around three questions:

1. What is the relationship between militarism and the climate crisis, and how does it appear in our everyday lives?
2. What are the levels of greenhouse gas emissions from the military sector, including in South Korea, how are these emissions reported, and how is this issue discussed internationally?
3. How can we imagine changing the different forms of climate injustice that we see in different places, and how can we, individually and together, take action?

The curriculum is currently being piloted, and we hope to publish the final version in September, and is designed to leave our hands. The final materials—including presentation slides, participant worksheets, and a teacher's manual detailed enough for anyone to run the session without us—will be available as free downloads from our







Members of World Without War take at the summer school.

website. We will continue to deliver the training ourselves, but our goal is that climate groups, peace networks, and university student groups anywhere will be able to use these materials on their own. For movements with limited resources, education is not a soft option before "real" campaigning. When it is designed in this way, education is the campaign. It creates the analysis, builds the demands, and develops the next generation of organisers at the same time.

TOOL: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE

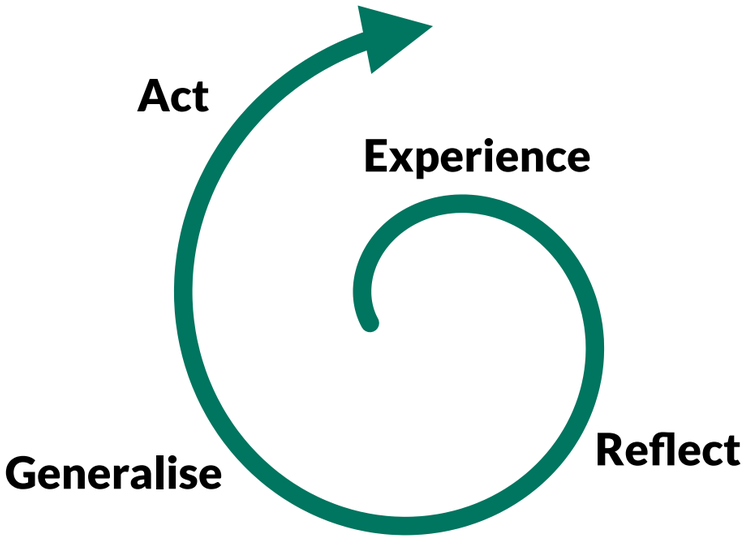
Planning and preparing workshops and other learning spaces can be daunting – a useful tool for starting to think about how to create spaces that are participatory and deeply educational is the experiential learning cycle. This simple tool helps us to ground our movements educational spaces in the lived experience of participants. This is in sharp contrast to the "banking model" of education which – as explained by educationists like Paulo Friere – frames the teacher-student as that between an expert teacher and empty students, who should gratefully and silently receive the expertise and knowledge deposited by the teacher. This is not the model we need! The experiential learning cycle offers us an alternative, broken down into four key steps.

1. The experiential learning cycle always starts with a direct, lived **experience** of the participants. This might be from the student's own life story, or can be derived from a role play, watching a film, a photography or art exercise, or any number of other activities.

2. Following this concrete experience, the facilitator moves the group into **reflecting** on the experience, exploring questions like: what happened? Who did what? What did you observe? What did you notice? Who or what was missing? How did you feel? How do you think others felt? The goal here is to review the experience they've had in as much detail as feels necessary.

3. The third stage is **generalisation**. Here, we begin to think about how the experience the participants have had applies to the wider world. At this point, the facilitator (or others in the group) may choose to introduce conceptual frameworks or theories that are relevant to the discussion and learning goals.

4. Finally, the group is invited to **act** on what they have learned: they may do this immediately in the next stage of the workshop or by re-running a role play, but it may be more appropriate that this step takes place after the formal end of the workshop, in their own time.



The best way to learn to use the experiential learning cycle is by putting it into practice! Here are a few pointers to think about incorporating it into your workshop planning:

- There are lots of ways of applying the experiential learning cycle, over very different lengths of time. It can be used to frame a week-long training course, or a five minute exercise.
- Generally, a facilitator will gently lead the group from one step to the next, without a clear or strict cut-off point between each one.
- Think carefully about what your learning goals for the group are, and use this to consider how you frame each step.
- Use different activities (role plays, discussions, small group work, quizzes, etc) for the different steps, which will help participants to explore experiences and concepts from different angles.
- Consider the comfort/discomfort zones (page 46), which explores how being drawn – in a careful and considered way – into our discomfort zone is often where our best and deepest learning occurs. Facilitators can use the experiential learning cycle and comfort/discomfort zones to design workshops that encourage participants to explore challenges and take risks, and draw out learning from these experiences.

2. START WITH STORIES

How we communicate things is important. We want people to care, to understand, to feel empowered. When it comes to communicating complicated crises like climate change or militarism we are presented with a vast array of different things we want people to know, and this complexity can be very off-putting.

Finding and using accurate data – facts, figures, numbers, research – is crucial, and facts and figures can help us "win" an argument, or present a case in a space determined by evidence.

However, in many cases, this form of communication can be quite alienating, especially if it is someone's first encounter with an issue. Stories, on the other hand, invite people to engage directly with the way an issue is experienced by other people, drawing them into something intimate and personal, encouraging empathy and understanding, which can then lead to a deeper desire to engage with the causes and drivers that have led someone to experience something.

WHAT SORT OF STORIES SHOULD WE TELL? AND NOT TELL?

In Beautiful Trouble, Doyle Canning and Patrick Reinsborough argue:

> *Oppressive realities are rooted not just in oppressive economic and power relations, but in oppressive narratives. Our role as agents of change is to undermine these narratives and replace them with new stories that help build a fairer and freer world.*

Many of us will be able to think of examples of storytelling that does not do what Canning and Reinsborough encourage us to; examples of nameless people depicted as helpless, reliant on the help of others... It's a stereotype the charity sector in the minority world has often reached, and been increasingly criticised, for. We need to make sure the stories we tell maintain the dignity of the subject, revealing and honouring their complexity and humanity.

One example of this is what Moky Maura described as the "Live Aid phenomenon" that led to the $1.2tn "Save Africa industry". She argues that this "industry" is "fed by and entirely reliant on a single, outdated story of Africa that was perpetuated and entrenched by the Live Aid phenomenon", a story which lacks nuance or context and is specifically designed to extract donations.

Instead, we should be reaching for stories that:

- Honour nuance
- Reflect the humanity and complexity of people and communities
- Focus on the agency, strengths, and impact of the subjects of the story
- Highlight imbalances and abuses of power, and the structural causes of conflict and injustice
- A simple test when telling a story is: would you want this story to be told, in this way, about you?

HOW SHOULD WE TELL STORIES?

Telling stories is an art form; it takes practice to deliver nuance in ways that are coherent and accessible to an audience. Stories can of course be told in any number of ways: in poetry, short or long form articles, reports, videos, podcasts, social media posts, photo essays, exhibitions, spoken word... And of course ever more creative approaches. The approach you choose to take will be determined by a whole host of different factors: the time, skills and resources you have access to; the purpose of telling the story; and what you want the audience to learn or experience.

TELLING OTHER PEOPLE'S STORIES

In our struggles for a fairer and more just world, we might find ourselves wanting to use others' stories and experiences in our campaigning. The trick is doing this in a way that is ethical, empowering and true to the person whose story is being told. If not done carefully, reproducing others' stories can mean reinforcing oppressive relationships or colonialist systems. Sometimes this is experienced as a form of extractivism, as a story is taken in a way that feels violent and destructive, with little thought of the person who's story it is.

Here are a few simple questions to guide how we use others' stories:

- Where did the story come from? Do you have the original source? Do you know it was recorded accurately?
- Do you know you have permission to use the story?
- Are you able to quote directly from the person who shared their experience?
- Is your telling of someone else's story reinforcing a stereotype?
- How would you feel if your own story or experience was being used in the way you intend to use someone else's?

SUPPORTING OTHERS TO TELL THEIR OWN STORIES

People often find telling their own stories to be a powerful, emotional, cathartic – even transformative – experience, especially if they are not used to having their voice heard. Equally, hearing stories from someone's own experience can be deeply enriching for an audience. Skilled facilitators and creatives can play an important role in supporting individuals, groups and whole communities to share their experiences in forms that often bring perspectives and nuances that are impossible for a third party to capture.

However, there are risks: people who have direct experience of militarism or the impacts of the climate crisis are likely to have experienced significant trauma, which needs to be handled carefully and tenderly.

Sometimes the details of stories or experiences are disputed, or reframed by the teller for their own reasons – facilitators need to be aware of potential bias or conflicts in how stories might be presented. Storytelling should bridge divides, not reinforce them.

CASE STUDY: HOW TEXTILES HAVE BEEN USED TO TELL STORIES

The following text was produced following an interview with Roberta Bacic, Conflict Textiles' founder and curator. Conflict Textiles is a live collection of 440 documented arpilleras and other textiles, with a digital archive hosted by Ulster University' CAIN (https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/)

A powerful illustration of how stories can be told in empowering and engaging ways are arpilleras. Arpilleras are three-dimensional, hand-sewn appliqué tapestries that "tell a story with each stitch". They originated in Chile as a medium for women, generally working collectively, to denounce the human rights abuses and repression of the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile. They have since been used to capture the first-person, lived experience of individuals and communities around the world, in response to war and conflict, and a wide range of other forms of oppression and social injustice.

Arpilleras originated in Chile – the families who experienced human right violations or whose family members were "disappeared" often had no way to explain what had happened. This was true in at two sense: literally, in the sense that their stories simply weren't told or heard; but also, because families didn't know what had happened to their loved

ones there was rarely a conclusion or “ending”, so their experiences didn’t seem to make sense even to themselves – telling their story in such circumstances is very difficult.

In the 1970s a Chilean facilitator and educator called Valentina Bone recognised the power of people telling a story using materials and fabric that everyone had access to in their everyday lives. The products of these workshops – arpilleras – were smuggled out of Chile and sold via the international solidarity movement, becoming an important way of sharing stories from Chile, but also providing much needed income to families who had often lost their primary bread winner. Arpilleras were eventually proscribed in Chile after a Quaker woman was arrested as she left Chile with arpilleras, and was held in detention for several days.

Working in textile rather than words means the arpillerista moved beyond the immediate facts of their story, and quickly begins to explore the meaning within it: “What does it mean to be a mother looking for a son?” “What does it mean to be a son looking for a father?” “What does it mean to have limited access to water?” In Chile, arpilleras also offered people opportunities to tell stories in times and spaces when they otherwise wouldn’t have been able to – because the political environment was too oppressive of course, but also because of their domestic context (they could sew when children were asleep, for example).

Arpillera’s continue to be used to tell stories around the world. The workshops where they are created are often gentle, low key events, mixing the practical aspects of making an arpillera with the emotional work involved. Facilitators focus on helping participants to “find a safe space” to “contain” and “absorb” what they have experienced. The goal – other than producing something powerful and beautiful – is to move participants from thinking of themselves as a victim that makes demands, to becoming active agents who work with others to find solutions to their problems. Facilitators are not instructors, they simply ask questions – facilitators are themselves an arpillera, interpreting and finding shape.



An arpillera from 1978 depicting Chilean women making arpilleras, and carboard collectors on the street.

Arpillera workshops are also very collaborative – limited materials are provided to encourage participants to communicate and decide who will use what material, to help each other, and to discuss their work. Following workshops, people don’t take their product away, it becomes a communal product – the arpillera is owned collectively.

Finally very few limits are placed on who can make arpilleras and since their inception in Chile they have been produced and displayed all over the world, from shanty towns to national museums.

ORGANISING TOOL: THE RIVER OF LIFE

The river of life is a simple and creative tool to encourage individuals to think about and communicate how their own lives have twisted and turned.

Facilitators can use the river of life in a general way – allowing individuals to choose what they focus on or draw out – or to encourage participants to explore specific aspects of their own journey (in relation to gender, class, race, or other parts of their identity).

As a minimum, each participant will need a large piece of paper and something to draw with. Facilitators might also choose to offer other resources – like paint, collage materials, glitter, charcoal, fabric or glue.

To start the exercise, tell the group something like;

"We're going to do an exercise which will allow each of us to tell our own stories; the things that have influenced us, our big and small decisions, our successes, our rough patches... We're going to use the image of a river, with all its twists and turns, rapids, gentle streams, tributaries, waterfalls, animals, bridges, pollution, (and anything else you can think of!) to reflect on this. We are each going to create a picture using the art materials to do that. I would encourage you to use the different features of a river to illustrate your life, both positive and negative experiences."

Some people will find this easier than others, for some it will be a daunting thing to be asked to do. It may be helpful to have a simple version of your own river of life prepared, and talk through the choices you made and why. Remind people that they shouldn’t disclose anything they don’t want to, but that participants will be expected to treat anything shared in the room with discretion and care.

Give some time – at least 15 minutes, but some groups will need longer – for participants to create their image. Invite a quiet, reflective atmosphere so people can think and express themselves. Encourage people to find their own space in the room. Some might get distracted by the quality of the art, rather than the quality of reflection. If this happens, gently encourage them to 'fill the paper', and remind them that no one outside the room will see their work.

Encourage people to think about their home or family life, their experience at school or work, their hobbies and friendships, religion or spirituality. When have there been challenges, or big changes? How have other people influenced their life? Have there been any radical shifts, or subtle changes?

After the allotted time (or when the group seems to be drawing to a close), invite those who want to share their illustration to do so, explaining to the group what they have drawn and why. Give plenty of time and space for this, and make it clear that this is the individual's time for sharing, not for questions or comments from the group. If the group is

KEY RESOURCES

- **Indigenous Storywork website and book:** https://indigenousstorywork.com/resources/, https://www.ubcpress.ca/indigenous-storywork
- **Threads of conflict** - a short documentary about Conflict Textiles and arpilleras, is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tT5SQsr2VKo

very large, then there may be more benefit in smaller groups sharing with each other, rather than as a large group, and then sharing back to the whole group something they have learned from the experience. If people feel comfortable, hang all of the images on a washing line, or stick them on the walls of the training room, to allow everyone to see everyone else's work.

3. BUILD AN ANALYSIS THAT'S RELEVANT TO YOU

The climate crisis and militarism are both more than "issues" or "problems", they are like the air in the room – even if we don't always acknowledge it's there, they frame the thinking and decision-making of people all over the world. The relationship between militarism and the climate covers everything from the arms trade to melting sea ice, fossil fuels to migration, women's rights to "artificial intelligence". To many people, this will be completely overwhelming – it's OK to feel like that! Edgar Morin and Anne Brigitte Kern coined the word "polycrisis" to describe this complexity, to reflect the way our planet faces a number of different social, economic, political, and environmental crises.

These crises aren't distinct or separate – they can cause, ricochet, and amplify each other in ways that are difficult to predict, causing cascades of global impact that can have very localised impacts. While some of our societies' structures may have some capacity to remedy the immediate impacts (though of course huge inequalities exist in our ability to withstand shocks), our wider economic and political systems appear increasingly incapable of adapting to be able to respond to the wider systemic problems.

Overwhelming! So we need to build frameworks that help us to articulate the complexity and uncertainty that our world seems to be experiencing, in ways that are clear, consistent and empowering. Our invitation here is to appreciate that these issues are systemic, complex, interwoven, that we can't fully understand or take action on any of these problems in complete isolation from each other, but also ground your own work and campaigning in a narrative and analysis that makes sense to you. We can then begin to welcome the knowledge, experience and priorities of other organisations and movements – not in competition to our own, but as complimentary and reinforcing.

WHAT DOES "BUILDING AN ANALYSIS" MEAN?

"Building an analysis" might sound dry and technical; the goal is to craft a story that gives context and meaning to the world you are taking action in, drawing out what feels relevant to explain why the world is as it is. An analysis describes what is important to you and what you value. A strong analysis places a specific injustice or act of violence in a wider context, enabling a deeper understanding of – and strategic action against – the root causes. Another way to think about building an analysis is as a process of trying on different coloured glasses. What does the world look like when we look at it through a feminist lens? Or by zooming out a 100 years? Or from the perspective of a child?

Some people will draw on specific political or economic frameworks – like Marxism, feminism or decolonial thought – to determine their analysis of the world. Others might focus on branches of science, collect data themselves (such as a survey of their local community), or focus on deepening their understanding of their own or others' lived experience.

An analysis is often trying to determine cause and effect, because injustices and acts of violence can't occur in a vacuum. What did an oppressor need – physically, politically, psychologically, or otherwise – to take the action they did? Where did those tools come from? Visually drawing timelines, mapping out how materials travelled from one place to another, or understanding the stories and motivations of those perpetrating acts of violence are all ways of gaining insight into a context. Different tools will feel more relevant to you than others, as will bringing together different understandings. A rich analysis will often draw on a mix of different tools and frameworks.

CASE STUDY: THE GLOBAL ENERGY EMBARGO FOR PALESTINE



The Global Energy Embargo for Palestine (GEEP) formed in 2024, on the back of calls for more scrutiny – and action – to end energy oppression and to disrupt the energy supply chain to Israel's regime of settler colonialism, illegal occupation, apartheid and genocide. The campaign specifically targets the fossil fuels used to power tanks or fighter jets that are fuelling the genocide, or the coal that powers the settlements and the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands. It does so by pushing for an embargo on fossil fuel trade with Israel, alongside a wider demand for more control over the export of fossil fuels to be used to power the military machinery and human rights violations worldwide. While the export of the weapons systems themselves is subject to a degree of scrutiny (through the use of end-use certificates and licensing regimes, though these are hugely flawed), the fuel used to power them is traded openly, and makes no distinction between fuel used for civilian and military use.

GEEP is an excellent illustration of "building an analysis that's relevant to you". They have identified a structural issue (militaries' ready access to fossil fuels) that is fundamental to the violence they are trying to end (the decades-long colonisation, apartheid and genocide against the Palestinian people). They have mapped out the logistics systems that physically transport fuel, and identified key allies on that route that have power and influence at different points, or who have a strong reason for being involved in the campaign. They have also identified the key national and international decision-making bodies that could help – or hinder – them achieve their goals, and strategies for intervening in these spaces.

GEEP's analysis is specific and focused, without ever over-simplifying, drawing on themes and frameworks from the Palestine solidarity movement, climate justice movement, and the peace movement, and also incorporates key aspects of labour and union organising methodologies. Bringing together these different frameworks allows GEEP to connect and align themselves with each of these spaces, while offering back a nuanced and specific framing to those same movements. This analysis then informs the specific parts of GEEP's wider strategy, including their approach to networking, mobilisation, and communication work which can draw heavily on their analysis.

Despite being a relatively new campaign, GEEP has been able to establish strong connections and relationships around the world, and has started to see impacts in policy making. Their specific, focused analysis plays a key role in this: they are able to communicate clearly, confidently and consistently because their strategy is rooted in an analysis of how the Israeli state's oppression of Palestinians is fundamentally reliant on the fossil fuel economy that is clear, confident and consistent.



TOOL: DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS



The Doughnut Economics model was developed by an economist called Kate Raworth, who wanted to develop an alternative to the "endless growth" framework measured by GDP, which she believed was failing to address - or actively contributing - to many of thee problems communities around the world are facing.

Her model asks us to think about the ways our economy does and doesn't meet humanity's needs (for food, education, housing, health political voice, and a range of other measures), and whether or not it is managing to stay within its ecological limits (such as biodiversity, ocean acidification, and climate change). The space between these two limits is the "safe and just space for humanity".

The doughnut model can be used in a variety of ways to create spaces for people to engage with a variety of complex problems in a way that feels manageable. It can be used to identify the myriad of ways that our economies are pushing the planet beyond its ecological limits while failing to meet people's needs. Because the model incorporates lots of different sectors of society - housing, food, health, education... - it invites interdisciplinary thinking and action, but is also accessible enough for people who have never been encouraged to discuss or share their views of how the world could and should be different to engage with a systemic analysis.

TOOL: THE PROBLEM TREE/THE HEALTHY TREE

This exercise can be done in any length of time from one hour to a whole day or even more depending on the needs of the group and time availability. If offer participants an opportunity to name, describe and analyse problems in their community or larger society, and to create a vision of a healthy society.

First, explain that this will be a two-part exercise. The first tree will represent the problems the community face, and the second tree represents the alternatives. We can use all of the different elements of a tree to illustrate the relationships between the root causes (the soil the tree is growing in) all the way up to the branches, which are the structures that produce the fruit (the most visible outcomes of the "soil" the tree is "rooted" in).

Depending on whether the group is beginning to analyse the problems in society, or has chosen a specific problem to focus on. If there is time, the tree can first represent many dimensions of society, and then groups can draw another tree that represents one dimension.

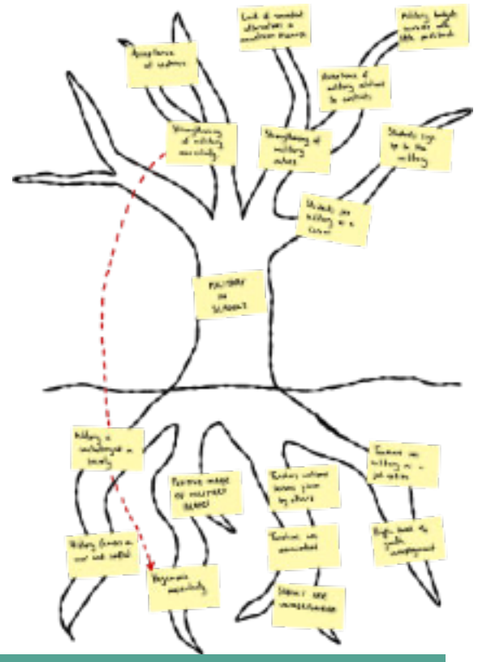
To run the exercise:

- Draw a large tree with roots, a trunk, and branches which will bear fruit, and identify the problem(s) that the group wants to focus on - they might want to be very general and discuss their society as a whole, or already have a specific issue they want to prioritise.
- Identify the roots, the root causes of the problem - the long term, slow-to-change issues that the tree is

rooted in. These might be economic systems, societal values, or cultural norms. What gives rise to these problems?

- Then, identify the fruits, the consequences or effects of the structure they grow from - these are probably the more visible, "headline grabbing" outcomes of deeper, structural societal issues. Remember - you are drawing a picture of the problem, so identify as many aspects of it as you can. The group may be quite creative in how they use the image of a tree to analyse the issue. Ask the participants to describe and analyse what they see. Ask prompting questions to help them develop a full picture of the connections. Note the points raised.

After the group has added as much detail as they feel able to the problem tree, draw another tree with roots, a trunk and branches. Invite the group to use their analysis of the problems to identify solutions. What would intervening in the root causes look like (how does the soil need to change?) In what ways would the "fruit" have changed?



An example of a "problem tree" focused on military access to young people in schools.

KEY RESOURCES

- Kate Raworth Introduction to Doughnut Economics, available at: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=talXb1wiEFY**
- New Economy Organisers Network resources for organisations includes a comprehensive guide on building an organisational strategy. Available at: **https://neweconomyorganisers.org/hubs/operations**

4. WE DON'T HAVE TO GO "HEAD ON"

When we realise what a state the world is in, we can be very tempted to throw ourselves into projects and campaigns that try to communicate a strong sense of urgency and determination. One way of describing this approach is as "going head on", trying to confront a huge challenge in as direct a way as possible, demanding immediate change and transformation to deeply rooted problems.

This response is very understandable, but it can actually have an impact contrary to your goal; if others don't share the same sense of urgency, have other priorities, or have needs that need to be met, then we can push people away from our movements, not draw them towards us. Rather than appearing welcoming or invitational, campaigns can appear patronising, or disdainful of the efforts and priorities of others.

Don't misunderstand this as a demand for caution, or avoidance of hard work – our appeal is to work in a way that sees people and organisations envelope themselves in their community and context, that sets out for deep transformation of our world in a way that draws people closer to our movements.

Maintaining an "emergency" framing also takes a huge amount of energy. An initial burst of enthusiasm can feel exhilarating, but if a strategy can't be sustained in the medium- or long-term, then organisers will face burnout and fatigue. This can leave a campaign floundering and breed resentment.

Sometimes, individuals or small groups end up acting as a self-appointed "vanguard" for our movements, behaving and communicating with a self-importance that undermines communication and trust. These "lone wolves" can bring a prescient voice, cutting through hegemonic narratives and challenging more powerful organisations – but they can also distract resources and energy, cause conflict and disrupt in ways that are not helpful.

Such cases tend to exhibit an analysis painted with a very broad brush, making links between different issues, but the actual work they embark on is very shallow – either because their energy quickly burns out, or because they haven't rooted their activism or solidarity work deeply into their own context, with relationships rooted in the specific needs and demands of their community.

Sometimes, by trying to change everything, we end up changing nothing.

WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE?

Some of the most inspiring examples of social change work, activism and solidarity come from relatively small organisations working in deep collaboration and sympathy with their wider community – a lot of the case studies in this toolkit fit this description!

- Work in solidarity with others: If in doubt, start at solidarity. Place yourself at the point where you are working alongside those most impacted by violent and oppressive systems.
- Broad analysis, deep and specific work: A broad analysis that draws together lots of different topics and issues is a wonderful thing, drawing together a wide array of events, issues, and contexts. But our work – what we actually do – can still be very specific: solidarity with local migrant populations, campaigning against the expansion of a local military base or fossil fuel extraction plant, pushing our governments to disclose military emissions, shutting down an arms fair taking place on our doorstep.
- Understand your position and relationship to others in a movement: movements are networks of people and organisations working together towards a common goal. They will inevitably have conflicts and contradictions within them, but they are also where we find our allies. Don't interpret "understanding your position" as "knowing your place" in a hierarchical sense – while some groups have more power and influence than others, movements are dynamic, ever-changing, and permeable. Sometimes individuals and small organisations can lead a dramatic and necessary shift (like Greta Thunberg did).

- Understand and appreciate the work of others: Part of knowing how you relate to others in a movement is understanding the work of others, what it contributes, and the effort and resources involved in making it happen. Who else is active in the same space (geographically or politically) as you? What are they doing? What are the gaps?
- Manage resources (including your own energy) in a sustainable way: Our time, energy, money, and other resources are precious, and we owe it to ourselves and others to use them wisely. It's understandable to want to change everything, all at once, but it's easy to squander the little we have in trying to do so.
- Have a clear and consistent analysis (see section 3, page 17.)
- Identify clear gaps: What is being missed by your movement? What is the "added extra" you can contribute? What questions need to be asked? What contexts or issues are not being prioritised? Who is best to be working on this? What resources would it need to succeed? Do I have the energy and capacity? Once you have the answer to questions to some of these questions, you might have found an opportunity to bring something distinct and new to your movement, that builds on and supports the work of others.
- "Work at the pace of trust": Working in a relational way, focusing on allyship and solidarity, can be frustrating – but also deeply rewarding. The phrase "work at the pace of trust" reminds us that if we value building relationships between individuals and organisations, then the strength of those relationships can be a determining factor in the pace we work and the risks we are willing to take. Once we have surrounded ourselves with individuals and organisations who we trust – and who trust us – then we may feel ready to act in ways that are more assertive, knowing we have the backing and solidarity of others in our movements.

CASE STUDY: LESVOS SOLIDARITY

Lesvos Solidarity is a migrant solidarity organisation based on the Greek island of Lesvos. Lesvos Solidarity charts its history back to 2012, when Greece was in the midst of a long financial crisis. On the island of Lesvos, a coalition of local groups, non-governmental organisations and independent volunteers decided to create "The Village of All Together", a collective which coordinated solidarity for refugees arriving in Lesvos from across the Mediterranean Sea. This led to the establishment of the Pikpa Camp in 2014, which became the first self-organised "reception camp" for refugees in Greece. At its peak, the camp was serving 3,000 meals a day. Lesvos Solidarity established a programme for upcycling life jackets and other materials. They opened the "Mosaic Support Centre" in 2016, working with Borderline Europe to create a space that offered informal education and workshops.

Lesvos Solidarity is an excellent example of how activists can do specific and highly contextualised work in a way that meets a significant need that no other group – or state institution – was meeting, in a way that reflects the values of both the organising group and the humanity of those they are working with.

The Pikpa Camp was forced to close in 2020, following sustained protests from local people and with authorities pushing to close self-organised camps in favour of government run facilities. Armed police surrounded the site and went from house-to-house to evict residents, including families and children. Despite the closure of the Pikpa camp, Lesvos Solidarity continues to organise solidarity, for example by renting and renovating abandoned apartments to accommodate vulnerable refugees.

Migrants and refugees often sit at the apex of the climate crisis and militarism, experiencing violence and indignity as they are forced to flee their homes. In the case of Lesvos, the vast majority of people were escaping war in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. As a response, Europe decided to increasingly militarise its external borders, with agencies like Frontex granted huge resources. Organisations like Lesvos Solidarity represent a grassroots alternative rooted in respect, dignity and solidarity for everyone, regardless of where they come from; every meal an intervention, every safe home an act of resistance to often violent and racist systems which criminalise both migration and solidarity.



Photos from Lesvos, taken in 2015 by Marienna Pope-Weidemann. CC2.0

5. DECOLONISE (AND DEMILITARISE) OUR SPACES

Many of us live in societies where militarism is valued and militarised attitudes are the norm, and where colonialism and colonialist attitudes persist. We will – perhaps subconsciously – carry attitudes or perspectives that align with or echo the violent structures that we seek to challenge. This means that even if we deeply value and respect the lives and wellbeing of others, and are committed to building a more peaceful and just world, we can still find ourselves thinking or acting in ways that undermine those values.

For example: it's very common for people who grew up or are immersed in racist cultures to harbour racist attitudes, or for people who grew up surrounded by misogyny to hold negative views of women. As well as our childhood experiences and the attitudes of our parents, our world view can be shaped by our friends and peers, teachers and other adults, our culture and religion, what we are exposed to online, and a whole host of other factors.

Even when we have had opportunities to reflect on and challenge these prejudices, it's not unusual for some residual elements to persist – especially if we are used to the world reflecting our own identity or values. This doesn't mean that someone is "secretly racist", or "deep down, hates women". It means that, in and among all of the values and insights that inform how we choose to act or the opinions we form, sometimes we might still draw on that part of our world view.

Put simply, it's very common for progressive, well intentioned, radical people to still sometimes think and behave in ways that do not reflect the values they want to uphold.

The impact when individuals behave in this way can of course be extremely upsetting, but the problem goes beyond one-to-one or small group interactions. There is a growing need for systemic, movement-wide decolonisation and demilitarisation of our spaces.

WHAT IS COLONISATION?

We often speak of one country (often but not exclusively from Europe or North America) colonising another – "Britain colonised India", or "Spain and Portugal colonised Latin America", but this phrasing doesn't really reflect the complexity of the relationship between states, let alone between the peoples who experience being colonised – or the coloniser. Because at its core, colonialism is rooted in the devaluing and dehumanisation of some people over others, a prioritisation of the wellbeing of one group over another, and a subjugation of those less powerful.

Colonialists often build a complex set of "justifications" for themselves that are deeply racist, including an idea of colonialism as a moral good or a duty. Rudyard Kipling wrote his famous poem "The White Man's Burden" to push the American government to colonise the Philippines. These justifications often rely on deeply racist and false hierarchies and social constructs such as there being "natural orders" of different peoples.

Colonialism is also deeply extractive – colonialists are often driven by the opportunity to access resources and extract wealth from other peoples' lands. Colonisation has seen huge amounts of wealth being taken from colonised countries in the form of metals and minerals, agricultural goods, cultural artefacts and knowledge, and other forms. A coloniser assesses a territory simply in terms of what it can grant them, reducing everything – the people, plants, animals, rocks, water, minerals – to a value determined by the coloniser. In order to be able to colonise, the coloniser has to think in extractive terms.

Some people argue that colonialism is only a historical phenomenon that has little relationship to the modern day. Many countries in the global south were only made independent in the mid-20th century – that is still in living memory! We can still identify the legacy of colonialism in international relations, domestic politics, cultural narratives, archives and libraries, education institutions, media and news, landscapes and natural surroundings – and, therefore our own minds, bodies and institutions. Such a framing also discounts the myriad forms of modern colonialism: like the USA behaving as the "world's policeman", the ongoing exploitation of natural resources in Africa, the debt dependency of the global south on the global north, Israeli settler-colonial rule in Palestine, and Russia's attempt to militarily occupy Ukraine.

WHAT DOES "DECOLONISING" MEAN IN PRACTICE?

- Acknowledge the problem: There can be a tendency to hide away from these issues, because they make some people feel uncomfortable. Some people have learned to avoid difficult conversations, but we can unlearn that by practising a new way of communicating.
- Be ready to listen: Listening – carefully, without judgement and working hard to fully appreciate what someone is saying – is critical to an anti-colonial approach, because intrinsic to colonial attitudes is that some people's experience and opinion is more valuable than others. Any other work needs to be anchored around patient, active listening to others.
- Be ready to learn: By listening well, we learn about other people's experiences, and deepening our understanding of events and histories around the world is also crucial to this. Countries with a history of colonising other people often obscure their histories, minimising acts of violence and moralising their behaviours – but we can take responsibility to learn about the impact of colonialism around the world. Committing to decolonise means committing to understanding the depth and breadth of colonialism – historically, culturally and psychologically.
- Be ready to change: Anyone who has any sort of relationship with colonialism (which is most of us) will have, to some degree, accepted some of its norms and assumptions. Interrogating these and being ready to change is crucial – colonialism in its most concrete sense continues around the world, but it also persists in our societies, and so in us.
- Use language carefully: Even if we have limited resources, we can all resist colonialism through our language use. What we say and write is important – but so is when we choose to speak, how much we say, and the silences we leave. By using language in a way that recognises the humanity and experience of others, and avoiding language that reinforces stereotypes or assumptions about people, we are communicating a readiness to build relationships that, to the best of our ability, aren't rooted in prejudice and subjugation.
- Redistribute resources: Campaigners around the world continue to call for reparations, that reflect the legacy and ongoing impact of colonialism. While governments around the world should take responsibility for reparations, our movements can also make choices that indicate an understanding and awareness of colonialism's impact. Examples of this might be in thinking how funding is distributed, who is given a platform at events and conferences, and whether your organisation has access to materials or equipment that others would make better use of.
- Embrace and welcome difference...: We are not all the same – the richness and diversity of different upbringings, experiences and cultures is part of what makes us human. Sometimes people avoid welcoming and celebrating this out of fear of making others feel ostracised or singled out, especially if – in some way – they are minoritised. But most of the time people are aware of the ways they are different to others, appreciate respectful acknowledgement of the value that their unique experience and knowledge is being given, and welcome the opportunity to bring a fresh perspective or challenge assumptions.
- ... Embrace and welcome common experiences and understandings: We are, also, all human, and there are many things we have in common with every other person on this planet. Identifying what these are – things like common values, interests, or life experiences – help to remind us of this, and can be the foundations for building trust.

TOOL: ACTIVE LISTENING

Listening well is a skill that we can practice and become better at . We will all have had an experience of feeling like someone has "heard" what we are saying in the sense that they are aware we have uttered sounds, but clearly haven't taken in what we have actually said. Maybe they were distracted by something, or thinking ahead to how they were going to respond. Maybe how they responded made it clear that they hadn't really listened, or even intentionally misinterpreted what we had said.

Equally, hopefully you have also had an experience of being really, truly heard by someone who has listened respectfully, doing their best to understand what you are trying to communicate. The term was coined by a psychologist called Carl Rogers, but has also been used by facilitators and organisers to strengthen communication and improve relationships. We can bring the principles of active listening to any conversation, but we have included it as a tool in this section on decolonisation because these particular topics rely on attentive, concentrated listening.

The following suggestions to support your own and others' listening are based on the advice from Seeds for Change, a UK-based organisation offering training, facilitation support and online resources to campaign organisations, community groups and co-operatives.

PREPARATION

Creating an environment that is conducive to good listening is half the battle, and as organisers there is a lot we can do in our spaces to change the environment we communicate in. For example:

- **Setup the room:** changing the lighting, heating and seating arrangements can have a big impact on the way people communicate and how well they listen to others. Make sure everyone has a clear line of sight to each other, and that the room isn't too warm or cold.
- **Avoid distracting devices**: Encourage the group to put away phones and laptops, unless they are being specifically used to support the interaction, meeting or event.
- **Prepare yourself:** Make sure you are prepared to listen well by taking some time to focus, put aside distractions, and prioritise the people in the room in front of you. Active listening takes a lot of energy - if you're not feeling in the right space to listen carefully and attentively, its often better to be honest with yourself and others about that, and to rearrange.

KEY RESOURCES

- The Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon (1961)
- Colonialism, climate change and climate reparations, by Dorothy Guerrero: https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/blog/2023/08/colonialism-climate-change-and-climate-reparations/
- Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism, Vanessa Machado de Oliveira
- Let This Radicalize You: Organizing and the Revolution of Reciprocal Care, Kelly Hayes, Mariame Kaba
- Amnesty International’s guide to reparations: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2025/10/why-do-reparations-for-colonialism-and-slavery-matter/
- Colonialism, climate change and climate reparations, by Dorothy Guerrero: https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/blog/2023/08/colonialism-climate-change-and-climate-reparations/

FOCUSING IN

- Focus on the person speaking by giving them all of your attention. Recognise when your mind drifts and bring it back to the person speaking. It is OK to ask someone to repeat themselves or clarify something they have said.
- Notice the assumptions you make: All communication is about interpreting what others are saying, making sense of others' experience in relation to our own. There may be occasions we make assumptions about someone or what they are saying, and it is important to be aware of these and do our best to put these aside, if we are going to understand what the other person means.
- Communicate that you are listening: Make sure the other person knows you are listening with body language and posture, your facial expressions, and "minimal responses" (like "yeah", "mmm", "uh huh"). Don't force anything or exaggerate and be yourself, but these are all "cues" to the person speaking that what they are saying is welcome and valid.

SUMMARIES AND QUESTIONS

Active listening doesn't mean sitting in silence - using techniques like summarising what the speaker has said, and asking open questions are great ways to invite a speaker to expand and deepen what they are saying:

- Occasionally, repeat back to the person speaking what you have understood, using short summaries of the key points. This helps to make sure that you have understood correctly, communicates to the person speaking that you have heard accurately, and gives the wider group an opportunity to hear the key points again.
- When summarising, be as accurate as possible, and try to avoid significantly changing the focus or intensity of what someone has said. For example, if someone says they are "furious" and you summarise this as "annoyed", that may come across as misunderstanding how they felt, or as an attempt to reduce it.
- Open questions - that don't lead the speaker, or make too many assumptions about them - are a great way of encouraging someone to open up. While closed questions expect a yes/no answer, open questions are more invitational, giving the speaker space to expand or explore new ideas.



Activists march in London at the 2024 March for Global Climate Justice. Photo: Crispin Hughes

6. HELP TO WEAVE A NEW NARRATIVE

THE CHALLENGE

The “mainstream story” of climate change rarely takes account of the direct carbon impact of militaries, or the historical relationship between colonialism, resource extraction, and climate change. The reasons for this are complicated, but not surprising; it is relatively rare for communities, or whole societies, to engage with systemic problems, especially when it means thinking about and challenging their own privilege and status. At the same time, obscuring and deflecting away from these issues serves the interests of powerful states, their institutions, and private companies. For example, attention has often been diverted towards individual behaviour change (which doesn’t mean individuals shouldn’t change their behaviour) rather than systemic or structural transformation, meanwhile corporations and state actors (such as militaries) have “greenwashed” their image.

But our economies are addicted to fossil fuels and extractivism, which are predicated on militarism, and militarism itself relies on fossil fuels and extractivism - a self-reinforcing relationship. Ensuring that military institutions and the arms trade bear sufficient responsibility for their role in the climate crisis, and that the historical role and legacy of colonialism is understood by policymakers and the wider public, is a key priority for peace and climate movements.

In turn, building a new narrative is key to being able to do this. While demanding concrete action on things like military emissions and protecting the rights of those forced to migrate to safer places, we also need to work together to shape a story of how we got here in the first place. Essential parts of this new narrative will need to include:

- Militaries are not benign, neutral actors
- Opposing militaries’ self-framing as key to responding to the climate crisis
- Resources spent on militarising the climate crisis are wasted resources
- Placing the climate crisis into a historical legacy of colonialism and historical emission patterns

WHAT ARE WE PUSHING AGAINST?

Everyone has a stake in the climate crisis, and lots of powerful groups – including militaries and defence departments, arms companies, the fossil fuel industry, and countless others – already have well-developed, well-tested messaging and narratives that supports their own interests. For example:

- Militaries positioning themselves as essential to responding to the climate crisis, embedding militarised narratives in climate response
- Fossil fuel companies obscuring the huge impact of extractivism on local communities and indigenous peoples, or their reliance on state and private security forces in accessing resources
- Greenwashing and tech-fixes
- Far-right, xenophobic and racist groups demonising refugees, including people fleeing both war and climate change

Everyone can be part of weaving this new narrative, even if our campaigning and activism doesn’t specifically focus on climate-militarism. In fact, a wide range of actors working together, ensuring stories and ideas are working their way into the cultural zeitgeist, could be as effective as a few “big players” following a communications strategy – and sharing stories and communications helps to build a “movement of movements”. Here are some examples of how we can all help to build this narrative:

- Incorporate language about the environmental impacts of militarism (and vice versa) in press releases or campaign communications: For example, migrant justice campaigners can highlight the impacts of militarised borders on people seeking safety.
- Develop clear, consistent, digestible language that people can easily relate to: using terminology in a consistent and accessible way is important
- Combine the stories of lived experiences with data and analysis to help build a stronger emphatic relationship between the people you are communicating with, and those most directly impacted (but be careful - see section 2, “start with stories”)
- Use simple, clear analogies and metaphors that help to communicate the systemic, structural issues we are trying to raise awareness and understanding of. For example, the image of the “armed lifeboat” paints a very clear image of the systemic…

CASE STUDY: DESCARBONIZAR ES DESMILITARIZAR

Centre Delàs – an independent research centre focused on disarmament and peace issues based in Spain – has investigated the links between the environmental crisis and militarism for over seven years. As a result, the NGO has published over a dozen papers connecting issues such as extractivism, emissions, global warming, environmental damage and North-South inequality, with war, militarization, military spending and corporate power. The papers show how all stages of the military economic cycle are related to specific damage to the environment: from the consumption of energy and resources necessary for military activity; testing and production of weapons as well as their transport; to the use of weapons during armed conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction.

Centre Delas’ research and analysis work has led to activism and campaigning on these issues, including alliance-building with other organisations such as Extinction Rebellion Barcelona, Ecologists in Action and Greenpeace Spain, with a particular focus on raising awareness around the role of the military within the climate crisis.

In 2024, the Centre launched the "Descarbonizar es Desmilitarizar" (Decarbonize to Demilitarise) advocacy campaign, which aims to reframe the narrative around military emissions. By explicitly linking pacifist, environmental, feminist, and global justice movements, the campaign challenges the invisibility of military carbon footprints in climate discourse and policy making, foregrounding military emissions as a new, critical dimension of climate action.

THE PROBLEM: MILITARY EMISSIONS BEYOND ACCOUNTABILITY

The campaign is built on a stark data point: the global military sector's carbon footprint could represent between 3,3% and 7,0% of worldwide emissions. This is a huge contribution. Despite the severity of this figure, however, military activities remain exempt from mandatory greenhouse gas reporting to the United Nations. The ‘Decarbonize to Demilitarize’ campaign highlights that the majority of military emissions stem not from operations alone, but from weapons manufacturing and supply chain activities. This structural accountability gap allows military forces and their supply chains to operate outside international climate frameworks, making their environmental impact effectively invisible to policymakers and the public. This “invisibility” means military climate emissions are largely undebated and unchallenged, despite being a significant contributor of both emissions and the wider systemic economic and political problems that make climate change such an intractable problem.

SPECIFIC DEMANDS AND STRATEGIC APPROACH

To remedy this, the campaign draws connections between western resource appropriation, militarisation of border controls, and climate destruction, in order to reframe military spending (and the inevitable carbon emissions) as a mechanism to protect elite economic interests rather than providing genuine security. In doing so, the campaign is moving emissions associated with the military into a more visible political space where they can be more widely

understood and debated, as well as more openly contested. Centre Delas is working with partners in the environmental and climate movements to ensure that this narrative change is taking place within grassroots activist spaces as well as at more governmental and institutional levels.

Rather than making abstract calls for demilitarisation, the campaign presents five concrete demands to the Spanish government:

- transparency through emissions reporting from the Spanish Armed Forces;
- mandatory segregated emissions declarations from the defence and security industry;
- inclusion of military emissions in Spain's international climate reports;
- support for binding international agreements (at upcoming COPs) on military emissions;
- and a reallocation of security resources toward social and environmental justice.

This strategy combines symbolic messaging with achievable policy targets, allowing the campaign to mobilise support from civil society organisations (around 50 have already endorsed the manifesto) while applying pressure on the public sphere and through institutional channels. The campaign's structure – using a petition system and organisational endorsements – creates a scalable model for expanding this movement beyond Spain to other nations with significant military-industrial complexes.

TOOL: THE ARMED LIFEBOAT ANALOGY

One of the many enduring legacies of colonialism is to separate the world into "civilised" minorities, that need protecting from the "uncivilised" majority – by militarising borders, securitising extractivist projects, and insulating privileged people from the impacts of the climate crisis (often at the expense of those least responsible for it). This framing has been described as "the armed lifeboat". Rather than taking the opportunity to radically overhaul global economic systems, "the armed lifeboat" carries a wealthy minority who have their weapons trained on a global majority in a bid to keep their assets safe and lifestyle secure. In the same way a lifeboat precariously bobs, isolated, on a hostile and precarious ocean is how many people in the global minority are taught to think about both climate migrants, but also about the wider potential impact of setting out on a path towards climate and economic justice. The analogy perhaps also captures a faux-helplessness, even managing to frame those "in the lifeboat" as victims.

Using this analogy, we can ask:

- Who is inside the lifeboat? Who is outside?
- Who arms the lifeboat – who profits from this?
- Who benefits by encouraging people to think of the world in this way? How do they maintain this narrative?
- In what ways does the "armed lifeboat" inhibit our goals for climate justice?

TOOL: VALUES, VILLAINS, VISIONS

Sometimes our movements can communicate in ways that are quite alienating, expecting people to be motivated by technical information, or specific facts. While learning about contexts and understanding the issues is important, it is also crucial that our audiences have emotional responses that are empowering. A useful tool for helping to communicate the issues and articulate a strategy is to think in terms of values, villains and visions.

- Our values describe that which is fundamentally important to us. Articulating our own values in a way that resonates with our audiences is a way of building a strong connection, even if we have a different "position" on an issue.
- Defining our villains means attributing responsibility for the damage, violence or injustice we are taking action against. Doing so means that an issue is connected directly with the actions of an individual, organisation or company.
- We need to help people believe that a different world is possible, and that means clearly communicating a vision of how it can change. A vision should find a balance between ambitious and exciting enough to feel like something to aspire to, and realistic enough that isn't seen as so "out there" that our audiences find it ridiculous.

Framing our communications around our values, villains and visions allows us to quickly share a broad and complex (but not complicated) view of the world, with lots of opportunities for people to connect and engage. The structure also gives context – a version of the world as you see it – before you move onto explaining your particular positions or approaches to particular issues.

KEY RESOURCES

- Activist Handbook – communicate your message: https://activisthandbook.org/communication
- The NEON Guide to Progressive Media Work, by Matthew Butcher, Polly Edwards: **https://commonslibrary.org/the-neon-guide-to-progressive-media-work/**



Protesters at the 2014 People's Climate March in New York City. Photo credit: Stephen Melkisethian, CC 2.0

7. BUILD NEW RELATIONSHIPS

The relationship between militarism and the climate crisis is a tangled web, incorporating a wide-range of different issues: the mining industry, migration, pollution, feminism and gender, democracy and decision-making, nuclear energy and weapons, digitalisation, the arms trade, animal rights... That might feel overwhelming, but it also means there are lots of opportunities to build solidarity and relationships, because each of these "issues" has a web of social justice organisations and activism associated with it.

FOCUS ON TRUST

Trust underpins all of our relationships – not just in movement building, but in every aspect of life. We take it for granted until it isn't present.

While it is of course important to determine whether or not you trust another, it is less common for people to consider what it is that engenders others' trust in them – but by focusing on this, we are focusing on the aspects of a relationship that we have control over. In turn, this sets us up in the best way possible to build sustained coalitions over time.

Some simple ways of engendering trust include:

- **Following through on commitments:** If you say you're going to do something, then do it – because you might not get asked next time! If you aren't able to follow through on a commitment then communicate clearly about it, because it's often the quality of the communication that impacts a relationship.
- **Value the relationship, and be seen to:** There are lots of simple things we can do that communicates to others that we value them: arriving on time to others' events or meetings, welcome people warmly to your own, checking-in periodically, trusting them with information or resources...
- **Communicate clearly and honestly:** how we communicate with someone is a reflection of our relationship with them. If we do what we can to make communication easy, then we often draw people closer to us.
- **Share your motivations (and invite others to share theirs):** communicating why we are making the decisions we are – the intent - often helps others to understand the actions we've taken.
- **See relationship-building as a goal in itself:** Other people aren't commodities, or resources to be used for our own ends; our relationships with others are ends in themselves. By treating them as such, we communicate to others that we value them, not just what we can get out of them.

FINDING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

You are likely to find that many people involved in these organisations already share some of your analysis or understanding, but there may be concerns about spreading energy too thinly, managing expectations, or setting out on projects or campaigns that distract from other work. That's ok – it's very common for activists and organisers to spread themselves too thinly! – but there are ways to strengthen relationships and draw people and organisations closer together while avoiding overwhelm. For example:

- **Go at a pace that works for you:** working together well often takes time – when we see the impact of successful collaborations, we rarely see the amount of work that went into building
- **Identify common concerns and issues:** a shared or common goal or problem can help move your relationship into concrete action and collaboration.
- **Be confident in your own goals and priorities...:** if you know what you want to achieve in a project or campaign, you will be able to communicate this clearly and openly. This helps others to understand the choices you're making, and what your priorities are, and enables others to do the same.
- **... But be flexible in how you achieve them:** Flexibility when working with others is important, and you may have to make compromises in the way you meet your goals.
- **Be intentional:** Movement building doesn't happen by accident – you have to make active choices to send the message, go to the meeting, invite a contribution, ask an opinion, meet for that coffee...
- **Share resources:** What do you have access to that others' don't? Trusting others with the resources we have builds trust and openness.
- **Stay up to date (and keep updating others):** Sign up for – and read – others' newsletters and blogs, stay up to date on analysis and issues, check-in when a crisis you know will impact those you know happens – take the initiative, don't wait for others to force their news or priorities on you. Equally, don't be a stranger with your own news or work – make sure people have easy and ready access to what you want them to know about what you're up to.

When trying to establish a new relationship, consider:

What would working with them more closely look like? Could you offer them a platform to speak at an event, or offer to give a talk at one of their meetings?

How could you build trust and understanding between your groups?

What would you need out of a long term relationship with another organisation? What could you offer?

CASE STUDY: THE GLOBAL WEEK OF ACTION FOR PEACE AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

The Global Week of Action for Peace and Climate Justice first took place in 2024, as an offshoot of an informal group of activists, researchers and others working on or concerned about the intersections between peace and climate justice. The initiative sprang from a recognition of the need for more outreach, education and campaigning, and for an international platform for people and organisations across the world to take collective action on the intersection between peace and climate justice issues.

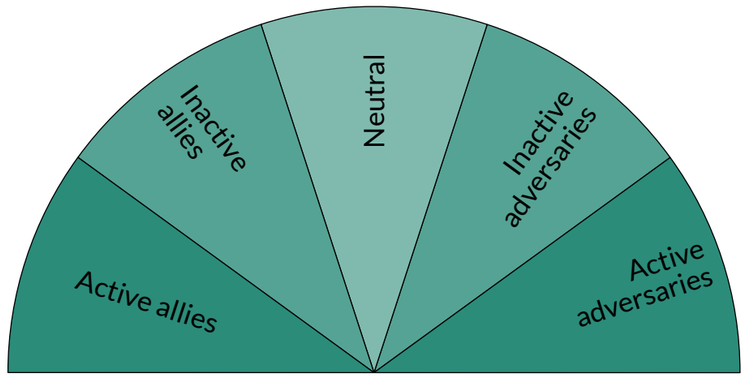
A small working group formed, with representatives from a range of different organisations, representing a range of different social and political groups: international grassroots networks, think tanks, research institutes and campaigning organisations. Some of these organisations had already worked together on projects, for others it was their first time working together. As they defined what they wanted to do, they also discussed how they were going to do it – the culture they wanted to build as they worked. This prioritised relationships, that people should be OK to say "no" to taking on tasks, and other elements of their approach. The working group had very limited funding for their work, which was of course limiting, but also meant that they were able to work in a way that suited them.

Despite only meeting online, and a limited track record of working together, the Global Week of Action for Peace and Climate Justice built strong relationships around a shared goal.

TOOL: THE SPECTRUM OF ALLIES

A useful tool for assessing your relationships with other organisations and individuals is the spectrum of allies. The spectrum runs from those who are already our active allies, to potential (or inactive) allies and "neutral" groups, through to inactive adversaries, and finally active adversaries.

- Active allies: People or groups you can rely on for support when needed, and who can rely on you (e.g. a group that you would organise an activity or event alongside).
- Inactive allies: People or groups who you share values or general goals with, but you don't have a direct relationship with (e.g. a group that sits within the same movement as you). We could also think of them as "potential allies".
- Neutral: People or groups who are unaware or show little interest in your cause or issue, or actively choose not to engage in either "side" of a debate (e.g. a single issue organisation that doesn't specifically work, comment, or otherwise engage on your issue).
- Inactive adversaries: People who have beliefs or values that differ to your own and may object to your goals, but don't actively do anything (e.g. someone who reads a newspaper opposed to your goals).
- Active adversaries: People or groups who take specific action against your goals, in word or action (e.g. a politician who makes statements against your campaign).



HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

The first step in using the spectrum of allies is to name groups, people, or institutions who fit into each of these categories. This initial task might take the group a while, and trigger discussion and debate – that's ok! Encourage the group to be specific and focused, because one of the outcomes of the exercise is the group having a clearer shared sense of what an ally/adversary even is. For the most significant actors, consider naming what it is that makes them an ally, or an adversary. How are they using the power and influence they have to support your aims, or to hinder them?

Over a longer period of time you could use pictures, articles, or other materials that illustrate why you have positioned different actors on the spectrum in this way. Revisiting the analysis you have done means you can make amendments and changes to your spectrum as the context you are working in changes. This dynamic process could provide vital insight into how you might build stronger relationships and build power as a movement.

SHIFTING THE BALANCE

The next step focuses on the potential/inactive allies, the neutral groups, and possibly the inactive adversaries. We can ask ourselves: what can we do to move one or more of those groups one position to the left (e.g. inactive allies becoming active allies, or inactive adversaries to a more "neutral" position)? In some circumstances it may even be possible to shift active adversaries into becoming "inactive". However, considering the people and groups in this category are putting energy into stopping you reaching your goals, it may not be the best use of time or energy, because you can probably assume they are the most committed and difficult to shift.

INACTIVE TO ACTIVE ALLY

Here we are thinking about how to strengthen relationships with groups you already "know", but aren't particularly close to. An inactive ally might be a group that you have had a relationship with in the past, but haven't managed to maintain. Here are some ways you could shift the balance:

- If they are planning an action or event, make sure you attend, publicise it on your own channels, or request a speaker slot/stall (as appropriate).
- If you have something in the pipeline that would make sense for them to collaborate on, what role (try to be specific and concrete) could you ask for help from them?
- Have a deliberate conversation about how you want to build a stronger relationship and follow up on action points.

Remember, building a stronger relationship takes time, persistence and energy. Some people and groups have had very negative experiences of building relationships and are therefore wary (or weary!) of others.

ACTIVE AND INACTIVE ADVERSARIES

An example of an inactive adversary might be a conservative grouping within a political or faith group. They could be moved to a more "neutral" position as social norms change over the medium/long term, or by encouraging the leadership of that group to organise workshops on relevant themes. The goal here is less to build your own movement (inactive adversaries probably aren't going to become active allies, at least in the short term). A more realistic goal might be to draw support away from your active adversaries by making your inactive adversaries more "neutral". This can help you achieve your goals because your active adversaries are likely drawing on the tacit support and acceptance of your inactive adversaries to push against your goals.

An interesting example of this in terms of climate justice work is the push by some politicians, media outlets, and organisations against net zero targets, 15 minute neighbourhoods, and traffic reduction schemes. Those actively pushing against these probably aren't going to change their mind, but some ways you could work to change the position of inactive adversaries, or draw neutral groups closer to you, include:

- Approaching community leaders (councillors, faith leaders, community organisers, etc) in the relevant area to discuss their position and explain the benefits, and discuss with them how they could communicate this to their constituencies
- Organising information and "no stupid questions" sessions for members of the community
- Hold stalls at community events with clear, accessible information - can you find spaces that would bring you into contact with those you wouldn't normally encounter?

This work - both the analysis, and the actual social change work - can take time and significant energy, but has the benefit of guiding your thinking in how you can strategically frame your actions and messaging, becoming more focused and deliberate in how you use your time, energy, and resources.

8. CHALLENGE DECISION-MAKERS AND POWERHOLDERS

A lot of this guide has centred on movement building – relationships, community, networks, grassroots power – and this is work that in and of itself is changing the world. But we also live in a world where lots of decisions are made by people and organisations with a lot more power than we have, and they often become the focus or target of our campaigns.

If asked to write a list of people with significant power and influence then most people would immediately think of "politicians", but there are plenty of others to consider as well: the CEOs of large businesses or corporations, faith leaders, journalists, the United Nations and other international structures, military commanders and defence chiefs, senior academics, high-profile celebrities... There are a lot of different people wielding different types of power and influence!

Some of the organisations that make up our movements find themselves in positions to challenge decision-makers, demand specific changes, or even advising and supporting with policy decisions as experts in their particular field. Being in these spaces offers opportunities to influence big, important decisions. At the same time it can feel compromising; some people feel that by engaging with these sorts of power structures they are legitimising them, when they would prefer to see them radically transformed.

If you are struggling with that tension then rest assured that you are not the only one, and that many have managed to find a balance between engaging, while staying true to their values and beliefs; indeed, it could be argued that doing so is what allows people and organisations to engage so effectively.

A common feature of 21st century campaigning has been to run short campaigns, with "clear demands" and simple, clear messaging. This approach often avoids systemic analysis of problems, and has failed to challenge or change the root causes of the issues our world is facing. Governments, corporations, international institutions and militaries have all been ready to embrace and "take action" on climate and environment issues, but rarely in a way that challenges underlying injustices.

In this context, perhaps one of the most significant challenges we face when it comes to campaigning on the relationship between militarism and the climate crisis is that it is impossible to avoid the systemic, underlying injustices that underpin the issues we are talking about: and yet, there are lots of examples (starting with all of the case studies in this booklet) of organisations managing to find ways to weave militarism and the climate crisis together in their actions and campaigning.

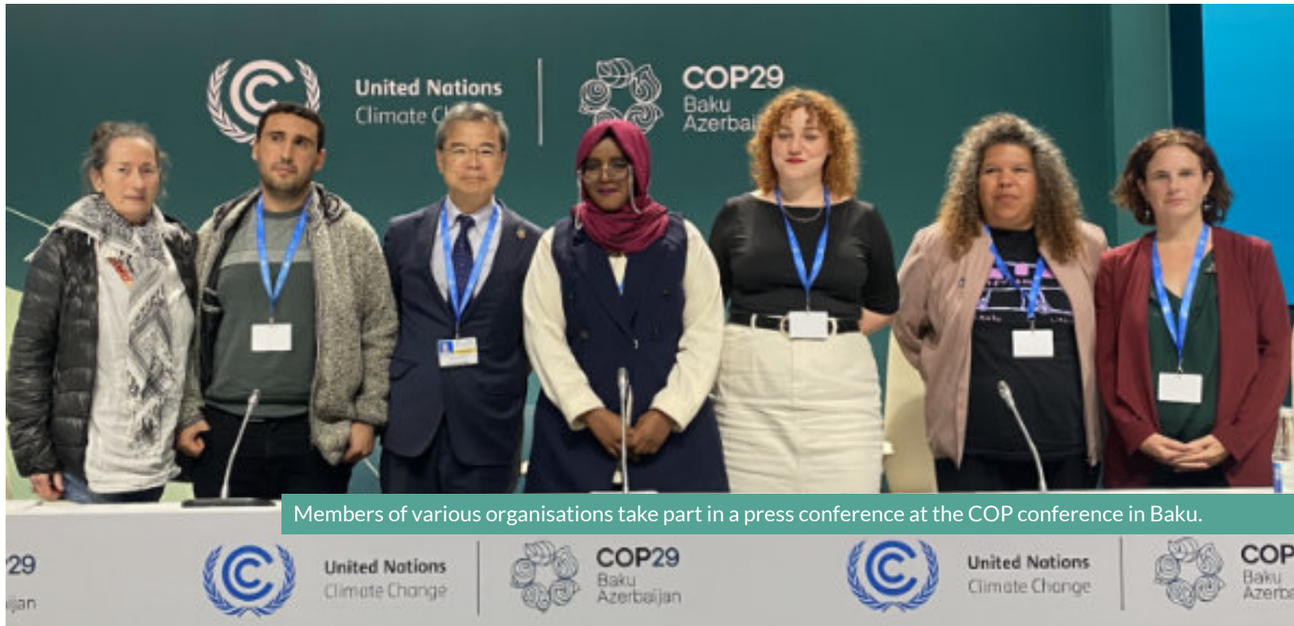
If you are thinking about trying to directly engage with and influence decision makers and powerholders, here are some key things to think about and keep in mind:

- **What do you want? What are you aiming to achieve?** It can be tempting to try and "engage" without a clear plan or goals. Knowing exactly what you are trying to achieve – what your demands are, what you want the powerholder to know, what you want from them – before you begin trying to engage will help significantly with how you approach and communicate.
- **What do they want? What are they trying to achieve?** Everyone wants or needs something, and decision-makers and powerholders are no different – it could be information, resources, legitimacy, relationships, to win an election, sell newspapers, communicate their position or value... You may not be in a position to offer these things, but even knowing what they are can inform your own decisions.
- **What can you offer? What can you share?** You may well have something you can offer a decision-maker or powerholder that they can't access elsewhere. For example, sharing your research or briefings – especially if they're "exclusive" or embargoed before release or publication – helps to build trust and connection, communicating that you trust their opinion on your work and their discretion.
- **Who are you representing?** If you are finding yourself in rooms with powerful people you are – believe it or not! – also in a position of power and privilege many people will never find themselves. Who isn't in the room, and how can you advocate for them, their experiences, and priorities?
- **What will you compromise?** Relationships often require compromise, but when engaging with politicians or others in a position of power – and may be coming from a very different worldview than your own – it may be helpful to think ahead as to what you are willing to compromise on in order to achieve your goals. This could be as something as simple in what you wear to a meeting, or the words you choose to use to describe an issue in order to avoid alienating the person you're engaging with.
- **What are your red lines?** At the same time, you should know what your limits are – what are you not willing to compromise on? This might be your political position or values, expressions of your own identity, or who you would be willing to share a platform with. Again, this might need careful consideration beforehand, but there are so many different scenarios it will be impossible to consider them all.

CASE STUDY: PEACEBOAT AT COP

I attend the UN climate talks representing Peace Boat, working to bring peace and demilitarisation into climate discussions. These conferences bring inequalities of power into sharp focus. Getting there generally requires accreditation through an admitted observer organisation, as well as money for travel and accommodation. These barriers exclude many people directly affected by the climate emergency and the decisions being made, and I am conscious that being there is a privilege and a responsibility. Even once inside, we are literally "observers": that is what is printed on our badges. We cannot access certain negotiating rooms, and in many others we can only watch and listen while governments negotiate our collective future. This can feel deeply disempowering. I have learned that working effectively here means understanding both the limits of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the opportunities within it: who makes decisions, where we can intervene, and how we can build collective pressure to be heard.

Those limits are particularly apparent when challenging militarism, which remains largely outside the substantive negotiations. Governments discuss the shortage of climate finance every year, while giving little attention to the resources going into military budgets. Military emissions remain inadequately reported and addressed. What helps



Members of various organisations take part in a press conference at the COP conference in Baku.



Members of Peace Boat at the Bonn climate conference in June 2026.

me work in this space is organising with people from feminist, human rights, climate justice, Palestine solidarity, peacebuilding and interfaith movements, as well as those supporting land and environmental defenders. Building connections across these movements is essential, and our alliances extend well beyond those attending the talks. The research produced by people outside the negotiating spaces is vital: we rely on their evidence about military emissions, spending and environmental harm to challenge governments and support our demands. Being at COP is only one part of a much wider collective effort.

As a co-lead of the Peace and Demilitarisation Working Group within the Women and Gender Constituency, I work alongside others to develop and advance shared demands. The working group was established by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom to strengthen demilitarisation advocacy within the UNFCCC through constituency organising. There are nine recognised NGO constituencies, including those representing women and gender, young people, Indigenous Peoples and trade unions. These are more than spaces for networking: they provide recognised channels to the secretariat and opportunities to address negotiators in official proceedings. An individual organisation cannot simply take the floor, but through a constituency we can develop shared positions and nominate representatives to deliver them during the limited speaking opportunities available. At the June 2026 climate talks in Bonn, for example, the Women and Gender Constituency raised military spending and emissions at an official consultation under the Belém Mission to 1.5, which focuses on keeping the 1.5°C goal within reach. The immediate achievement was simply getting these points across in an official UNFCCC space, through a speaking opportunity allocated to constituencies. This was followed by written submissions from several organisations working on militarism and climate, both with and without observer status. Constituency organising enabled us to speak at the consultation, while the open call for submissions allowed a wider range of organisations to contribute evidence and reinforce shared demands.

To raise awareness and build pressure, activists have spent years organising side events, press conferences and public actions agreed with the UNFCCC secretariat. We also request bilateral meetings with government delegations. When engaging negotiators, we have found it useful to connect our demands to their responsibilities: military spending is relevant to climate finance, for example, and military emissions to transparency. This provides a practical starting point while retaining our wider anti-militarist analysis. We also look for further opportunities to submit evidence,

including through the second Global Stocktake, which assesses collective progress under the Paris Agreement. For me, being strategic means considering how these activities fit together: what we want a government to do, which allies can help advance that demand, and how research, public pressure and direct engagement can reinforce each other. Building support across constituencies is particularly important in showing that these concerns are shared across movements.

Building on years of work by many organisations and movements, we can feel the tide beginning to shift. Militarism is receiving more attention within UNFCCC spaces. At COP30 in 2025, Brazil's President Lula challenged the contrast between the money available for war and the funding needed for climate action. Ahead of COP31, its president-designate, Türkiye's Murat Kurum, has called on wealthy countries to spend more on climate action than on defence. Such statements do not amount to changes in spending priorities, but they give us openings to press decision-makers to act on their words. The work remains slow and frustrating. My strongest advice is to invest in relationships across movements and between conferences: listen to others' priorities, develop shared demands, connect with researchers and campaigners, and follow up together. These alliances are valuable in themselves. They help us sustain each other and build our ability to challenge decision-makers. Knowing the process helps us identify an opening; organising collectively gives us a better chance of using it. These are spaces where agreements affecting all our futures are made, and I believe we need to use whatever influence we can build together..

TOOL: WHO HAS POWER IN A SCHOOL?

This simple tool can help people to see that virtually everyone has some power, and that different people derive their power from the different sources.

Ask people to brainstorm all the people or groups who have power in a school. Almost every group will start by saying "the teachers" or "the headteacher", but with a bit of a prompt you will quickly get a list of pretty well everyone involved. If an important group or person is missing (Secretary of State/caretaker), you can add it yourself. Ideally this is done on two pieces of flip chart, so that you can write the people on one sheet and the source of power on the other. If working on one sheet, leave enough room between names to add in the source of power.

Next ask them why each individual or group has power. Where does their power come from? What is its source? Why do people do what they say? Time usually doesn't permit to do this for the whole list, but make sure you cover the head, the pupils, the caretaker, the school secretary, parents and Secretary of State. This will give a good range of sources. Write participants responses in a different coloured pen.

The third stage is a facilitated discussion about power in general. Capture participants main points in a third colour. Try to draw out the core point of this exercise: that the power of some comes from the obedience of others. People in a position of authority and power have gained that position because consciously or subconsciously others have given their own power over to them.

If you have enough time, begin this exercise by brainstorming why students, generally, obey teachers. Give a particular command as an example ('open your textbook, and do the first exercise on page 15'), and brainstorm all the reasons that a student would follow that command (you are likely to gather 'fear of punishment', 'wanting to do well in exams', 'because that's what you do in a school', 'because everyone else does', and so on.) This exercise can demonstrate how different people have power, and are able to exercise 'power over' because of the obedience of others.

9. BUILD RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

A warming planet is and will become increasingly volatile. Changing weather patterns are already having direct impacts on people's lives: catastrophic weather events are becoming increasingly common and are destroying homes and livelihoods; people's health is directly impacted by increasing temperatures; and farmland and other food sources are being disrupted and degraded. Militarism tries to position itself as a key part of the response to this volatility, but is also contributing to insecurity, driving chaos and breakdown.

We can't expect to completely insulate ourselves from this volatility – significant aspects of our lives rely on systems that are beyond our control. But we can help to build communities that are at least a little more resilient to some of these shocks, and in doing so build relationships, learn new skills, and empower people to take other types of action.

Climate and peace activism have both often focused on targeting decision-makers and pushing for institutional or even international changes, but there are also many opportunities to act locally, on projects that directly benefit our communities - like planting trees, building wildlife habitats, restoring floodplains, growing food, initiating community-owned energy projects, low-carbon transport, youth projects, and repair cafes – all of which help to decouple our local economies from the vagaries of national and international decision-making and inaction.

EVERYONE'S DIFFERENT

No community is monolithic – all communities are complex and varied. There are often tensions, conflicts, and significant differences in terms of class, life experience and aspirations, and culture. Recognising and embracing this complexity and variability is important, and many community projects thrive because of diversity. Equally, we will all find some people – often those most like ourselves – easier to connect and communicate with than others, and it can take extra effort, time and patience to build relationships with those we have less in common with.

WORK COLLECTIVELY, BUILD LOCAL DEMOCRACY

How we go about this work is as important as what is achieved, and the values of collectivism, democracy, empowerment are important foundation stones to build on. This might sometimes feel like the slow, cumbersome way round, and especially so if you think you know what the problems and solutions are! But if you don't prioritise communication and participation, you risk alienating people who might actively engage in your work. The processes are as important as the concrete outcome.

UNDERSTAND YOUR CONTEXT, RESPOND TO LOCAL NEEDS

Building an analysis of the problems your community faces before deciding what to prioritise is crucial; without doing this, you risk building a project that is heavily biased towards your own priorities, or copying something you have seen others do that is not relevant to your own context. Doing this collectively and in a way that is participatory and engaging means that everyone learns something through the process, and feels invested in the outcome.

BUILD TRUST AND SAFETY

Trust is perhaps one of the most important resources that social change organisations have, but something we seldom talk about. When we prioritise building trust – by following through on our commitments, being honest and truthful, sharing our vulnerabilities, being sensitive and aware of others' needs, and sharing resources – we know we are building relationships for the long term, and it will often be reciprocated.

KEY RESOURCES

- In 2025, War Resisters' International published **New Worlds in Old Shells**, a handbook for those wanting to build radical, alternative projects and societal structures.
- **The Transition Handbook: from oil dependency to local resilience,** by Rob Hopkins
- **Jackson Rising Redux, lessons on building the future in the present,** edited by Kali Akuno & Matt Meyer
- **Mutual Aid: building solidarity during this crisis (and the next)**, by Dean Spade

PUSH FOR INVESTMENT

You probably can't do everything yourself. Some things – like building flood defences, cycling infrastructure, or using land – will take the involvement of local and national government. These systems will often try your patience and feel disempowering, even if you live somewhere with a functioning democratic system. The root you take to getting the investment your community needs will depend entirely on the context in which you take action – methodical lobbying of politicians, noisy campaigning, or even running for office yourself are all options others have successfully used! In any case, clearly documenting needs and building a strong case for investing in infrastructure will stand you in good stead.

SHARE FOOD

If in doubt, feed people. People connect and share over food in a way that they rarely do otherwise, and incorporating meals, sharing of food, and snacks into our organising communicates an intent to build a warm, nurturing and inclusive space that recognises and welcomes people's needs, and values their time and energy.

WORK ECOLOGICALLY

The climate crisis is occurring because humans built economies that were decoupled from the natural systems around them, using fossil fuels to vastly increase the amount of energy they had access to. This brought around incredible changes in living standards (in our diets, health, construction methods, and a whole range of other areas), but also meant many people are now very detached from the natural environment in which they live.

Working ecologically means minimising our footprint on the earth, and using nature's rhythms and patterns in our strategic planning. This will mean radically different things depending on our political and geographic contexts and resources, but we can say, with some confidence, that decarbonising our local economies, and supporting our local habitat's ability to sequester carbon, is fundamentally important to everyone. Supporting our communities to do this on a local level can help to build awareness and understanding of the importance of doing this at national and international levels.

CASE STUDY: COOPERATION JACKSON

Cooperation Jackson is a non-profit organisation based in Jackson, Mississippi, formed in 2014 following the successful city-wide transformative planning and eventual electoral victory of grassroots activist Chokwe Lumumba. Their mission is to challenge inequality and create employment opportunities in the city that uphold the community's rights, dignity, and justice. They focus on supporting and sustaining cooperative, worker-owned business and community collectives, drawing on and inspired by both a long history of such struggle in the region, and from international networks of cooperatives. Jackson is one of the poorest cities in Mississippi, which is itself the poorest

state in the USA, which means their work is taking place in a context shaped by long term unemployment and economic hardship. The city faces a significant lack of good jobs that pay living wages, and limited access to affordable high quality food, health care, and housing.

Cooperation Jackson sets out to transform the economic reality of their community by building a solidarity economy, held together by a network of cooperatives and other worker-owned and democratically self-managed enterprises. Members of the network include the Fannie Lou Hamer Community Land Trust (which stewards over 40 different properties, including housing units, a community centre, commercial units, a shopping plaza, and farming plots), a number of cooperatives focused on farming and food growing, the Zero Waste Coop, a design and print shop, and a catering cooperative. Other coops in the process of being formed include a People's Grocery, a medical cannabis dispensary, a café and library cooperative, and the Ewing Street eco-village (a community-led sustainable housing project).

Cooperation Jackson has also responded to immediate, pressing needs. For example, in 2022 the city of Jackson faced a huge water shortage. Triggered by a flood (but built on years of lack of investment in critical infrastructure) the crisis saw 150,000 people lack sufficient access to water. Cooperation Jackson was one of many community organisations that pivoted towards meeting this most fundamental need, distributing pallets of bottled water across the city.

Cooperation Jackson sets out to make their community more resilient to the economic, political and environmental shocks that their community is vulnerable to, by empowering, connecting, and resourcing members of community to meet their own needs – but at a more fundamental level by giving their community permission to even begin to imagine what a more interdependent economy, rooted in solidarity, might look like. Some of the key features of their work are their readiness to engage in long-term, generational-spanning work, that requires a sustained commitment, and their willingness to communicate about both their successes and the challenges they face in achieving their goals. The basic political approach of this sustainable project, and its potential beyond the Jackson locality, are covered in their book, Jackson Rising Redux (Akuno and Meyer, eds., PM Press, 2023).



Members of Cooperation Jackson at a May Day event in 2016.

10. SUSTAIN YOURSELF AND OTHERS AROUND YOU

Our activism is a reflection of ourselves: if we are stressed, anxious, burnt out, then this will be communicated in the decisions we make and ultimately the impact we have. Knowing how to sustain ourselves throughout the long, tiring, perhaps never-ending work of transforming our world is essential. Rest, recuperation and relaxation will all mean different things to different people, but there are still some general ideas and issues to consider.

WHAT DOES "SUSTAINING OURSELVES" MEAN?

We all know that life – because of work, family, health issues, finances, or a whole multitude of other reasons – can sometimes be difficult or stressful. Involvement in social change work can be a source of energy and inspiration – but it can also be simply another source of stress, and become just another thing that exhausts us! However, acknowledging that our involvement in activism or social change work is tiring is sometimes difficult, for a variety of reasons: it's something we've "chosen" to do; our organisational culture rewards or encourages members to become "martyrs" to the cause or struggle; others around us aren't "complaining"...

But by simply pushing forwards without engaging meaningfully with why the work is challenging or draining us doesn't make the difficulties go away, and can lead to us feeling burnt out – physically and emotionally exhausted. Instead, we need to engage meaningfully and try to find ways that make our own and others participation in movements sustainable in the long term.

Here are a few examples of actions you can take as an individual and as a group to support sustainable engagement in our movements.

UNDERSTAND AND ARTICULATE HOW YOU ARE FEELING, AND WHY

Some people are very good at knowing how they are feeling, others are terrible at it! Expressing how we feel – to ourselves and to others – takes practice. If we have lived or worked in environments where people don't talk about how they are feeling, or the impact of sustained exposure to work that is stressful or difficult, then we might need to take time to think about the words we want to use to describe how we feel.

Some people – especially those with more power or privilege – feel guilty about expressing stress or tiredness, because they are awarey that lots of people experiencing injustice or conflict more directly don't have the opportunity to "step back" or rest. This is understandable, but it is important to recognise that all of our feelings are valid.

BE READY TO SAY "NO" TO TASKS OR REQUESTS ON YOUR TIME AND ENERGY

Being able to say "no" to a task or request is important: it communicates a clear boundary, but it also indicates that the roles, tasks or responsibilities someone has said "yes" to are being taken on willingly, and hopefully in a way that is sustainable. In our groups and organisations we might need to actively encourage people to say "no" to requests on their time and energy, and we should always respect their choice when they do decline a task.

EXPRESS GRATITUDE FOR WORK DONE AND TIME SPENT, AND CELEBRATE ACHIEVEMENTS

Many people have a legitimate need to be recognised for the work they do, and expressing gratitude for the contributions people have made to our groups can significantly contribute to making sure people feel seen and heard,

and that their contribution has been valued. Recognition like this can have a big impact on someone's ability to continue engaging in a group and contributing in the future.

RECOGNISE SOME PEOPLE ARE CARRYING MORE THAN OTHERS

We are all carrying different loads, and there is no need or utility in comparing them. Neither are we in a "commitment race", or competing to prove ourselves. One person's stressful day will be another person's calm and relaxed one! Some people thrive when they have a lot to do, others find it overwhelming. At the same time, some people simply have less capacity than others – because of health issues, childcare or other caring responsibilities, work or financial pressures, and so on. Some people have "done enough" simply by turning up at a meeting, or getting the one task they committed to done.

RECOGNISE SOME PEOPLE HAVE MORE RESOURCES TO ALLOW THEM TO "SUSTAIN" THEMSELVES

At the same time, we don't all have access to the same resources – time, financial, or otherwise – and for those with less this can impact their ability to access opportunities to relax and replenish themselves. If there are significant differences in terms of financial income or class in your group or organisation, you may want to consider how you can make sure that those with less are able to access opportunities that are relevant to them.

BUILD GROUP CULTURES THAT ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO WORK IN SUSTAINABLE WAYS

Groups that are able to balance the demands of campaigning and activism with the physical and emotional needs of their members are often those that flourish in the long term, drawing people closer to them, increasing trust among members, and making spaces that people want to be in. A lot of "building a culture" means simply acting in a way that you want and expect others to behave and communicate, which sets clear expectations of what is "normal". This will look different depending on the nature of the group, but some of the advice covered in this section – articulating feelings, saying "no", recognising the load others are carrying, expressing gratitude – are all excellent places to start.

TOOL: COMFORT AND DISCOMFORT ZONES

A useful tool to explore our own sense of the way we are impacted by the work we are doing in our groups – and our experience of life more generally – is by understanding our comfort, discomfort and "panic" zones. This is helpful to do individually, but it can be enlightening to run the exercise in a group, allowing people to learn a lot about each other's experiences.

The exercise is run using two concentric circles – these can be mapped out on the floor using a washing line or rope, masking tape, or simply by inviting the group to imagine their presence. The space in the middle represents our "comfort zone", where we feel safe, happy and secure. The next space – the donut shape – represents our "discomfort zone", where we feel more unsure, things are challenging, our boundaries are being pushed. We can stay in our discomfort zone for a while, but it is physically or emotionally draining. Finally, the space beyond our discomfort zone – the rest of the room – is our "panic zone". This is where we feel very unsafe, like we need to escape or hide, where we are no longer able to function normally.

A facilitator can take the group through a series of scenarios and ask the group to position themselves in the different zones depending on how they feel about it. "Riding a bicycle on the road" can be a good illustration, because for some people this is entirely normal and common behaviour that they are comfortable with doing every day, while others are terrified and would never do it (or know people who are). After each scenario, the facilitator can ask for feedback on why people have positioned themselves where they have stood. They can also invite example scenarios from the wider group. Facilitators can invite members of the group to share what would help them to feel more comfortable in a specific scenario (for example, if "doing a presentation in front of a group of strangers" puts someone well into their discomfort zone, maybe "having an opportunity to practice in front of a supportive group" could make them more comfortable with the task).

The exercise can also be used to support the group to reflect on their culture and who generally finds themselves in their comfort zone more often than others. Who in the group has contrasting experiences of specific tasks, or in a more general sense? Why is this? What could be done to change or rebalance this?

This exercise can also be used to highlight that often our best learning opportunities are when we are in our discomfort zone – in our comfort zone we aren't being "pushed" beyond what we already know, but in our panic zone we are not a position to engage meaningfully because we feel threatened or anxious. We can't stay in our discomfort zone forever, but it is in this space we are most likely to experience new things or encounter different ideas.