

Towards an Assembly of Social Movements on Climate Change

Peoples' Social Forum 2014
Before and Beyond Ottawa



Report of the preparatory meeting held in Montreal on June 6, 2014



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Assembly of Social Movements on Climate Change Kicks Off With a Bang!

By Michel Lambert, Alternatives international
<http://www.alterinter.org/spip.php?article4206>

More than sixty people were in Montreal on June 6th for the first ever Assembly of Social Movements on Climate Change, under the umbrella of the [Peoples' Social Forum](#), taking place in August 2014. This preparatory meeting of the larger Assembly to take place on August 23rd gathered representatives from environmental groups, citizen movements, First Nations communities, as well as labour union representatives, women's groups and student associations, giving credence to the notion that the climate change issue is crossing over into seemingly dissociated sectors. British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec and eight Native communities and groups were represented.

The meeting was held in cooperation with the passing of the [Peoples' Walk for Mother Earth](#) in Montreal, a 700-km journey from Cacouna to Kanesatake aiming to raise awareness among local communities who will be affected by both the Line 9 and Energy East pipeline projects.

An unprecedented willingness to work together

The call was initially made by [Alternatives](#) and the [Council of Canadians](#), and successfully mobilized over fifteen groups just for the organization of the June 6 meeting (see the original call in annex). Respecting the autonomy and specific agendas of each other, the participants appreciated the opportunity and the urgency of working together in solidarity, complimenting each others work to obtain significant achievements against the pro-hydrocarbon and anti-climate policies of the present federal government. This initial meeting held discussions to build consensus at three levels.

Three priority issues

- The Assembly has taken a stand against projects aiming to exploit hydrocarbons, as these projects are the main culprits in the rising rate of greenhouse gas emissions affecting climate change.
- The Assembly will also address the much-needed transition towards green and renewable energies, climate jobs and decreasing our carbon footprint.
- The Assembly of Social Movements on Climate Change will promote the idea of climate justice, and therefore the respect of fundamental rights of First Nations communities.

Converge, Coalesce, Coordinate!

The Assembly wishes to achieve more together than as a sum of all its parts. Activist art, direct action and civil disobedience are the main tactics that were agreed upon, along with divestment campaigns, training camps and common declarations

A sustainable Assembly

The Assembly of Social Movements on Climate Change, unlike the extractive industry, aims to be a sustainable and a lasting process ! Its structure will be inclusive, horizontal and participative, based on the [Peoples' Social Forum Charter](#) in order to debate and put forth common plans of action.

At the Peoples' Social Forum, and beyond

More than 10 000 people are expected to attend the Peoples' Social Forum in Ottawa from August 21st to 24th 2014. It will be a historic event : the very first time that many activists and progressives from French and English Canada as well as First Nations will come together to discuss the future we want to work towards. The issue of how we protect our environment will be of fundamental importance.

The Assembly of Social Movements wishes to halt climate change. Regardless of who will govern the country as of 2015, we know that the policies and actions of our government and the oil industry are responsible for the current situation, and the Parliamentary opposition offers far too few significant alternatives and changes. By joining forces from across the Canadian territory, including environmental and First Nations groups, citizens' movements, youth, scientists, workers, students and more, the Assembly wishes to leverage social justice movements through the climate change issue, giving new breath to current and historic struggles of civil society in favour of climate and social justice.

Michel Lambert is the Executive Director of [Alternatives](#)

Agenda of June 6 meeting

1. Openings
2. Introductions and presentation of the participants
3. Context of the Assembly and objectives of the meeting
4. Presentation of the March for Mother Earth
5. Discussions on issues, actions and shape of the Assembly
6. Next Steps
7. Evaluation of the day

Proceedings

Friday 6 June 2014

Notes from the day, organised under the headings given in the schedule

As for the original call (see in annex), the goals for this first meeting were:

“• To determine common subjects/working points that the Assembly can work on (subjects and working points will allow us to kick-start work on a thorough plan of action that will be presented on August 23rd)

• To determine the format of the Assembly on Climate change, before, during and after the Peoples' Social Forum in August)”

1. Opening (Native protocol)

Michel Lambert welcomed participants to the conference, and noted that many groups were present including Greenpeace, Rural Solidarity Quebec, Mining Watch, Climate Justice Montreal, and others.

Melissa Mollen-Dupuis gave the traditional First Nations welcome

2. Welcome word and presenting the participants

Participants introduced themselves and their organisations. M. Lambert noted that there was a good diversity amongst participants. There were women's groups, labour groups, First Nations groups, and many participants from outside of Quebec including from Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario (Ottawa and Toronto).

3. Presenting the context of the Assembly and the goals for the day

Maryève Charland-Lallier invited participants to suggest some ground rules for the operation of the Assembly to ensure that all could participate in a respectful and productive environment. Suggestions adopted by the assembly included:

- Alternate between men and women speakers
- Use the microphone (mandatory for translation)
- Wait for your turn before speaking
- Speak slowly if possible to facilitate translation
- Participate in the language of your choice
- Prioritise those who haven't already spoken when choosing commentators
- Attack ideas, not people
- Decision-making should be by consensus
- Pay attention to minority voices and communicate with a smile

M. Lambert asked participants to brainstorm the **objectives** for the day's meeting. The following is a summary of the ideas shared:

- **The main objective is to work, as a civil society, towards solving the causes and countering the policies in Canada which accentuate climate change and to collaboratively develop strategies for doing so**
- To build something that will be enduring and sustainable
- To promote strategies which allow us to both struggle against existing climate change and prevent future climate change through individual action
- To build networks, and reach out to the largest number of groups and individuals as possible. We don't want to simply 'preach to the converted'
- Consider structural issues, particularly today's accepted economic model, and ask how we might change this
- Connect with a variety of groups both nationally and internationally, and particularly the labour movements
- Consider the mainstream political realities. What are the policies of the Obama and Harper administrations? How can we work with or against those policies?
- We must represent, support and involve the First Nations groups in our work. They are the most vulnerable to climate change, but are also best equipped to teach us how to live sustainably. They also have legal and ancestral rights which are important and relevant to this struggle
- Focus on solutions and alternatives – we must say more than simply what we do NOT want
- We must listen to women's voices and ensure whatever strategies we propose are not having negative impacts on women
- We could support proposals for an International Environment Court

The facilitators summarised the objectives as follows:

We must be BROAD and inclusive, bringing on board citizen and labour movements; we must operate by clear consensus; we must not just work with First Nations, but also support them at the frontline of their struggles; we must propose ALTERNATIVE MODELS; we must build something DURABLE; we must take action, and do something CONCRETE.

4. Presenting delegates from the Peoples' March for Mother Earth

The Peoples' March for Mother Earth is an important movement, which has succeeded in raising awareness about the dangers of shale gas and the pipeline. The experience so far has been successful and uplifting, and the group has operated in a horizontal, organic way, creating dialogue, and the group has successfully included First Nations leaders. Natasha Kanapé-Fontaine mentioned that she didn't just feel like 'the token' First Nation representative, but that there was a great respect for her and her ideas, and a real desire to use her knowledge and expertise in the movement. Together, sharing a strong vision, this struggle will bind First Nations peoples and other Canadian groups together, and we can succeed.

5. Discussions on the issues, actions and format of the Assembly

The goals of the day were introduced to the group. The format of the ‘World Café’ was introduced, as were the **three principal questions** to be discussed:

1. Which issues should become **priorities** for the Assembly, and for the Movement?
2. What kinds of **interventions** should we make at (and leading up to) the Forum? What sort of structure should the Forum take?
3. How should we organise ourselves for the Ottawa gathering – and what should we do after? How will the movement **continue and remain sustainable**?

[Note: In the World Café discussions and following presentations, topics 2 and 3 were sometimes overlapping]

There were three sessions for the discussions, each lasting 15 minutes.

Participants rotated 3 times, and all had the chance to contribute their ideas on each of the three questions. Following the discussions, during lunch a representative from each table produced a summary of the ideas shared at their table.

Summaries of all ideas shared (given after lunch break):

- **Q1: Issues and themes to be addressed (Tables 1,4,7):**
 - Fight against energy development projects; particularly pipelines (and tar sands)
 - Adapting to climate change – sea level rise
 - Supporting First Nations
 - Encouraging sustainable development projects; and supporting those who need help in the transition period to clean energy
 - Support UN pro-climate action plans and connect with international networks
 - Melissa’s diagram (Concentric circles depicting social justice, respect for all elements on earth (wind, air, earth, water); responsibility to mother earth; equity; intergenerational rights)
 - Promote what has already been achieved re pipeline expansion, and use these successes to galvanise support for new movements
 - Work towards solutions
 - Climate justice – North/South equity; Environmental racism
 - Health impacts of climate change
 - Transitioning the economy – beyond capitalism, zero growth
- **Q2: Interventions and Structure of Assembly (Tables 2, 5 and 8)**
 - Event itself should be environmentally friendly
 - Use social media to reach a broad audience
 - Use civil disobedience, particularly to capture media attention
 - Have a broad base of activists involved: labour groups, students groups etc.
 - Operate locally, provincially, regionally, nationally
 - Use visual communication effectively to help publicise event
 - Use visual art in effective ways
 - Propose alternatives
 - Make an inventory of effective and ineffective actions before and after the forum; use this to inform future actions
 - Raise youth awareness and involve them in movement

- Create a manifesto and disperse amongst people
 - Establish contacts with the UN and consider how the Charter of Rights and Freedoms might be relevant
 - Work on changing individual human behaviour
 - Engage First Nations Groups, as their contributions are crucial
 - Use interventions like the March for Mother Earth
 - Consider a lobbying campaign, calling our MPs for example
 - Interventions should be flexible– everyone needs a space to engage and participate, and to coordinate
- **Q3: Sustainability of the movement (Tables 3, 6 and 9)**
 - Action plans should be well defined. Should all ‘speak same language’ – and be united in our goals, purposes, values.
 - Leadership is required for durability.
 - Content and goals should be communicated to a wide audience
 - Assembly must bring together a diverse range of participants and groups
 - Rules and accepted values for functioning must be respected
 - Meet at least once a year in the future, to see where things stand
 - Anglo, Franco, Aboriginal, and multicultural representation are all important. A Pan-Canadian movement is needed.
 - Develop different ‘caucuses’ – i.e. women’s caucus, labour caucus, first nations caucus...
 - Have a multitude of action plans that we can then follow up between the different groups and caucuses
 - Develop ideas for the short, medium and long-term

6. Next steps

Finally, after these summaries were shared, each participant chose one of the three questions, and in groups, three top ideas/issues/goals/strategies were chosen for each of the three questions. The goal was to reach the three final ideas by consensus.

FINAL answers to the three questions posed – top three ideas for each:

[Michel Lambert noted that while the ideas have been ranked in order of importance by consensus, the other ideas would not be discarded. This summary is to help us focus our efforts but is not all-inclusive.]

Question 1: Issues/Priorities

1. Struggle against hydrocarbons projects and pipelines
2. We are in an economic transition period and we must realise this. We must prioritise climate-friendly jobs, and move to a post-capitalist era that is no longer obsessed with growth. Consumerism must be challenged, and we must propose alternative solutions.
3. Climate justice/environmental racism must be addressed. Those most vulnerable (both between and within countries) will be affected earlier and harder.

Question 2: Interventions and Assembly structure

1. Art must be incorporated effectively into our actions.
2. Coalitions must be developed, whether formal or informal, between a variety of groups, and particularly with First Nations groups. Strategies must be anti-colonial.
3. We must engage in direct action – which means civil disobedience. Other ideas include a climate camp, campaigns that pressure big energy and big capital, and education campaigns.

Question 3: Coherence and sustainability

1. The Assembly must develop long-term communication strategies - not just for internal purposes, but also to communicate with external parties.
2. We should have a Canadian Committee, which will provide leadership and direction.
3. We need to consider structure on national, provincial and regional levels. Each level will have different tasks, the division of labour is important and will be assisted by the Committee.

SUMMING UP THE DAY

M. Lambert thanked the facilitators, and the participants for their hard work. He announced this report to be circulated for comment. “We will keep all the materials from today, such as the flip charts, filmed material and notes, and consider the material carefully in order to make a good summary.”

7. Evaluating the day

M. Lambert noted that the day really felt like the beginning of something significant, and that as a result of the Assembly our actions in August will be able to go further and be effective. He noted that the consensus was clear – we need to fight against big hydrocarbon projects. He again noted that we will be sending the materials around for comment, and noted that we already have a coordinating committee and a native caucus. He invited any interested participants to get involved with the running of the Assembly, and that the aim is to be as inclusive as possible.

Feedback was invited. Participants thanked the organisers and said they found the day inspiring. Some feedback/constructive criticism was offered:

- ‘We may speak the same language, but we don’t necessarily understand each other’ – we must be aware that in groups certain participants, particularly women and First Nations people, find it difficult to have their voice heard. Participation must be encouraged.
- We must not focus just on the big issues, such as the tar sands and pipelines, but go beyond to include smaller movements and issues that are less apparent or mainstream
- We need to be more inclusive of Anglophones, some found it difficult to participate today
- Some decisions were not reached by consensus, and at times it was difficult to have our voices heard and to take account of divergent views, which are important as they make our movement stronger. Debates should not become personal, and some participants felt that at times they did.
- We should hold further workshops
- There was not enough time to come to a consensus and to discuss issues properly in the short timeframe
- It would be ideal if the events that we hold ourselves are environmentally friendly, i.e. less plastic

Live Online Streaming

Thanks to a member of Alternatives, Sébastien Grenier, we were able to ensure live online streaming for many of the segments throughout the day, increasing accessibility to the content of the Assembly for those who were unable to attend. The link was shared on Twitter and Facebook. You can watch some clips at this YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1kCSD0XETIUOhq5vc4NbFg>

Survey

We also invite those who participated to fill out a survey on their experience at the Assembly. <https://fr.surveymonkey.com/s/YG6HFQ3>

List of participants

Mohamad Alsadi (UNIFOR); Aurélie Arnaud (Femmes autochtones du Québec); Marie-Josée Béliveau (Coalition Vigilance Oléoducs); Alain Brunel (Association québécoise de lutte contre la pollution atmosphérique); Patrick Bonin (Greenpeace); Ariane Bilodeau (FNNEQ-CSN); Philippe Bourke (Regroupement national des conseils régionaux de l'environnement); Myriam Beauchamp (Le Grand conseil de la Nation Waban-Aki); Jean-Claude Balu (Alternatives); John Bradley (Community organiser); Philippe Charbonneau (Council of Canadians); Maryève Charland-Lallier (Regroupement national des conseils régionaux de l'environnement); Martine Chatelain (Coalition Eau Secours); Ana Collins (Peoples' Social Forum – Indigenous Caucus); Alexa Conradi (Fédération des femmes du Québec); Dominique Daigneault (CCM-CSN); Marie Durand (Alert pétrole Rive-Sud); Floris Ensink (Sierra Club Québec); Adriana Eslava (Comité pour les droits humains en Amérique latine); Aurore Fauret (Peoples' Walk for Mother Earth); Richard Girard (Polaris Institute); Nathalie Guay (CSN); Vanessa Gray (First Peoples' Caucus); Monique Hains (EnvUQAM, Ciel et Terre); Lindsay Hughes (Climate Justice Montreal); Georges Karpát (Coalition vigilance oléoducs); Natasha Kanapé-Fontaine (Peoples' Walk for Mother Earth); Bonnie Kerr (Québec Terre à terre); Widia Larivière (Femmes autochtones du Québec); Michel Lambert (Alternatives); Jean Léger (Coalition vigilance oléoducs); Abed Louis (Comité pour la Justice sociale de l'Université du Québec à Gatineau); Martin Lukacs (Defenders of the Land); Julie Marquis (CSN); Aida Mas (Comité pour les droits humains en Amérique latine); Marie-Ève Mathieu (Regroupement Interrégional Gas de Schiste de la Vallée du St-Laurent); Rushdia Mehreen (Greenpeace); Mélissa Mollen-Dupuis (Idle No More); Clayton Thomas Muller (Idle No More); Jean Ouimet (« Révolution citoyenne pour respecter les limites de la planète » Citizens' Movement); Mireille Peletier (CSN); Karine Péloffy (Centre Québécois du Droit de l'Environnement); Sylvain Pilon (Québec Terre à terre); Abdul Pirani (Council of Canadians); Geneviève Puskas (Équiterre); Gabriela Rappell (Sierra Youth Coalition); Mikael Rioux (Peoples' Walk for Mother Earth); Dimitrios Roussopoulos (IPAM); Michal Rozworski (Peoples' Walk for Mother Earth); Nadia Santoro (UNIFOR Labour Caucus); Sakura Saunders (Anti-Line 9); Bader Takriti (Climate Justice Montreal); Chelsea Taylor-Flook (Healing Walk); Jacques Tétreault (Regroupement Interrégional Gas de Schiste de la Vallée du St-Laurent); Shona Watt (Climate Justice Montreal); Don Waboose (Batchewana – Sault Sainte-Marie).

Annex: Original call



Toward an Assembly of Social Movements on Climate Change Peoples Social Forum 2014 Before and Beyond Ottawa

More than 10 000 people are expected at the Peoples' Social Forum taking place in Ottawa from August 21st to 24th. This will be a historic gathering as it will be the first time that activists and progressives from French and English Canada as well as First Nations will come together to discuss the future we want. The issue of how we protect our environment is already a defined theme of the Forum and an Assembly of Social Movements on that specific theme is taking shape. Now more than ever, our movements are active on the issue.

- First Nations are at the forefront of many struggles against the petro and mining industry in Canada;
- Citizen movements have generated massive opposition to each and every attempt by the Government of Canada to export its petrol via the South, West and now East;
- Environmental organizations, targeted by the very same government, have launched new campaigns and have gained more and more support against climate change in general and extractive industries in particular;
- Scientists and institutions, also under attack, are continuing to denounce the climate obscurantism of this government and all also calling for action now.

These conditions create a momentum and we believe that together, we can achieve much more to stop climate change. Canadian industries and policies need to be changed now.

Climate Change: A Key Struggle for the PSF 2014

Cuts at Environment Canada, Omnibus laws affecting hundreds of thousands of lakes and rivers to allow pipelines, attacks on environmental groups, grants to the petro-industry, Free Trade Agreements enabling the extraction of fossil fuels, and way more, are all pieces of one larger and unique strategy of capitalizing the Alberta Tar sands, or any natural resource, to the very last drop while not considering any negative effect on climate change.

The exploitation of Tar Sands, expected to triple production in coming years, are already Canada's fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions, responsible for climate change. First Nations living downstream from the tar sands, one of the largest industrial projects on Earth, are facing front line impacts including significantly higher rates of rare cancers. The tar sands are causing serious water and air pollution and destroying large tracts of boreal forest.

As the government of Canada is pursuing its pro-petrol strategy, Canadians will suffer important negative effects from climate change AND are now more responsible than never for the global effects of climates change all over the world. Those policies are doing harm at both local and global levels. What kind of nation is built on reckless expansion of tar sands?

Why an Assembly?

- We know we need to work together but we don't know how!
- We know we are working on common issues, but we are working alone!

- We know none of us can do it alone.
- We know together, we can engage way more new people.
- We know we need to propose a strong social, citizen and indigenous opposition to this government and all those who succeed it who will want to pursue the same policies.
- We know that an alliance between the West and East movements would be so unprecedented that it would destabilize the government and the industry.
- We know we'll be stronger!

The objectives of the Assembly:

The Assembly of social movements on Climate wants to stop climate change. We know that the policies and actions of our government and industry are highly responsible for climate change and we want to act together on those issues. The Assembly should adopt and follow a common action plan to reach that goal.

The Process:

The Assembly of Social Movements on Climate should NOT be a mere two-hour gathering. We are not only beginning before the PSF in August in order to reach Ottawa with a more advanced plan of action, but we are also aiming at building an Assembly that will last in time and help us to continue to work together on this fundamental issue for the coming years.

The Assembly should be inclusive of all interested parties, involved or not in the PSF, but active on the issue. Climate and fossil fuel activists, First nations, environmental organizations, labour unions and social movements should be invited to participate.

Systematically, any organization proposing an activity for the PSF within the theme of climate change and the environment should be invited to join the Assembly on Climate. Alternatives and the Council of Canadians are spearheading the process to facilitate a first meeting that will launch the Assembly. Both organizations want the process to be inclusive on the basis of the Peoples' Social Forum Charter and are inviting any interested groups to also join them in the preparation of this initial meeting.

Montreal, June 6, 2014

The meeting will be held in Montreal on June 6, 2014 as the **Peoples for Mother Earth March** (700 km following the Energy East pipeline route from Cacouna to Kanasatake) is reaching Montreal the day before. Please also consider staying with us as the Marchers for Mother Earth will walk through the city on June 7th, *en route* toward Kanasatake.

Signatories

Signatories include André Bélisle of the Association québécoise de lutte contre la pollution atmosphérique (AQLPA), Philippe Bourke from the Regroupement national des conseils régionaux de l'environnement (RNCREQ), Bruno Massé from the Réseau québécois des groupes écologistes (RQGE), Marie-Josée Béliveau, Nicolas Mainville of Greenpeace, Brent Patterson from the Council of Canadians, Michel Lambert from Alternatives and seasoned First Nations activists Melissa Mollen-Dupuis of Idle No More Quebec and Ana Collins.

Contact and info

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Peoples for Mother Earth March: <http://www.peuplespourlaterremere.ca/>