

## **Resolution on Renewing Our Commitment to Combating Climate Change**

*Adopted by the 2021 Delegates Assembly*

Sponsored by Jewish Community Relations Council of Silicon Valley, Jewish Community Relations Council of Portland, Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston, Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Rochester, Union for Reform Judaism, and Rabbinical Assembly

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs has been a strong advocate for combating climate change, which is one of the greatest threats we face. A 2019 United Nations report warns of a looming ecological disaster that will endanger not only countless species, but ultimately humanity itself. Now more than ever, there is an urgency to renew and strengthen our commitment to address this global crisis. In the past five years, the climate crisis has substantially worsened. According to the U.S. Department of the Interior, climate trends have moved substantially in the wrong direction:

- Temperatures are rising worldwide due to greenhouse gases trapping more heat in the atmosphere, which is in turn heating the oceans and impacting climate everywhere.
- Higher ocean temperatures have produced more severe storms and floods, while higher temperatures overall have resulted in more severe droughts, wildfires and water shortages due to shrinking snowpack.
- Glaciers are melting at a faster rate along with sea ice in the Arctic and Antarctic, raising sea levels and threatening coastal communities and estuarine ecosystems.
- Higher northern temperatures have begun melting the permafrost, releasing methane and producing a vicious cycle that accelerates further warming.

Sustaining the environment is an important component of the Jewish value *l'ovdah ul'shomrah*, “to till it and tend it” (Gen. 2:15), and *yishuvo shel olam*, that we further God’s intention to maintain a habitable world. Responding to this challenge is equally motivated by the principle of *pikuach nefesh*, that one who saves a life, saves the entire world.

Recent events call out for action. Climate change is exacerbating existing racial and socioeconomic inequities. Climate hazards and natural disasters are harming marginalized, low-income and vulnerable communities – particularly Communities of Color – at accelerating rates around the world. There is a growing number of climate refugees leaving regions increasingly uninhabitable due to flood, fire, drought, rising sea levels, and conflict over dwindling natural resources. Failure to address climate change now will have catastrophic and irreversible consequences.

### **The Jewish Council for Public Affairs:**

- Reaffirms that climate change “is an overarching concern at this moment and for the long-term future. It touches on all social justice issues with which we engage. We must

bring Dr. Martin Luther King's 'fierce urgency of now' to our efforts to adapt, to reduce, and ultimately to reverse climate change and its consequences." (JCPA Climate Change Resolution, 2016)

- Believes that climate change poses an existential threat to humanity. The scientific consensus is that we have no more than a decade to reverse climate change before suffering catastrophic consequences.
- Believes that climate change is a:
  - Planetary issue, and international cooperation is integral to halting and adapting to this crisis. It is imperative that the U.S. uphold and strengthen international agreements, not only by rejoining the Paris Accords, but by modeling bold action and rallying international leaders to cut emissions even more aggressively.
  - National security and human rights issue, as floods and droughts disrupt food production and destabilize governments, contributing to conflict and resulting in a growing tide of climate refugees throughout the world.
  - Public health issue that directly impacts quality of life. It disproportionately affects underserved and minority communities, widening the equity gap in our society and harming societal health.
  - Racial justice and socioeconomic issue felt disproportionately by people of color and low-income communities around the globe. We must ensure that these vulnerable populations, both in the U.S. and internationally, do not suffer an undue burden of climate change, environmental destruction, and impacts of pollution.
- Acknowledges that our long-term economic health is intertwined with environmental sustainability; it is not one or the other.
- Believes it is critical that the U.S., as a disproportionate contributor to climate change, take a leadership role in the promotion of greater global collaboration to combat this crisis.

**The Jewish community relations field should:**

- Educate ourselves and our communities and demand that our leaders be guided by the best available science, listening to climate scientists as they advance understanding of the threats and challenges, as well as work together towards achieving climate justice.
- Collaborate with environmental leaders, advocacy groups and concerned citizens to publicize the importance of this issue and take action locally in response to climate change.

- Support and advocate for programs, policies, and regulations at all levels of government, including, but not limited to:
  - Reducing carbon dioxide and other environmentally harmful emissions, including through efforts to keep fossil fuels in the ground, e.g., moratoriums and/or tax disincentives on new coal leases on public land and prohibitions on drilling for oil in the Arctic and off our coastlines.
  - Encouraging development of carbon sequestration technologies.
  - Supporting public and private investment in carbon-free, clean energy, mass transit, high-density housing and other initiatives that mitigate climate change, which can also benefit the labor force and economy overall. As an example, economic recovery programs should invest in job placement and training for workers in transition from other energy industries and should benefit communities of color that disproportionately bear the burdens of climate change.
  - Providing communities with the resources and tools they need to adapt to the impacts of climate change.
  - Eliminating tax subsidies for oil and gas and supporting effective economic incentives and disincentives that accelerate the replacement of dirty sources of energy with clean, carbon-free-options such as solar and wind.
  - Improving standards for utilities and transportation that continually reduce pollution.
  - Enabling states to implement energy standards that set more efficient energy use and lower levels of pollution beyond those required by federal regulations.
  - Reducing the carbon footprint and water consumption of food production and promoting sustainable, locally sourced agriculture, including an end to federal subsidies to Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs).<sup>1</sup>
- Additionally, encourage Jewish institutions to:
  - Include a specific focus on the climate crisis through a lens of Jewish ideals and *tikkun olam* within the curricula of their education programs.
  - Encourage their clergy at all levels to elevate the importance of the climate crisis to the highest levels of Jewish concern for congregants.
  - Include a focus on the climate crisis within programming and outreach to both affiliated and non-affiliated Jews.

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<sup>1</sup> A CAFO, or Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation, is an industrial-sized livestock operation, which produces significant amounts of animal sewage and other pollutants.

- Include climate change impacts on their current building operations and within the plans for remodeling or new construction projects.
- Appoint someone to hold a designated sustainability portfolio.