

A LEGACY OF ACTION



Since Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, the human drive to leave a better world for our children has been at the core of environmental advocacy. At the same time, advocates for human rights have embraced the concept of intergenerational justice, grounded in the respect-based account of human dignity that is chiseled into numerous UN documents.

Now, as humanity faces the unprecedented crisis of climate change, the Climate Legacy Initiative seeks to at last bring these two arenas of thought and action together.

Intergenerational justice must be at the heart of any legal effort needed to respond to the climate crisis. Indeed, as advocates have pushed for technological innovation and economic incentive, they often have based their arguments on an unspoken obligation to the future. Now is the time to make that moral and legal obligation explicit.

A Changing World, A Changing Future

It is almost an American birthright to dream that our children will inherit a better world. For a country built on seemingly limitless resources, this is not irrational – but it is no longer the truth. Climate change is an existential threat to our children's future, threatening everything for which we and our parents and grandparents have struggled. The future isn't what it used to be.

The three core principles of intergenerational justice are an attempt to adapt universal moral principles to the unprecedented ecological challenge we face today. Together, they point the way to saving a planet in extraordinary change and peril:

- We have a moral obligation to pass on what has been passed on to us – and not take away **options** from future generations.
- We have a moral obligation to pass on a world of as good or better **quality** than we received it.
- We have a moral obligation to share what has been shared with us, and to give future generations equal **access** to natural resources.

Climate change poignantly illustrates that living in the present has its limitations. Understanding the connection to our legacy today is the only way to avoid a most disastrous tomorrow.

Taking Action

Creating a climate legacy we can be proud of will take work. At almost every level of law and government, dedicated advocates need to fight to establish the legal principles that will create a livable world for our descendants. We need:

- State-level constitutional provisions and statutes to implement environmental rights for future generations.
- State and federal legislation establishing how governments should make environmental decisions.
- A national cap-and-trade climate pollution policy.
- Legislative, regulatory, and judicial action expanding the public trust doctrine to ensure protection of natural resources necessary for the welfare and survival of present and future generations.

These and other responsible action on climate will not happen unless people in every community, state and country make their voices heard. That means a new generation of tireless, committed, effective advocacy – for the sake of generations yet to come.