The Sink or Swim Project by Delaney Reynolds (delaney@miamisearise.com)

I founded The Sink or Swim Project in late 2014 to educate, inform and engage people of all ages about global climate change and especially the risks that Florida and our planet faces from sea level rise.  What began as research for a book that I am writing for young adults about sea level rise has evolved into a broad educational and advocacy initiative that includes a website ([www.miamisearise.com](http://www.miamisearise.com/)) filled with information, live lectures in a variety of venues ranging from classrooms and college campuses to community groups, global Skype sessions with students in other countries,  community activism on environmental topics and social media including a periodic blog (<http://miamisearise.com/delaneys-blog/>).

Concerns over ‘green house’ gases as a threat to our planet are not, of course, new concepts and have been expressed by environmental leaders for decades. What is different today, and I see this in peoples’ reactions when I lecture, is that our society has begun to understand that these are now dire concerns, that the damage has begun and that people, especially children, want solutions to this growing problem. As I explain to adult groups, ‘Kids Get It’, we understand that smoke pouring out of a factory or car or a truck is not healthy for our planet and must stop. I see this most vividly when I speak to groups of children and while some adults want to deny that fossil fuels and other established habits are not a problem, our youngest citizens know better. Today’s youth is not tied to politics or special interests and we very much want (and need) the adults that are in charge today, today’s voters for example, to (please) help lead the way towards the changes that our future requires to solve this profound problem.

Although South Florida is often called ‘ground zero’ for sea rise in America, children all over the world understand that this is a problem that my generation must solve. I was, for example, proud to be contacted in December by the Principal of the Skindia Vidalaya School for Girls in Gwalior, India to present my lecture to their students. It was a humbling experience to sit in front of a monitor at 11 PM at night here in Miami and be connected by Skype with their class 10.5 hours ‘ahead’ of me the next morning. It was also inspiring to hear and see that these young women have the same concerns that I face over these topics and, like me, want the adults in their lives to start solving the problem rather than leaving it to my generation.  To learn about my new friends in India please follow this link; <http://miamisearise.com/2015/12/28/from-india-with-love/>.

More recently I have collaborated with students in Vietnam on a sea level rise video that they are making and, like my work with the students in India, these experiences not only mean that The Sink or Swim Project is having a global impact, but prove that my concerns here in the United States are shared by children all over the world. The students in Vietnam, just like those in India, are deeply concerned about our warming planet and the need to take action today, before it’s too late.

The Sink or Swim Project has also been active in seeking advocacy for climate justice for our planet and all of its people. For example, last fall when I learned that the Mayor of Miami-Dade County had proposed a budget that spanned three large books and 1,000 pages, yet mentioned climate change just once, near the end, and did not allocate a penny towards the problem, I felt that I needed to help. I wrote blogs about the proposed budget, attended the Budget Hearing and asked the Commission to allocate $1,000,000.00 towards the problem. I am proud to report that as a result of my advocacy and that of many others that the Commission voted to allocate  $300,000.00 as well as created Miami-Dade’s very first Chief Sustainability Officer and, while these are only small steps, they are steps in the right direction and illustrate that even a child can have a voice and an impact. It would be enormously helpful if today’s adults would be active in demanding that our local, state and federal government create legislation and solutions to help end our reliance on fossil fuels and, instead, demand sustainable energy such as solar power be everywhere. One day, in fact, I hope that The Sunshine State can be turned into The Solar State because solar power has become so common! To learn more about my work with the Mayor and Miami-Dade Commission last year, please follow this link;<http://miamisearise.com/2015/09/26/raindrops-keep-falling-on-my-head/>.

While I understand that I am only 16 and have a lifetime to learn and live, what I already know is that the threat that every corner of planet faces from global warming and sea rise is so significant that we do not have even a day to waste. Within my lifetime seas will rise at least two to three feet based on the carbon mankind has already pumped into our atmosphere and oceans. Experts predict increases of six to 10 feet, or more, are possible by 2100 if our society does not dramatically change its behaviors.

Places that millions of people and I love, places like the Florida Keys, the Everglades, and Miami Beach, may become extinct, lost forever. America’s only living coral barrier reef (South Florida’s Biscayne National Park), the third longest in the world, is at risk of becoming extinct during my lifetime from carbon acidification and with it an entire, critical ecosystem would be destroyed. People’s lives, way of life, and entire economies are in danger. Literally no aspect of our planet or society can escape the threats from global warming and sea rise.

For these reasons and many others, the time has come for all citizens of the world to decide whether we want our planet to sink or swim. I would ask those in charge today, today’s adults and voters, parents and grandparents, to please work furiously to help change our long standing behaviors. To begin the process to wean our society from the use of fossil fuels. To create laws to implement solar power and other sustainable energy solutions everywhere. To demand that our political leaders place warming and sea rise at the very top of their daily agendas. To learn more about my views, views shared by children all over the world, please consider watching not only the trailer but the entire 10 part series Ahead of the Tide ([www.aheadofthetide.org](http://www.aheadofthetide.org/)) starting with the trailer that can be found by visiting this link:  <https://vimeo.com/152621948>

Morally, working to leave our planet in better shape, shaping laws today that will help your children and grandchildren protect our planet and culture in the future, is the right thing for you to do. On behalf of all of the world’s children in my generation, please know that we would not only appreciate your help on these important topics but we, and our planet, expect and deserve it. Thank you.