

# A Manifesto for Environmental Justice: The Chain of Survival

**Meta Description:** Environmental justice is humanity's survival test. Explore the five pillars—air, food, energy, climate, and resources—through real stories of injustice and hope.

## Introduction: Questions We Can No Longer Ignore

When was the last time you took a breath of air and wondered if it was killing you? When was the last time you looked at your plate and asked if food is still a right—or a privilege? When was the last time you switched on a light and thought about who lives in darkness while you glow in comfort? When was the last time you watched the weather change, not as a season, but as a disaster? And when was the last time you asked the earth for permission before tearing from it its forests, rivers, and minerals? These are not rhetorical questions. They are survival questions. They form a chain—air, food, energy, climate, resources. Break one link, and the others strain. Break them all, and civilization shatters.

## The Right to Breathe: Justice in the Air

The air we breathe is invisible, but its absence—or its poison—becomes violently visible. A winter morning in Delhi looks like a smoky battlefield. Children walk to school, coughing through a haze so dense it swallows the sun. Doctors call it the equivalent of smoking 50 cigarettes a day. But their families cannot leave. They cannot buy purifiers. They must breathe what is given to them. Cross continents to Louisiana's "Cancer Alley," where mostly Black neighborhoods live under the shadow of petrochemical plants. Children there learn the names of cancers before they learn multiplication tables. Their backyards are pipelines, their playgrounds toxic. Meanwhile, in wealthy capitals, some sip oxygen at "oxygen bars." The obscenity is unbearable. Clean air is not a luxury. It must be a constitutional right—protected for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, or income.

## Food as Justice, Not Privilege

Food is dignity. It is life. And yet hunger is humanity's most shameful wound. In Brazil, the Zero Hunger program linked school meals with small farmers. Malnutrition dropped, children stayed in school, and farmers thrived. A government's choice turned despair into dignity. In Yemen, blockades starved families. Mothers boiled leaves or fed their children bread dipped in tea. Hunger there is not about scarcity. It is about injustice. Even in rich nations, food deserts trap the poor. In U.S. cities, supermarkets waste tons while children go to bed hungry. Hunger is not the absence of food. It is the absence of fairness. Justice demands food be treated as a legal right. No child should suffer malnutrition while warehouses overflow with grain.

## Energy: Power for All, Not the Few

To flip a switch should not be a privilege. In rural Kenya, a girl studies under a kerosene lamp. The smoke scars her lungs. Her neighbor, with a solar home kit from M-KOPA,

studies under clean light. One spark alters her future. Bangladesh has already electrified millions of rural homes with small-scale solar. Yet globally, 750 million people remain in darkness while fossil fuel companies collect record profits. Energy is not just technology. It is power. Denying it to the poor denies them opportunity. Governments must transition to renewables, retrain fossil fuel workers, and fund community-owned energy. Because no one should be left in the dark.

## Climate: Protecting the Vulnerable First

Climate change is universal, but its cruelty is selective. When Hurricane Katrina struck, it was poor Black neighborhoods that drowned first and rebuilt last. When Pakistan's floods drowned one-third of the nation, it was the rural poor who lost homes and futures. When Tuvalu sinks, it will be the powerless who vanish—though they contributed almost nothing to global emissions. This is climate apartheid. The poor pay for the emissions of the rich. Justice demands reparations. Wealthy nations built prosperity on carbon; they owe adaptation funds to vulnerable countries. Drought-resistant crops, cyclone-proof housing, flood defenses—these are not handouts. They are repayments.

## Resources: From Exploitation to Consent

Every tree felled, every mine dug, every river dammed tells the same story: extraction without consent. Indigenous peoples, guardians of 80% of global biodiversity, are rarely asked permission. Instead, they are displaced or criminalized. Yet their stewardship protects the planet. Ecuador showed another way: granting legal rights to nature itself, and voting in 2023 to halt drilling in the Yasuní National Park. Life over oil. Consent over extraction. True justice demands Free, Prior, and Informed Consent for any project. It demands accountability for ecocide. It demands recognition that ecosystems have rights, because without them, human rights cannot exist.

## The Chain of Justice

Air. Food. Energy. Climate. Resources. They are not separate debates. They are links in the same chain—the chain of survival. Environmental justice is not charity. It is a shield for all people—regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. It means no poisoned neighborhoods, no starving children, no dark villages, no climate refugees, no stolen lands. Governments must act with courage: • Write environmental rights into law. • Redirect subsidies from destruction to sustainability. • Empower communities with consent. • Prosecute polluters, not victims. History will not remember our excuses. It will remember our choices. No poisoned breath. No empty plates. No dark homes. No abandoned villages. No stolen lands. Environmental justice is humanity's final test.

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