Statements from briefing call announcing EARTHRISE and global plans for 50th anniversary of Earth Day
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Denis Hayes
Board Chair Emeritus, Earth Day Network; President, Bullitt Foundation

On Wednesday, April 22, 1970 — the first Earth Day — 20 million angry people launched an environmental revolution. Next spring, the 50th anniversary of Earth Day — the core of which we are calling EARTHRISE — will be vastly larger, more diverse, more global and more consequential.

After the first Earth Day, America quickly created the EPA, and Congress swiftly passed a huge raft of legislation, and in just a few years, we fundamentally changed the way the nation did business.

Next year, the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day faces a far greater challenge. It must confront the global war the fossil fuel industries are waging on the future. Many of the most important climate goals around the world are now under ferocious attack from self-serving autocrats, protecting the short-term financial interests of their cronies. What we have on our side are the people. Humanity is finally becoming aroused by its children to a Darwinian fight for survival.

Next spring — together with thousands of student groups who have already been out on the streets, along with thousands of activist groups, faith groups, social justice groups, labor groups, professional organizations, green businesses, and others — on Wednesday, April 22, we will organize EARTHRISE: the largest protest demonstration in history.

EARTHRISE will mobilize one billion people in every city, town, village and crossroads in 200 nations on every continent. They will carry a simple unifying message: “We demand a future.” If humans are to stand even the slightest chance of meeting the 1.5 degree Paris climate target, 2020 must be the year of peak carbon. The 50th anniversary of Earth Day must mark a true inflection point. In 2020 carbon emissions must finally turn around and begin a steep decline.

President Trump has accused us of “waging a war on coal.” In truth, our war is far larger than that. We are calling on people throughout the world to go on strike for the planet. We are asking engineers, lawyers, bankers, laborers, mechanics, geologists and everyone else involved in producing carbon emissions to stop. This won’t happen overnight, but it must happen far faster than most of our leaders understand. It will require a mobilization like that for World War II, and the stakes are even greater than they were for World War II.
In a world increasingly led toward oblivion by rabid nationalists, Earth Day will help define our future as a species. The 50th anniversary Earth Day campaign will harness every tool at its disposal: social media; guerilla street art; college teach-ins; Vote Earth campaigns, with voter registration and electoral activism; education programs at zoos, aquariums, museums, arboretums, botanical gardens; Earth Challenge 2020, enlisting millions of citizen scientists. And on EARTHRISE, a billion people will hit the streets.

When a billion angry people, representing all nations, all ages, all races, all sexes, all religions, all professions come together to demand radical change, the fossil fuel titans and their political lackeys who bought us this mess had better run for cover. EARTHRISE will mark a new beginning.

Dotsie Bausch
Olympic Medalist; Founder and Executive Director, Switch4Good

I am really proud to be on this call with so many planet-forward activists. As a professional athlete, for many, many years before I won my Olympic medal, I was laser focused on fueling my body to perform at its peak. It was then that I also became acutely aware of the massive positive impacts that each one of us can make, including every single person on this call, with our food choices.

The industrial livestock system, which we currently rely upon to feed the world’s growing population is wasting our natural resources and driving more greenhouse gas emissions than the entire transportation sector. Forty percent of the world’s grain is fed to farm animals, 40 percent. While nearly a billion people to go bed hungry, every single night.

If we continue relying on the livestock industry to feed the world — as our population grows from almost 8 billion today to nearly 10 billion people in 2050 — we’ll need 50 percent more land, which last time I checked, we just do not have. And we will have to produce more food in the next 40 years than in the previous 10,000 years combined.

There’s just no easy way to put this: We are literally eating away ourselves into extinction. But don’t give up hope. Because we do still have a fighting chance to slow down the pace of climate change and minimize the drain on our natural resources. And unlike other complex solutions, food is so simple. Each and every one of us has the power to make a positive impact three or more times a day, with every food choice we make. And I find this so empowering because it’s something we can start doing right now.

That’s why I started my nonprofit Switch4Good, to help people make the switch away from animal-based foods and lean into plants. We are a proud member of Earth Day Network’s FoodPrints for the Future campaign, and FoodPrints’ vision is low impact, healthy, accessible and affordable food for all.
I’ve been eating a plant-based diet for years, and I can tell you that is possible to eat very well without compromising on taste or nutrition. Imagine inspiring billions of people to take incremental steps toward a plant-rich diet. We really can do that together. We can save the planet, save ourselves, one meal at a time.

Reverend Lennox Yearwood, Jr.
President and CEO, Hip Hop Caucus

I’m very excited about Earth Day 2020. It will be one of the most significant, major mobilizations that we will have in 2020, and the urgency has never been greater and never been higher than what we have right now with our climate breakdown and our climate crisis. Let me say this though. As we approach the 50-year anniversary of Earth Day next year, one of the reasons that I am so excited, and so energized about what is happening, is that not only do we show growth as people, but we should show growth as a movement.

One of the things 50 years ago, which was clear, is that while we mobilize in the streets — and thank goodness for Dennis Hayes and so many others, who were part of that movement 50 years ago — what was clear, though, was that the movement then was siloed.

There were many things that were happening in the world that should have been unified at that time. While it was great that we created the Environmental Protection Agency, which was critical — we must strengthen that organization and that agency so that we can have clean air and clean water — that was 50 years ago. What was also happening is that we had Kent State University, where four young people — like today, young people rising up — who were killed, folks that were protesting the Vietnam War. We had people of color who were protesting for civil and human rights in Detroit, in Memphis, in Los Angeles.

What’s different then is that those movements were siloed. They were happening in their own siloed buckets. What has changed 50 years later is that as we approach Earth Day 2020, you now have those who are protesting war, young people who are coming together protesting for civil human rights, people who are protesting for immigration, all coming together. That is why Earth Day 2020 is so different, and so magnificent. It won’t just be one set of people but all of humanity coming together fighting for one cause to fight for our planet. That is why Earth Day 2020 is so significantly different than what happened 50 years ago.

And let me conclude by saying this: That it isn’t just about 2020. It’s about 2070, 50 years from now if we don’t come together as humans from across this globe, if we don’t come together, then it will be beyond a crisis; it will be a catastrophe for the next generation of 2070. So, we mobilize, we organize and we energize for the upcoming Earth Day, and we EARTHRISE all around this nation and this world. All power to the people.
Bill McKibben
Author; Co-Founder and Senior Advisor, 350.org

Thank you very much and what an honor to follow all these voices, including my brother Reverend Yearwood.

Earth Day 2020 is going to be absolutely beautiful, and it’s going to be absolutely crucial because here’s the thing: We are losing right now. And we can tell we’re losing because the temperature keeps going up and the amount of carbon in the atmosphere keeps going up, and hence, the number of fires keeps going up and the number of floods keeps going up. And the amount of sheer injustice keeps rising because remember that the iron law of climate change is “the less you did to cause it, the sooner you get hurt, the harder you suffer.” We are on the edge of losing entire nations to rising seas and to growing deserts.

And so, we need people out in numbers we have never seen before. As Denis pointed out, there were 20 million people on the streets in 1970. Perhaps the biggest day of political protest in American history. That was about 10 percent of the then population of the U.S., and that was enough to change America in profound ways within a few years. All the laws that we still count on — the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act — had been signed into being.

So, we need 10 percent or more of the planet’s population out in the streets to work the same magic again. And we need them beginning on Earth Day 2020, but we need to be out in the streets for the decade to come.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change gave us our ultimatum this month, a year ago. They said that if we had not fundamentally transformed our energy systems by 2030, then we have no chance of ever meeting the targets we’d set in Paris.

So, Earth Day 2020 marks the beginning of the last crucial decade. We’ve wasted the three decades since we were first warned by scientists that the climate was changing in perilous ways. Now we have to work like never before, and that work, as Denis says, involves taking on the fossil fuel industry and also all that enable them, including, maybe most crucially, the financial industry: The banks provide the money that is the oxygen on which the fires of global warming burn.

So, there will be people everywhere next Earth Day, and they will be some combination of angry and hopeful; some combination of frankly despairing but also daring to believe that together we can do again what people did 50 years ago. So many thanks to the people who are organizing what’s going to be perhaps the most remarkable day in human history.
Alexandria Villaseñor  
*Founder and Executive Director, Earth Uprising*

Yes, so thank you for having me here today. It’s very great to be talking with all of you. My name is Alexandria Villaseñor. I’m a 14-year-old climate activist, and I’m from New York City. Really, my activism began last fall when I experienced the effects of the Paradise fires near my home in Northern California.

Right after the fire, I saw Greta Thunberg speak at COP 24, and she really empowered me to go out and take action for my future. I translated my grief over the loss of ecosystems and biodiversity into action. On December 14, 2018, I began striking every Friday in front of the United Nations Headquarters, in solidarity with the Fridays for Future movement.

I have now been on a climate strike for 45 weeks, and after I began my strike, I learned of other activists around the world who were also on strike. Together we began planning for the first ever global climate strike, which occurred on March 15. And on that day, 1.6 million students protested climate inaction and demanded that their world leaders act now on the climate crisis. So, on March 15, it was the first action of many.

And recently on September 20, students from all over the world mobilized just to send a message to our leaders at the United Nations Climate Summit. So, on that day, four million young people supported by our adult allies came together and took to the streets. In New York City alone, there were 315,000 protesters who shut down the financial district.

September 20 will not be the last time we’ll be making our voices heard because the climate crisis is continuing to get more urgent. Every new, dire report that comes out about the timeline we’re on to combat the climate crisis only just makes our activism become even louder. I want to see each one of you on this call today making your voice heard on the leadup to Earth Day in 2020 because that will definitely be one of the biggest climate mobilizations that we have seen. The Earth is uprising. I cannot wait to see the action that is taken in this next year.

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Kumi Naidoo  
*Secretary-General, Amnesty International*

Having listened to all the wonderful, previous panelists, I am reminded a moment during the South African liberation. Most of the really good points I want to make have been eloquently made by the previous speakers. There are parts I want to emphasize, and I won’t speak for too long. Around two minutes, so let me be very brief.

Firstly, I think one of the most catastrophic errors that we made around the Earth Summit in 1992 in Rio was allowing the threat of climate change, as well as environmental collapse, to be
played primarily as an environmental issue. We need to understand that environmental collapse generally, as well as climate change specifically, is completely a cross-cutting issue.

And therefore, Amnesty International hosted, just a few weeks ago in New York, a summit of human rights organizations and non-environmental organizations to say, “Folks, how do we as a human rights movement step up to play our role?” And as Amnesty, we have to do everything in our capability to encourage our allies in the non-specific environmental movement to get as involved as possible.

Why does it make sense for human rights organizations to play this role? That is very clear. Today, climate change, for example, constitutes a mass death penalty facing all the people on this planet. We should also note that, sadly, there probably would have been more urgency if the people that were dying first in the largest numbers were people in the most powerful countries.

The terrible injustice of climate means that those who have actually contributed least to the problem of emissions, for example, are the ones that are paying the first and most brutal price — whether in Africa, whether in Latin America, within Asia, within the Pacific, within the Caribbean.

The last point I want to make is that we need to now be sending out a very strong message to our leaders that nature does not negotiate; we cannot change the science. All we have is the capability of changing political will. And we have to now send a strong message through Earth Day next year to a range of other efforts that have been planned to tell leaders that they need to stop playing political poker with the future of our children, and they need to act to the urgency that the situation calls for.

As far as Amnesty is concerned, we will continue to intensify our involvement. And we hope to mobilize the human rights community to ensure that on Earth Day next year, the human rights community’s ability in that effort will be the highest it has ever been. Thank you very much.

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**Angela Valenzuela**

*Climate Justice Activist and Artist*

*Note: Valenzuela was unable to make the call, but she provided a statement.*

I wish I could be with you today, celebrating the launch of Earth Day 2020.

While my heart cherishes the 50-year anniversary of Earth Day and everything that we have achieved as a movement, I am also deeply concerned for our democracies, rights and how to bring the systemic change needed for a world bellow 1.5 degrees Celsius.
Chile is now facing a democratic crisis and overwhelming repression from the state. The last few days have been full of massive pacifist protests throughout the country, people united to demand a dignified life after 30 years of a democracy that has failed to bring basic access to education, healthcare and the protection of our environment.

The response of the government has been to declare state of emergency and put military forces on the streets. Many people have been murdered the last few days for their basic right to protest.

We need to protect and strengthen our democracies to protect the Earth, our only home. I would like to invite the international community to put pressure on the Chilean government to take the military forces out of the streets, otherwise we think that we should all demand that the COP25 be suspended.

Yeb Saño  
*Executive Director, Greenpeace Southeast Asia*

Thank you. It's such a great honor for me to be joining the chorus of voices today.

As we approach the 50th year of Earth Day, we're facing a truly, truly crucial point in human history and in natural history. We are changing the planet, and the world will no longer be the world that we know it.

There’s are lot of reasons to fear about a lot of things and all of this. But most of all, I fear for our children. What kind of world are we handing back to them? In my own country, the Philippines, and increasingly in many parts of the world, we face the dangers of more intense and destructive storms, rising sea levels, extreme rainfall, extreme temperatures. Given the vast shoreline and even geographic susceptibility, the climate, the emergency is a very clear and present danger for us, and it is a matter of life and death.

And it would be difficult to forget the 8th of November 2013, and certainly so for the millions of people who lived to see the catastrophe of Super Typhoon Haiyan, one of the strongest tropical storms ever to make landfall in human history. Let me borrow the words from Joanna Sustento, a young woman, a good friend, a survivor of Super Typhoon Haiyan, but who lost her parents, her 3-year-old nephew, her brother and sister-in-law when the typhoon ravaged our country. Since then, she has become an advocate for climate justice.

And I quote, "The wrath of super Typhoon Haiyan is an example of what's to come. And this is an absolute injustice that should not be passed on to future generations. My community is demanding justice for the thousands of lives killed, for the hopes and dreams of a better future lost to greed, apathy and deceit. I may have lost my family in the storm, but I'm not losing in this climate crisis.” End of quote.
My dear friends, the climate crisis is one of the biggest injustices in human history, indeed, and those the least responsible for this problem are the worst affected. And those who are largely responsible for this crisis remain unaccountable and have largely done nothing, and they’re stealing control of the world's wealth and power. So, therefore, it's of real importance in great courage and conviction we stand together. We stand up for our rights and for what to strike.

As we celebrate Earth Day next year, in the face of all adversity, we must remain filled with hope. And it is really exciting to hear all of you today and to be part of this.

And we must keep in mind that if the world leaders fail to address the climate crisis, we will all find a way as united humanity; we will find a way. It’s upon our generation to fight for a world without injustice, to stand up for a world without fear. And this is our duty, because to wait for the next generation is not only too late; it is also irresponsible.

Let me also speak as a person of faith and as a leader from the Catholic Climate Movement. This conversation on the climate crisis can never be complete without reflecting on this emergency as a spiritual crisis and, therefore, the role of faith communities in confronting this reality. We look forward to the major moment for the 2020 Earth Day anniversary.

Finally, I say to those who bring rights up to the front the climate crisis, we rise with you. For those who walk or rise courageous spiritually, we walk with you. For those who will eventually see the sunrise stand out, embracing faith in the light, forget not of people and communities who have given up their lives.

The climate crisis is a battle that will not be won or lost in the chambers of commerce or chambers of government. It will be won or lost in the chambers of people's hearts. But regardless of where that battle lies, it is a battle we cannot afford to lose. Thank you.

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Reverend Ed Brown  
Director and CEO, Care of Creation, Inc.; Catalyst for Creation Care, The Lausanne Movement

Thank you to Yeb for reminding us that this is a battle for hearts, and it’s also a spiritual crisis that we as human beings need to address.

I am here representing a global network of evangelical Christians who are concerned about what we call God’s Creation and are increasingly active in responding to the global environmental crisis. But I am also participating for personal reasons: I think I am one of the only people on this call who actually participated in the first Earth Day. I was a high school junior in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, and I gave my first environmental talk on that occasion. This 50th anniversary means a lot to me personally.

Today, I’m representing the Lausanne/WEA Creation Care Network. We are people from almost 150 countries united in belief in the Bible and worship of Jesus Christ as our Lord and
committed to caring for and healing God’s creation. We have the support of the Lausanne Movement, which is a global network of evangelical leaders, and the World Evangelical Alliance, which is a network of churches in 129 nations that have each formed an evangelical alliance and over 100 international organizations joined together to give a world-wide identity, voice and platform to more than 600 million evangelical Christians.

Next week marks seven years since we hosted the Lausanne Global Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel in Jamaica. Immediately following Hurricane Sandy’s devastation of the Caribbean and coinciding with that storm’s arrival in North America; the destruction and loss of life was a startling reminder as to the urgency, timeliness and importance of that consultation and need for action.

Our discussion, study and prayer together led us to two primary conclusions: First, creation care is indeed a gospel issue within the lordship of Christ. Caring for God’s creation is a core part of our identity as followers of Jesus. Second, we are faced with a crisis that is pressing, urgent and that must be resolved in our generation.

Many of the world’s poorest people, ecosystems and species of flora and fauna are being devastated by violence against the environment in multiple ways, of which global climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, water stress and pollution are but a part. We can no longer afford complacency and endless debate. Love for God, our neighbors and the wider creation, as well as our passion for justice, compel us to urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility.

We are very happy as evangelicals to join Earth Day 2020 and to renew our entire global community to a new call to action to join with the rest of the human race in seeking to heal this planet, God’s creation.

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**Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim**  
*President, Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad*

Coming from the indigenous community, I can tell you that climate change is inflicting a terrible humanitarian crisis on my people.

Yesterday, I went around Chad to visit my people, but when I went around Chad, because it’s the rainy season, there are about 200 kilometer square and then immediately you see this year, the rain season comes for long. At the end of the day, you have every crop getting flooded. When there’s a flood, it’s not good for animals; it’s not good for people. That’s why it’s called a big crisis of food and security.

So, for me and all indigenous people, the average temperature has increased by more than 1.5 degrees over the last decade. That means climate change is adding poverty. Everything is drought, flood. That becomes the new reality for us.
The indigenous people around the world, including my people, are on the frontlines of climate change, and this is happening right now. And when we talk about 2020, for us, it’s going to be the decade to take action. Twenty-twenty will be for Earth Day, for action, for solutions we need right now.

At the frontlines of climate change, we’re not only the victims, but we do have a lot to bring to fight the climate change. Over centuries, where we live is in harmony. At the heart of the ecosystem, indigenous communities have accumulated knowledge that can be powerful weapons for fighting climate change and protecting our environment.

Indigenous communities who are in the Pacific Islands can know where to find food after a hurricane. When you are in the desert, like my grandma, she can tell you where to get water during a big drought that we have. My brothers and sisters and indigenous peoples from the Amazon forest; they are the ones caring for the lands that are protecting the diverse species. All the knowledge we accumulated is harmonious with the ecosystem that can help us build the solutions to protect our environment to fight against climate change. That means this decade has to put the people in the center. It calls for those who are marching but also for those who are fighting for their survival.

Listening to the indigenous people, making us partners into the decision-making process, putting us at the heart that might help to find a climate solution. We say in my community that when your house is burning, we cannot wait for the climate decision at the next COP, but you have to call the fireman. So now the planet is burning. We have to go and act in order to put this fire out.

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Ricky Kej  
Grammy-Award winning Musician and Environmental Advocate

Namaste, everyone. I’m a musician and an environmentalist, two pillars that have pretty much dictated my whole life and all of my life decisions. I believe that the biggest threat to our environment, to our natural world and, of course, to us as humans, is to think that somebody else will make a difference. We are always waiting for somebody else to make things better — we wait for the government, for NGOs, for corporations, for leaders to make a difference. When actually the truth is we need to constantly empower ourselves.

And we need to empower everyone around us to truly believe that we can bring about massive change by ourselves. And pretty much let it sink in that every positive action that we make actually matters.

The father of my nation, Mahatma Gandhi, has said that there always needs to be a topdown approach to solving problems through government and legislation, but equally important is a ground-up approach to public awareness and consciousness to action. And of course, this is far
more relevant today, where politicians are no longer leaders but have somehow evolved to becoming followers.

All of us are aware of all the problems affecting our environments and our lives. We are all aware of climate change, species extinctions, air pollution, plastic pollution. But we are not collectively doing anything about it.

Being a musician, I know how powerful music can be. Music is such a powerful language, not just for communicating a message but for retaining the message deep into the consciousness of the listener. The songs we learn during our childhood are pretty much the songs that we never forget. The morals that we learn through song and music are morals that stick with us forever.

Being an ambassador of Earth Day Network, I believe that music can be that absolute catalyst to drive people from mere awareness to action. And this is what I have made my life’s mission: to empower all of us through the powerful and emotional language of music, to be the change that we want to see. Thank you for your time and thank you for giving me the opportunity to share these thoughts with you. Thank you so much.

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**Lorenzo Fioramonti**  
*Minister of Education, Italy*

This is my message to Earth Day 2020. The time to act is now. By next year, we’ll have only 10 years left before we hit the wall. Twenty-thirty is the end of a process; we only have 10 years in order to achieve solutions.

Let’s face it, we have been waiting for decades and decades. We know the devastating effects of climate change. We’ve known it since the 1960s, and yet we have done very little until now. Now it’s a great time; it’s the perfect time: We have global awareness of the devastating effects of climate change.

We have a young generation of students and activists. They are mobilizing across the planet and we, perhaps, have also a generation of politicians that are willing to take responsibility for a radical transformation of our economy. Because we do need transition to different economy in order to resolve this challenge, to address this challenge. We do need a dramatic difference, to make a dramatic difference, in order to transform our global economic and social system.

Climate change is not just an environmental problem; it’s a problem of social justice, it’s a problem of access, it’s a problem of energy, it’s a problem of social coordination across many countries. We do need to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and there is little time left. Earth Day can become a catalyst on its 50th year, a catalyst to really mobilize a mass of people. An intergenerational effort to transform, to turn 2020 into the year in which everyone realizes time that is running out, and we can no longer wait.
In Italy, for instance, we are going to be activating a global debate. A national and global debate on the kind of country we want by 2030. Introducing environmental and ecological education in schools, having universities hold workshops and seminars on the kind of ecological transformation that we need. We want to transform the first six months of 2020 into a general conversation on the future we want.

Earth Day can really become a fundamental and global catalyst to activate that radical transformation we have been waiting for and now we can no long hesitate to activate. So, let’s work together towards achieving those objectives.

Anne Bowser  
_Director of Innovation, Wilson Center_

The problem as we see it begins with the fact that professional science alone cannot collect enough data to understand the world’s pressing environmental problems. And the dominant culture of science fails to engage the public in understanding and also in helping to solve these problems.

Citizen science, an approach to science where professional researchers collaborate with members of the public, is the solution. Together with Earth Day Network and the U.S. Department of State, the Wilson Center is launching Earth Challenge 2020 as the world’s largest coordinated citizen science campaign to date.

The project has two goals. First, we want to help coordinate the citizen science activities and data that are already out there. We are working with hundreds of volunteer academic researchers in a major open data campaign. Second, and perhaps more importantly, we are building new technologies, including a mobile application to help global citizens monitor their environments. Data from the app will be shared with scientists, but individual volunteers will also be able to share their own data on social media or send it to a local policymaker as a powerful advocacy tool for the fight to, for example, ban single-use plastics based on data of plastic pollution observed in the environment.

For the 50th anniversary, we’re focusing our citizen science activities on six research questions: What is the extent of plastic pollution? How does air quality vary locally? How are insect populations changing? What are the local impacts of climate change? Is my water safe to drink? And is my food supply sustainable and secure?

In addition to these six priority areas, we’d like to note that 2020 is only the starting point. Ultimately, our goal is to use mobile technologies and other devices to empower citizens anywhere to use science to understand and also help solve the world’s pressing environmental challenges.