

In 1991, the People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C. brought together more than 300 African, Latino, Asian and Native American activists from all 50 states and throughout the Americas. The three day summit was not about responding to the environmental movement, but rather reaffirming the connection of people of color to the land, and our understanding that environmental issues are linked to economic, racial and social justice. The following statement of principles was adopted by the summit on October 27th, 1991.

Principles of Environmental Justice

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 reestablish 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:

1. Environmental justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
2. Environmental justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
3. Environmental justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
4. Environmental justice calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water and food.
5. Environmental justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
6. Environmental justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
7. Environmental justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.
8. Environmental justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment, without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
9. Environmental justice protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparation for damages as well as quality health care.

10. Environmental justice considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.
11. Environmental justice must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples in the US government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants which impose upon the US government a paramount obligation and responsibility to affirm the sovereignty and self-determination of the indigenous peoples whose lands it occupies and holds in trust.
12. Environmental justice affirms the need for an urban and rural ecological policy to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and providing fair access for all to the full range of resources.
13. Environmental justice calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.
14. Environmental justice opposes the destructive operations of multinational corporations.
15. Environmental justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures and other life forms.
16. Environmental justice calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.
17. Environmental justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and to make the conscious decision to challenge and re-prioritize our lifestyle to insure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

From the JVCNW Covenant:

SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE: We work for justice by being aware of how our attitudes and behavior affect others. Our awareness urges us to change the attitudes and structures which create poverty, perpetuate oppression, and destroy ecological systems. Solidarity demands that we create change by working alongside the poor, oppressed, and vulnerable. After change has been achieved we foster reconciliation.

- I will seek truth rather than relying on prejudices, assumptions, rumor and incomplete information.
- I will strive to be just in my attitudes, language, and actions.
- I will strive to recognize and celebrate the worth of my life and the lives of others, no matter how different, in the community where we live and serve.
- I will work and live in solidarity with people who are poor, oppressed and vulnerable toward the goal of structural change in the attitudes, practices and institutions of our society.
- I will act in accordance with my ethical beliefs and responsibilities. I will live in such a way that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

As you prepare to enter your locale and placement, here are some questions to reflect on in connection to ecological justice. Think about answering these questions now as you arrive in your locale, and then taking an opportunity to come back and answer the questions again later in your year after you've had a chance to learn more throughout your JV year.

- What are the environmental justice issues that may be present in your locale? Are there any that may be present in your placement?

- How might you see ecological injustice intersect with other social injustice?

- What communities and learning opportunities can you connect with on your local, national and global scale around ecological justice?

- What would an ecologically/environmentally just community look like in your locale?

