



Indigenous People and the Environment

Indigenous people lead the world as Defenders of Mother Earth and Water Protectors. We have always been on the front lines—stopping the damming of our rivers, standing up to the mining of our sacred lands, fighting pipelines. We are clear about what we are for: clean air, clean water, clean soil, respectful relationships with all of life, and a good future for the generations to come. By standing up against greed, over-consumption, and desecration of the land and water, we inspire people everywhere to step into thoughtful, prayerful, powerful action on behalf of the environment and sustainable energy.

Because our connection to the land and to our traditional knowledge is mostly intact, we have a great deal to share with the world about a gentler way of living on this earth. We know how to share. We know how to grow food in ways that do

not deplete the soil. We know our forests and our medicine plants. We know how to live in a way that does not contribute to climate chaos. We are not easily confused about what really matters.

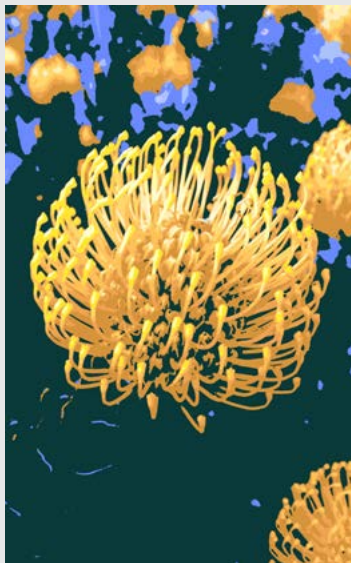
Our long histories of living respectfully in balance with the natural world have been guided by our “original instructions,” which reminded us to be generous, reciprocal, and respectful in all our relationships. We have honored the water, the land, and all of life. Many of us live on our original homelands, as our ancestors did for many, many generations. Our ties to the land and our languages and traditions have remained intact, protecting us from consumerism and greed. In human relationships, we have always known of the power of listening and sharing. Our traditions of sharing our stories in community have helped us to heal our hurts.



Over time, many of us have been pushed off our land. The places we've lived have been invaded and targeted for environmental destruction. The things we love—the mountains, rivers, plains, tundra, special plants in our forests; the ground under our feet—have been seen as “resources” by the oppressive society and exploited by the fossil fuel, energy, pharmaceutical, and mining industries. The fossil fuel industry has often located its extracting and

refining activities near to our homes. Our traditional areas for hunting, fishing, and gathering are endangered, and because of the extractive economy all water is threatened.

We have a long history of resilience and resistance. Policies of genocide have attacked our languages, our way of life, our traditional governments, our families, and our homelands. However, even in the worst cases, we are just a few



Sustaining All Life (SAL) is an international grassroots organization working to end the climate emergency within the context of ending all divisions among people. *United to End Racism* (UER) consists of a wide diversity of people in many different countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal. UER and SAL are projects of and use the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from emotional harm resulting from oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging the release of painful emotions, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved. Re-evaluation Counseling currently exists in 95 countries.



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generations away from our connection to the land. One of our great strengths is how we hold on to our sense of place and connection to the natural world, despite brutal oppression. We know how to heal the land and ourselves. We are powerfully taking back our languages, our traditions, and our homelands.

As Indigenous people, we need to heal from the effects of genocide—from the many ways it has hurt our communities, our hearts, and our minds—so that we can move forward together in creative, effective ways.

We need our allies to heal from the damage to their hearts and minds enough to notice that we are still here, that for many generations we have been leaders in the care of the environment.

This work is not new to us. We need our allies to heal so that they can join us and back us in thoughtful, respectful ways. We have so much to share about how to live gently on the earth.

Many of us have found the tools of respectful listening used in *Sustaining All Life* very helpful. They resonate deeply with our values and with our healing traditions. We have learned to use these tools and now teach them. They have helped our communities work together more effectively to protect the land and the water. They have also been helpful to our allies—they have helped them show up and work with us in a good way.





The Work of *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism*

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—if we make some very large changes in our economy, our energy systems, and our lives in the next five to ten years. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis can be resolved only if we simultaneously address racism, genocide of Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on the groups targeted by these oppressions, and on other vulnerable populations (including populations of people who are elderly, disabled, and very young). Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of climate change, racism, and exploitation.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression, and especially racism and classism) between nations and between groups of people, (2) widespread feelings that it's too late and any actions will be ineffective, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the climate emergency, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of our economic system. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these and other issues.

The role of oppression

The economic and political forms of our societies demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the earth. This results in exploitation and oppression. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) target everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we tend to act toward others in ways that repeat the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the mental and emotional harm we experience is the result of this passing on of hurt. Our experience is that though people are vulnerable

to acting in oppressive ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a person has been hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

The importance of healing personal harm

The mental and emotional harm done to us by oppression and other hurtful experiences interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the climate emergency.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other harmful behavior is neither quick nor easy work. Many of us resist this personal healing work. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the harm done to us by oppression. Some of us assume that we will never be free of this harm. In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts and address barriers to effective organizing. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing.

By releasing emotional pain in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.



Sustaining All Life



For more information, see:

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