People Of Color Leadership Summit On The Environment

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African American, Native American, Hispanic American, and Asian American delegates from every state in the nation will attend the historic “First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit” on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., October 24-27, 1991. These sisters and brothers will be joined by other delegates from Puerto Rico, Central and South America, Africa and the South Pacific.

The problem of environmental racism is both a national and an international crisis. People of color communities are deliberately being targeted for toxic pollution, dumping, and a vast array of different types of environmental injustices.

As a direct response and challenge to this growing problem, the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ is sponsoring this important leadership gathering. The process to plan and develop the coordination of the “Summit” is itself a testimony to the viability of multiracial and multicultural struggle and “movement-building” forums as effective future strategies to confront institutional racism.

The Gulf Coast Tenants Association, the Southwest Organizing Project and a host of other national and regional organizations have joined in the support of the summit.

For the first time in the history of this nation, grassroots and national leaders from the Native American, African American, Hispanic American, and Asian American communities, who are actively involved in the struggle for environmental justice, will have the opportunity to be together in the same place to discuss, debate, reach consensus, and to agree on a national plan of action.

The major goals of The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit are: (1) To facilitate an ongoing process for people of color leaders to strengthen their national, regional, and local organizations and communities which are involved in challenging environmental injustice; (2) To provide an opportunity to initiate dialogue between people of color leaders.

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At the same time, the environmental leaders of the national organizations; (3) to identify key environmental policy questions from the perspective of people of color leadership; and (4) to impact the decision-making process in public policy in the interests of environmental justice at the federal, state, and municipal levels.

The “Leadership Summit” will also adopt a set of “Principles of Environmental Justice” which will help guide the strengthening of the future movement. The draft of one of the principles states, “Environmental policy must be based on justice for all without discrimination due to race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, or culture.”

Dr. Robert Bullard of the University of California at Riverside stated, “Persons of color who live in waste site areas are often victims of a “double whammy” in that they are exposed to elevated risks associated with living in polluted environments at the same time they have problems getting access to health and medical facilities.”

Environmental racism is racial discrimination in environmental policy making. It is an institutionalized form of racism that seeks to camouflage itself while causing untold destruction and severe risks for people of color communities.

It is hoped that the results of the Summit will make a positive difference for environmental justice for all.