

Twenty Years after the Founding of the Durban Group for Climate Justice, Carbon Markets Are Expanding alongside Resistance and Critiques

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As the 29th UN Climate Conference (COP29) plods toward another conclusion dominated by corporate-dominated false solutions, the Durban Group for Climate Justice is highlighting the critique against the carbon market that they pioneered twenty years ago at their founding meeting.

In October 2004, activists representing diverse organizations and networks from around the globe came together in Durban, South Africa to strategize about the risks of the then-emerging carbon markets. Now, after 20 years of fraud, market failures (and extreme price volatility), human rights abuses, violence and violation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and communities located near polluters, we, as the Durban Group for Climate Justice, reaffirm our commitment to stopping carbon markets, including carbon offsets. These are not merely false solutions to the climate crisis, they have fundamentally legitimised the continuation and increase of emissions from burning fossil fuels.

As the Paris Agreement aims to expand global carbon markets through Article 6, our original statement remains extremely relevant today. It is in this spirit that we share our statement from 2004 in order to demonstrate the importance of our original message and continue to demand Climate Justice Now!

[The Durban Declaration on Carbon Trading](#)

Statements from Durban Group Founders and Participants

“The meeting of twenty years ago is even more relevant today as we continue to face the onslaught of the polluters who put their profits before the well-being of the people and planet.”

Desmond D'Sa
Goldman Prize 2014
South Durban Community Environmental Alliance
South Africa

“The anti-solutions that we spoke out against in Durban in 2004 are today still being pursued and adopted by ruling elites everywhere: by neoliberals, by fascists, by extractivists, by oligarchs, by kleptocrats, by social democrats, by progressives, by socialists, even by self-styled anti-imperialists. More than ever, the ‘carbon management’ approach to climate must be contested no matter who its sponsors are.”

Larry Lohmann
The Corner House
UK

“Our founding document of the Durban Group remains relevant because the conditions in which it was drafted continue to prevail. Twenty years have passed, twenty climate conferences, and environmental collapse is only deepening and accelerating. And there is no point in setting national targets for emissions

reductions, or trying to measure this collapse in carbon, or determining points of no return, or designing adaptations and mitigations, or planning energy transitions. None of these have been able to slow the expansion of the oil industry and the climate crisis.”

Marcelo Calazans
FASE-ES and Oilwatch Latinoamerica
Brazil

“The Durban Declaration came at the right time. Not only to denounce what are called ‘false solutions’ to global warming, such as carbon offsets, but also to complement the proposals that organisations from the South put forward at the time: leaving hydrocarbons in the ground as the real and effective way to combat climate change. Today, there is a global clamour to stop extracting and burning oil, gas or coal; soon the same will happen with carbon offsets, and more and more voices will be raised to eliminate them once and for all.”

Ivonne Yáñez
Acción Ecológica
Ecuador

“Carbon trading is the solution proposed by those who think nature can be saved only if there is profit in it. They may indeed turn a profit as they prolong the use of fossil fuels. They reveal themselves as the agents of destruction.”

Bobby Peek
groundWork, Friends of the Earth
South Africa

“Two decades have gone by since the gathering in South Africa. Taking the Durban Declaration back to Indigenous spiritual authorities it was interpreted through ceremonies that this marketing and trading of carbon in the Whiteman world is a violation of the Sacred. They said it was all about money but said it was about the control of air, of the trees and eventually all of Life. They said it will not be easy to change the minds of these people, and many have no heart. They said it will feed the big black snake and the giants that will eat the souls of all people, telling untruths with many temptations with false promises of making a better life. The spiritual authorities said it would be a long fight but never give up. Since 2004, I have witnessed all this to come true. The Durban Declaration on Carbon Trading and our Durban Group for Climate Justice is needed more than ever, to prevent the slavery of Mother Earth, Father Sky and all Life as we know it.”

Tom BK Goldtooth
Executive Director
Indigenous Environmental Network

“Despite the carbon market's record of fraud, human rights abuses, violation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and an utter failure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, COP29 is considering expanding carbon markets through Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. This is complete madness from the perspective of addressing the climate crisis. It only makes sense for Big Polluters, who are using carbon markets to continue their destructive operations for as long as possible, and for those hoping to profit from carbon trading.”

Chris Lang
REDD-Monitor
Germany

“After the Durban Group emerged in 2004, the REDD mechanism, based on carbon trading, was launched and promised to be a cheap and efficient mechanism to control deforestation and mitigate climate change. Twenty years later, deforestation has further increased because REDD never was about halting extractive industries from destroying forests. It has rather blamed forest-dependent communities for deforestation and invaded communities’ lands with carbon tree plantation projects. It has proven to be a colonial, racist and patriarchal mechanism, a massive land grab, with communities losing control over their territory, losing autonomy and food sovereignty. In spite of its complete failure, nowadays there is a new wave of forest carbon projects, but also a stronger resistance that needs to be strengthened.”

**International Secretariat
World Rainforest Movement**

“The reason for the hosting site choice of Durban for the 2004 meeting was in large part the heroic efforts of Black community activist Sajida Khan to prevent a methane-gas-to-energy project at the Bisasar Road landfill next to her house. (It was located there by the then apartheid municipality in 1980, and even since, thousands of Black residents petitioned and marched for its closure.) The World Bank’s Ken Newcombe – who was recently indicted for widespread carbon market fraud at C-Quest Capital – had in 2002 pushed the ruling African National Congress to reverse a promised landfill closure, made during the first democratic election in 1994. His aim was to keep the dump (Africa’s largest) operative, so as to generate more methane and thus more carbon-offset profits. Due to toxic emissions from the dump, Khan died of cancer in 2007. The offset financial model crashed by the 2010s, because of extreme volatility in carbon pricing and global elites’ failure to authorise sufficient emissions cuts to undergird the strategy, known locally as the ‘privatisation of the air.’ By all accounts, it was a failure. Khan’s inspiration and efforts to raise awareness will never be forgotten.”

**Professor Patrick Bond
Centre for Social Change
University of Johannesburg**

“Carbon markets, pricing and offsets are flawed concepts and have demonstrated failure every time. As Article 6 of the Paris Agreement is forced through the UNFCCC at COP29, we are witnessing a desperate move by wealthy colonial governments and elites to shore up these false solutions. Carbon markets issue pollution permits to the biggest polluters on the planet causing the climate crisis and allow entrance to a market where they use these permits and credits to play the markets and profit off of the climate crisis. As removals are introduced into this new global market we must stand together to reject all carbon markets that distract from real action. The Rights of Indigenous Peoples and phasing out fossil fuels should be centered. The Durban Declaration is relevant 20 years on! Climate Justice Now!”

**Tamra Gilbertson
Climate Justice Program Coordinator
Indigenous Environmental Network**

“The absurd nature of selling CO₂ credits, i.e. privatizing the air, was first called out by the Durban Group for Climate Justice. Despite the overwhelming evidence provided by the Durban Group through the crucial book [*Carbon Trading*](#) nearly 20 years ago, global corporate and government elites continue to escalate carbon credit absurdism through ever more economically complicated and technologically unfeasible false solutions designed to enable the ongoing burning of fossil fuels and mass overconsumption by countries of the global north and elites in the global south. In carbon market and false solution schemes broadly, forests have become central. Today absurdist schemes include saving forests as carbon offsets while simultaneously escalating the global demand for wood for the absurdly named “green economy.” This scheme includes developing new varieties of genetically modified trees for

vast forest-destroying plantations, in order to supposedly “replace” the massive demand for fossil fuels with wood in manufacturing and fuel production. As Biologist Dr. Rachel Smolker pointed out, just using wood to replace liquid fuels would require six planets worth of land. We must move away from absurdism and back into a realism that, though hard to look at, must be honestly confronted and addressed. That has always been the purpose of the Durban Group.”

Anne Petermann
Executive Director
Global Justice Ecology Project
International Coordinator
Campaign to STOP Genetically Engineered Trees

“Carbon trading is a fundamentally defunct idea. Carbon credits are permits to pollute that are set up to benefit polluters resisting to undertake real changes. They can never work as they inherently invite environmental destruction, fraud, corruption and abuses of Indigenous Peoples’ rights, human rights and land rights. And fundamentally - in a world where every society ultimately needs to cut emissions to zero, there is simply no rationale for creating markets for permits to pollute. Yet the fantasy of markets and offsets is expanding, even into terrifying new areas such as solar geoengineering. Challenging corporate power and transforming our societies to people-centred, equitable and socially just societies is what matters, and the only thing that will deal with the root causes of the climate crisis just as the Durban Declaration stated 20 years ago.”

Niclas Hallstrom
What Next?
Sweden