

## **Resolution 108A – Environmental Justice for Working People**

In too many communities like Flint, Michigan, our children don't have clean water to drink and clean air to breathe, sometimes for reasons that are directly caused by wealthy special interests that prioritize profit over quality services and the elected leaders who represent their interests.

Working people, including SEIU members, their families and communities are directly and too often disproportionately affected by the threats of air and water pollution, climate change and extreme weather events. These problems aren't just more prevalent where working people live. We are also more likely to be confronted with environmental and health hazards at work—and less likely to receive adequate protection from them.

As SEIU members know well from their own communities, climate change is real and poses significant threats to people's health and livelihood, and disproportionately affects working people, the poor and people of color.

All people deserve to live and work in environments that do not pose a threat to their health and livelihood. We also have a responsibility to our children and grandchildren to be good stewards of our common home, our planet, and to leave them with cleaner air and water and an abundant, resource-rich natural world.

For more than two decades, SEIU members worked to promote safe and green practices in the workplace that improve our natural environment and have been on the front lines of responding when environmental injustice and climate change catastrophe strike like drought and wildfires, catastrophic flooding and the calamities resulting from Hurricane Katrina, Super-Storm Sandy, Typhoon Haiyan and the water crisis in Flint, Michigan.

SEIU members who work in healthcare have been on the front lines of responding to climate change related public health problems, like exacerbated asthma and other respiratory illness—and the increasing crisis from vector borne diseases like dengue fever, chikungunya and West Nile virus, which flourish in the wake of extreme weather events. Healthcare providers have also worked to prevent these health problems from growing by advocating to reduce the use of toxic chemicals and lower energy consumption in their workplaces.

As the nation's largest property services union, SEIU members are in a unique position to be stewards of a better climate future. Buildings are the largest single user of energy and a major source of the harmful emissions that cause climate change. Across our industries, SEIU members operate, maintain and clean these buildings and in that role can serve as catalysts to improving our air, water and environment.

People who provide public services, such as people who maintain water treatment and sewer systems, are regularly exposed to hazardous or potentially dangerous waste.

SEIU members in Canada live in one of the largest oil-producing countries in the world and as such, are disproportionately affected by the price of oil and by the need to transition away from the use of fossil fuels. We can provide leadership to help move the country off its dependence on fossil fuels and to also provide justice and good jobs to people who currently depend upon those industries to support their families.

Puerto Rico is extremely vulnerable to the worsening ravages of climate change. Approximately 2.3 million people live in coastal municipalities and are exposed to specific climate-related hazards such as sea level rise, coastal and river flooding, hurricanes, landslides, and droughts. As temperatures increase faster than the global average, rainfall is projected to decrease. Dry days are increasing and wet days are decreasing, creating an island-wide drought affecting temperature-sensitive crops. Public health risks such as the Zika virus are on the rise. An already weakened economy will be further weakened as tourism and livelihoods become impacted due to coastal erosion, loss of beach area, damage to ecosystems and species, and the need to invest in coastal defenses such as sea walls.

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An overwhelming majority of the world's governments, scientific experts and civil society groups agree that we must curb the harmful greenhouse gas emissions that result from the burning of fossil fuels to try to stem the harmful effects of climate change. Countries the world over need to transition toward 100 percent clean energy use by or before the year 2050 to prevent us from passing the point of no return—at which point we may not be able to stop the advance of health, economic and natural disasters that are currently being exacerbated by climate change.

As working people, we recognize that thousands of people who currently work in the fossil fuel industry—including SEIU members who are directly employed in the fossil fuel sector or, are employed in the transport of fossil fuels — depend upon those jobs to support their families. We also recognize that the communities in fossil fuel producing areas will be impacted by the transition to a new energy economy. And, we salute the many brave men and women who gave their lives in long and bitter struggles to unionize the coal fields, railroads and fossil fuel plants and won dignity on the job, good pay and safer working conditions. For this reason, part of our effort to break our dependence on fossil fuels must be to create fair and positive transitions for those families and communities to new jobs and new futures.

The fight for environmental justice is inextricably linked to the fights for economic, immigrant and racial justice because the effects from climate change and environmental dangers disproportionately affect the neighborhoods and jobs of working people—particularly people of color. Around the world, women are also disproportionately affected by the dangers of climate change by taking primary responsibility for agriculture and household duties in many regions—and because of the greater risk they bear from some diseases exacerbated by climate change, such as the Zika virus.

These fights are also linked because the same profitable corporations and wealthy special interests that are pushing down wages and making it harder for people to join together in unions are also funding efforts that hurt people of color, such as the fight in the courts to roll back the Voting Rights Act and to short-change political representation for communities with immigrant populations. These wealthy special interests oppose any efforts to limit their ability to pollute our air and water and lobby our governments to use tax money to subsidize wealthy fossil fuel companies.

Our movements—economic justice, racial justice, immigrant justice, gender and LGBTIQ equality and environmental justice—operate in the same economic system and confront the same adversaries.

Our movements can only be successful and achieve our vision for a just society if we unite to create real change.

SEIU members in their work have a chance to help and heal our planet and to be part of the global transformation affecting how low-income communities access affordable clean water and energy.

As one of the largest organizations of working people, the majority of whom are people of color, and as residents of communities hardest hit by environmental abuse and climate change, we are uniquely positioned to contribute to building a wider movement that creates fundamental change in our economic and political systems to win economic, racial, immigrant, gender and LGBTIQ equality and environmental justice.

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### Therefore, Be It Resolved;

1. SEIU will join the fight to make clean air and water a human right, for environmental justice in all communities, and to combat climate change, united with organizations of common interest.
2. SEIU will lead in broadening the environmental justice and climate movement by linking the struggles for economic, immigrant, racial, gender and LGBTIQ equality and environmental justice in our own work and holding bad actors accountable.
3. SEIU will commit to working with our brothers and sisters across the labor movement to insist that any transition from a fossil fuel dependent economy to a clean energy economy must provide for a just transition for all workers and communities whose lives and livelihoods will be impacted including: federal and state governmental action to require giant energy corporations to fund social services plus retraining and investment in hard-hit communities to create good-paying middle class jobs; government investment and support for retraining and job creation which includes assuring workers the right to organize unions at their workplace, and government policies that provide supplemental unemployment benefits for our members—and all workers—displaced by the conversion who cannot find jobs with comparable pay and benefits to the ones they've lost.
4. SEIU acknowledges both the urgency of our climate and pollution crisis and the need to develop millions of good jobs for the unemployed, the under-employed and for those affected by the shift away from fossil fuels. We will support efforts to transition to a planet-sustaining clean energy economy within a timeline recommended by the best science in order to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. As part of an energy transition, to meet the already urgent need to adapt to a changing climate and to seize opportunities presented by new green industries, we support policies to create millions of new, good jobs for working people in our countries. Moving forward, SEIU leaders will create a union-wide education and consciousness-raising program for all SEIU leaders, officers, staff and member leaders to equip us to act.
5. SEIU will continue to address climate and environmental justice through workplace initiatives that expand the scope of existing jobs to include innovative ways to affect energy, carbon emissions and sustainability. SEIU will push for a nationally accepted certification for workers across our industries and support universal training for new and incumbent workers, including contract workers, to support greener practices in buildings, schools and healthcare delivery systems. We will also push for investments to fund training programs at the federal and local levels.
6. SEIU will support measures calling for infrastructure investment to ensure that all people have access to safe drinking water and are not exposed to hazards in workplaces and their communities and will partner with others in this effort. The horrific poisoning of 100,000 people—primarily people of color—in Flint, Michigan demonstrates the grave and inequitable consequences when we fail to invest in a modern infrastructure.
7. As transporting people and goods by rail is substantially more energy efficient than doing so by truck, bus or automobile; SEIU will support efforts to fully fund, expand and oppose privatization of Amtrak, America's passenger rail system, and support major government investment in energy-efficient high-speed rail.
8. SEIU will continue to support measures, such as strong greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals, that aim to reduce the harmful air and water pollution that cause climate change both nationally and internationally

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by uniting with partners who are driving aspirational initiatives in states, at the federal level, and through capital strategies.

9. The green workgroup will work both independently and with a broader movement-building committee to work throughout the next four years on recommendations for how we accomplish the goals in this resolution.