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Speak Out Now

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Faced With a Climate Catastrophe, What Will We Do?

April 22, Earth Day, is a day to celebrate the natural world for its wonder and beauty, and the life that it provides for all living species. The activists, who created Earth Day 49 years ago, knew that if we destroy our planet, we will destroy ourselves. For decades scientists at the best universities and some of the world's largest corporations have understood the horrific impact that capitalist production has on our planet. But for decades the corporations and politicians have ignored the problem that their system creates.

We are facing an environmental catastrophe. The United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world's leading international body on climate change, recently reported that the world has 12 years to totally reorganize society to avoid the collapse of our environment. Many scientists say this is a conservative estimate. We face a situation that no other society has confronted. We will either totally change this system or we will watch our world collapse.

Last month, Mozambique and other countries in southern Africa experienced the most destructive cyclone in their history. Whole cities were destroyed, over 1,000 people were killed and a million displaced. In the past two weeks "bomb cyclones" have hit from Colorado to Minnesota with record winds and snowfall, followed by massive flooding. At the same time, tornados ripped through the south and northeast U.S. This past fall, California experienced the most destructive fires in its history, destroying an entire town.

Scientists who study the climate, explain what our future will look like, if we continue as is. They take the current level of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in our atmosphere and compare it to previous periods in the Earth's geological history. CO₂ is a major gas that traps the sun's energy in our atmosphere, creating a greenhouse effect that maintains the earth's

temperature. Increasing the amount of CO₂, traps heat – leading to an overall warming of the earth.

Every year the capitalist economy releases ten billion tons of carbon, from the burning of oil, gas, and coal, into the atmosphere. This rate is at least ten times faster than anything in the geological record for the past 300 million years! Our oceans and forests absorb much of the carbon in the air. But as the ocean warms, increasing amounts of CO₂ can't be absorbed. And as the world's forests, especially in the Amazon and Congo, are destroyed through massive logging, more CO₂ stays in the atmosphere, trapping the heat and adding to global warming. The consequences are hard to imagine.

The majority of the Earth's fresh water is stored as ice in glaciers, which are melting. The water from melting glaciers flowing into the oceans is causing sea level rise. Pacific islanders have already been forced to leave their island homes. As sea levels rise, coastal cities will be flooded. Millions more will become climate refugees. Food production will be severely impacted because of droughts. The current changes in the Earth's climate and weather patterns threaten much greater environmental catastrophe if something isn't done now.

The governments around the world have shown that they will continue to allow business as usual, because they represent the fossil fuel industry, the banks, investment firms and other global corporations. They certainly do not represent the 99% of us!

We cannot accept this suicidal system. On March 15th, almost 1.5 million young people from over 123 countries took to the streets to demand change. They know the world's political misleaders have failed us. They say we have to be the ones to save ourselves, and our planet. We need to join them and act as if our lives and future depend on our actions -- because they do!