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A New Declaration

by Derrick Jensen on Feb 1, 2012

We hold these truths to be self-evident:

That the real, physical world is the source of our own lives, and the lives of others. A weakened planet is less capable of supporting life, human or otherwise.

Thus the health of the real world is primary, more important than any social or economic system, because all social or economic systems are dependent upon a living planet.

It is self-evident that to value a social system that harms the planet's capacity to support life over life itself is to be out of touch with physical reality.

That any way of life based on the use of nonrenewable resources is by definition not sustainable.

That any way of life based on the hyper-exploitation of renewable resources is by definition not sustainable: if, for example, fewer salmon return every year, eventually there will be none. This means that for a way of life to be sustainable, it must not harm native communities: native prairies, native forests, native fisheries, and so on.

That the real world is interdependent, such that harm done to rivers harms those humans and nonhumans whose lives depend on these rivers, harms forests and prairies and wetlands surrounding these rivers, harms the oceans into which these rivers flow. Harm done to mountains harms the rivers flowing through them. Harm done to oceans harms everyone directly or indirectly connected to them.

That you cannot argue with physics. If you burn carbon-based fuels, this carbon will go into the air, and have effects in the real world.

That creating and releasing poisons into the world will poison humans and nonhumans.

That no one, no matter how rich or powerful, should be allowed to create poisons for which there is no antidote.

That no one, no matter how rich or powerful, should be allowed to create messes that cannot be cleaned up.

That no one, no matter how rich or powerful, should be allowed to destroy places humans or nonhumans need to survive.

That no one, no matter how rich or powerful, should be allowed to drive human cultures or nonhuman species extinct.

That reality trumps all belief systems: what you believe is not nearly so important as what is real.

That on a finite planet you cannot have an economy based on or requiring growth. At least you cannot have one and expect to either have a planet or a future.

That the current way of life is not sustainable, and will collapse. The only real questions are what will be left of the world after that collapse, and how bad things will be for the humans and nonhumans who come after. We hold it as self-evident that we should do all that we can to make sure that as much of the real, physical world remains intact until the collapse of the current system, and that humans and nonhumans should be as prepared as possible for this collapse.

That the health of local economies are more important than the health of a global economy.

That a global economy should not be allowed to harm local economies or land bases.

That corporations are not living beings. They are certainly not human beings.

That corporations do not in any real sense exist. They are legal fictions. Limited liability corporations are institutions created explicitly to separate humans from the effects of their actions—making them, by definition, inhuman and inhumane. To the degree that we desire to live in a human and humane world—and, really, to the degree that we wish to survive—limited liability corporations need to be eliminated.

That the health of human and nonhuman communities is more important than the profits of corporations.

We hold it as self-evident, as the Declaration of Independence states, “That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends [Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness], it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it. . . .” Further, we hold it as self-evident that it would be more precise to say that it is not the Right of the People, nor even their responsibility, but instead something more like breathing—something that if we fail to do we die.

If we as a People fail to rid our communities of destructive institutions, those institutions will destroy our communities. And if we in our communities cannot provide meaningful and nondestructive ways for people to gain food, clothing, and shelter then we must recognize it's not just specific destructive institutions but the entire economic system that is pushing the natural world past breaking points. Capitalism is killing the planet. Industrial civilization is killing the planet.

Once we've recognized the destructiveness of capitalism and industrial civilization—both of which are based on systematically converting a living planet into dead commodities—we've no choice, unless we wish to sign our own and our children's death warrants, but to fight for all we're worth and in every way we can to overturn it.