

2016 Greenfield Peace Writing Scholarship 2nd Place Entry

by Caroline Friesen, Lincoln High School, Portland, OR

In today's political arena, climate change is often addressed as an issue entirely separate from issues such as national security. In fact, discussions about climate change are often put on the back burner when events that threaten national security occur. However, these two issues are inextricably linked. Climate change creates the conditions in many nations around the world for conflict, extremism, dictatorships, and oppression to occur, which are only further exacerbated by events our changing climate has brought us: flooding, droughts, storms, and the depletion of resources. It is only by recognizing and understanding how closely tied these two issues are, and addressing these problems in tandem instead of separately, that we can, as a global community, attempt to achieve a more just and peaceful world.

In recent months, Paris has become an example to the world on how to handle both the issues of terrorism and climate change. Following the attacks in France's capital in mid-November, many suspected the scheduled global climate talks would be postponed or even cancelled. However, the talks proceeded as planned, and the nations involved reached an agreement. All nations who participated in the talks pledged to lower CO₂ emissions and important steps were taken towards halting the effects of climate change.

Worldwide, smaller grassroots movements have also been making large impacts on the progression towards a solution. In Sussex, England, a community came together to protest fracking in their community and then helped start a new company to provide energy in a more sustainable, renewable way. In Canada, the Beaver Lake Cree Nation stood up for their rights and demanded the stop of tar sands drilling, which is eroding their homeland. These movements represent small successes on a global scale, but when combined, they have the potential to bring about real and significant change.

Successful movements such as these give a voice to those who have been marginalized or unfairly targeted by large, power-hungry corporations, as well as by climate change itself. By giving people in third world countries the resources to combat climate change and by taking responsibility for their contribution to climate change and doing their part to halt it, wealthy first world countries can help bring about a more just and equitable world. Taking responsibility for and recognizing the way in which colonialism on the part of first world countries has negatively impacted the ability of third world countries to respond to issues such as these is one important step that needs to be taken. A small success for this issue has already been achieved: At the Paris talks, leaders put in place a provision to set up a fund for third world countries such as these.

By halting and reversing the effects of climate change, especially in countries that are being subjected to violence, oppression, and disaster, we can reverse the conditions that have led to these damaging conflicts. Extreme weather events could become fewer and farther between, and increased levels of stability could be returned to countries and communities around the globe. By working hard and being dedicated to creating successful movements to combat climate change, we can bring about a more peaceful world. And by practicing empathy and understanding the worldwide struggle that people are facing due to climate change, a more just and peaceful world can become a tangible reality. As the Dalai Lama said, "peace is not just the mere absence of violence. Peace is, I think, the manifestation of human compassion."