

Northwest Organizers Attend Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit

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Editor's Note: As Views goes to press, environmental justice organizers from around the country are preparing to gather October 23 – 27 in Washington DC. In this article two Northwest participants address the history of the gathering and the goals of Summit II.

In 1991, over 1,000 national and international environmental justice activists attended the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, DC. Mobilizing people of color and indigenous activists to challenge environmental racism, the Summit was probably the single most important event in the environmental justice movement's history.



Indigenous rights activists Corbin Harney, Norm Harry and Darlene Gardipe at the CSTI plenary, "Environmental Attacks: Native Perspectives."

The Summit developed a shared analysis about the ways in which communities of color are disproportionately affected by and bear the brunt of environmental atrocities. Shared, too, was agreement that federal agencies

charged with enforcing civil rights laws fail to address this form of discrimination.

Participants recognized the need to create a grassroots movement that would address environmental racism. From the Summit came the platform upon which the environmental justice movement was built. The "Principles of Environmental Justice" established now guide environmental justice values and policy (see box).

Over the past decade, the environmental justice movement has grown in numbers and expanded to

take on global and international issues.

Environmental justice organizers decided to convene a Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit to recognize the significant strides, achievements and milestones made to date; to share information on emerging issues; and to energize the movement and galvanize support.

While the first Summit focused on convening people of color and indigenous peoples from the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico and Mexico, Summit II extends the movement further by including a youth component. This is the first ever national/ international gathering of youth of color environmental justice organizers. Youth organizers will come together to articulate principles for the youth environmental justice movement.

Following the precedent set in the first Summit, planning for Summit II is led by a committee made up of 47 members from diverse racial/ethnic, cultural, geographic, gender, and organizing backgrounds. Coordination is provided by the United Church of Christ, whose Commission for Racial Justice convened Summit I.

Yalonda Sindè, Executive Director of Seattle's Community Coalition for Environmental Justice, is on the Summit II planning committee and is helping to raise money for members of the Northwest Environmental Justice Alliance (NEJA) to attend.

"Too often the environmental justice issues affecting communities of color in the Northwest are overlooked," Sindè says. "We want to ensure that Northwest environmental justice activists have the opportunity to have their issues heard by a national audience."



PRINCIPLES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: PREAMBLE

WE, THE PEOPLE OF COLOR, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to insure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples, do affirm and adopt these Principles of Environmental Justice.

Go to www.summit2.org to read the full text of the seventeen Principles adopted October 27, 1991.