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VIEWS

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# *»How can we sleep while our beds are burning« 50 years of Greenpeace - 50 years of »Hope in Action« for a green, peaceful and just world*

*by Jennifer Morgan and Thomas Henningsen*

50 years of  
Greenpeace



A more spectacular beginning could not have been imagined for Greenpeace. In September 1971, a crew of just twelve set out to peacefully confront the U.S.A., the world's most powerful military force, over the detonation of an underground nuclear bomb on the island of Amchitka. Although the test went ahead, the mission was a success, as it would be the last nuclear test on the island due to the vociferous protests that were held during Greenpeace's voyage.

The waves caused by the courage and compassion of that small crew have been resonating ever since, and the work being done by Greenpeace has only intensified as the climate and biodiversity crisis tragically continues to worsen. Injustice in all its forms, from climate to race to gender to economic disparity, continues to reign supreme due to corrupt politicians and greedy elites, and yet the hope and power of people both young and old, from all walks of life, holds firm. A safer, healthier, greener tomorrow can still happen, as we already have the solutions to the climate and biodiversity crises, but we are still on our journey to implementing them and turning them into reality.

Greenpeace has always based its campaigns and missions on its vision of a green and peaceful world. Then as now, the environmental network's activities are based on five pillars:

## **MISSION**

Greenpeace is an international environmental campaigning network that aims to protect the diversity of life and the planet.

## **ACTIONS**

Bearing witness and non-violent direct actions are central to Greenpeace's campaigns and aim to hold polluters to account. Documenting environmental crimes to show the world what it does not know or has forgotten helps us to make it a witness to our actions when intervening and calling out those in power who are causing the planet harm. The development of scientific principles and solutions to influence political processes have become an important activity over the

the network's lifetime. Climate litigation is becoming an increasingly potent campaigning tool for bringing about positive change.

## **GLOBALNESS**

Peace and the environment know no borders, which is why Greenpeace has had an international focus right from the start, and now has a more diverse and global outlook than ever before. We have grown into a global movement with an international network alongside allies. This means we no longer stand alone in tackling what are often challenges facing specific nations – quite the contrary, in fact, because the international implications and global threat they present make these challenges opportunities as well – ones that can often be overcome more effectively with global support. Greenpeace is active on all seven continents, and maintains a permanent presence in 55 countries, bringing together millions of supporters across the planet, from all ethnicities, creeds, sexes, gender identities and economic backgrounds.

## **POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE**

From the very outset, a focus was directed at maintaining financial and political independence. This was prioritised because only this gives Greenpeace the freedom to act and criticise openly. It is private donations that make our work possible – we do not accept money from companies, state or government agencies.

## **PEOPLE POWER**

A mind bomb 50 years ago has led to a movement that has an impact on the entire world, thanks to millions of courageous volunteers. More than 3,000 people currently work for Greenpeace. Worldwide, many thousands more provide their support on a voluntary basis and many millions support Greenpeace.

## **WHAT HAS GREENPEACE ACHIEVED?**

Greenpeace has achieved important successes from the Arctic to the Amazon, as well as in Africa, Asia and beyond; from the halls of power to mining towns to school rooms, from the



end of commercial whaling to the ban on dumping radioactive and toxic waste in the world's oceans. Its successes also include the World Park Antarctica, and the development and the roll-out of CFC-free refrigerators, as well as its key role in achieving a phase-out of nuclear power and preventing genetic engineering in agriculture – not to mention stopping deforestation and promoting the fossil-fuel phaseout.

Greenpeace has had an impact on countless lives – improving the conditions in which people, animals and plants live, at times saving them – with every hectare of forest spared, with every square kilometre of marine reserve declared, and with every improvement made to nature conservation and environmental protection laws.

Ecological thinking and sustainable action have become an essential part of political discussions across the world – in stark contrast to the situation at the beginning of the 1970s. Of course, this was no easy feat – a strong will, courage, creativity, perseverance and, above all, the tireless commitment of so many people were, and will remain, necessary. And Greenpeace cannot take credit for all this positive change alone.

The environmental movement, which Greenpeace is proud to be a part of, has had to reassert and reinvent itself time and again, changing with the constantly shifting backdrop of corrupt lobbying, insipid greenwashing, anachronistic thinking, and polluters putting profit before people and the planet. It has also had to change and grow, welcoming unexpected allies, sharing precious resources, and broadening the vision we share of a healthier tomorrow for everyone. This has involved self-reflection on the need to empower the most marginalized and vulnerable groups among us, while we are constantly challenging ourselves to be more inclusive and egalitarian.

We have arrived in a decisive decade for the climate, and we have had to place a keener focus than ever before on the intersectionality of the crises the world is facing today, highlighting the interdependency of the solutions, and exhibiting the boldness necessary to embrace radical systemic change. We need to remain courageous enough to hope.

Even our mission is evolving, because it is no longer just about protecting the foundations on which life rests but is now also about preserving them and ensuring their survival on earth.

Today we are facing the greatest environmental crisis of all time – the biodiversity and climate crisis. The climate chan-

ge caused by humans and, in particular, the inaction of many politicians is expediting the loss of biodiversity. This scenario is racing towards us at a speed that could soon see a future arrive that it is imperative to prevent.

The sixth status report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which was just published in August 2021, vividly shows how dramatic the situation is and what unspeakable suffering we are in for if we do not manage to use the remaining period of a few years to change course and avert the worst climate scenarios.

The polar caps are melting at an unprecedented rate – the amount of meltwater from Greenland in the last 20 years totalled around 4,000 gigatonnes, or around 400,000 tonnes per minute every day for the last 20 years. The Ohio State University warned that the »point of no return« could be reached for Greenland's ice cap in August 2020, this would mean that no matter what we do, Greenland's ice will melt and raise the global sea level by around seven metres. The only question that would remain is how fast this will happen. In the same year, the highest temperature ever recorded in Antarctica, almost 21 degrees Celsius, was measured. And the world is literally on fire, with the earth's forests burning more than ever, deadly and destructive fires in the tropical forests of Amazonia, Africa and Asia, but also in North America, southern Europe, Australia and even in the far north of Russia.

We are experiencing more and more violent storms, floods, fires and other extreme catastrophic weather events – combined with water scarcity, droughts, failed harvests and the famines that result from them. According to the latest study by the Institute for Economics and Peace, there will be 1.2 billion people seeking a new home over the coming 30 years as climate refugees.

The climate crisis is nothing new, and by now, we should be more than aware that we are heading towards a hitherto unseen period of upheaval – if we fail to take fast and consistent measures to counteract climate change.

It is precisely because of these impending dangers that the climate movement is so vital, and makes it all the more necessary to form alliances now. Forging powerful networks is a global priority for Greenpeace. Because governments are still not implementing the urgently needed climate goals, alliances with industry – the ones prepared to take responsibility – or with local politicians are necessary. This

**QR code for the original songs  
by Midnight Oil.  
Beds Are Burning (1987) and  
Beds are Burning –  
TckTckTck (2009) – T  
ime for Climate Justice**



also extends to groups you might not initially associate with us, such as the Black Lives Matter movement in the U.S.A. or First Nations on all continents, People of Colour, and LGBTQI+. Greenpeace supports them because it is the system that we have to change. The same economic and , in part , the same social system that oppresses marginalised communities, People of Colour and Indigenous peoples is also a system that allows the exploitation and destruction of nature. In addition, support, cooperation, and alliances with the youth of the world – the next generations – has a key importance.

Some things have still not changed since the 1970s: the environmental ignorance of most politicians, and the lack of conscience exhibited by many corporations. Investors, banks and financiers are simply carrying on with activities that are injurious to the climate and environment instead of taking responsibility and promoting change. We have to get people around the world to vote for politicians who will support the energy, mobility and agricultural transition. We need leaders in power who are prepared to implement solutions, take immediate measures, and promote technologies that are already available, and also ensure all industry investments are made with environmental requirements in mind, moving the world towards an ecologically compatible economic system.

**»HOW DO WE SLEEP WHILE OUR BEDS ARE BURNING?«**

The song by the Australian band Midnight Oil describes the forced displacement of the Australian Pintupi Aborigines and the subsequent contamination of their traditional grounds by nuclear weapons testing. This text not only resonates with Greenpeace due to its anti-nuclear origins, but also because of the current situation around the world. This song was rewritten for the global climate summit in Copenhagen in 2009 in order to warn the participating politicians about the impending climate crisis.

The world failed to seize the opportunity in Copenhagen, resulting in the loss of valuable time. We are determined to keep going and keep contributing to real change on the basis of strong alliances. We maintain hope, and that gives us the will to keep growing, to get the international youth climate movement involved, and to inspire the same hope among the new generation of activists.

The current climate and biodiversity emergency shows the urgency of a radical and fundamental systemic change for a green and just future for everyone – the youth of today and tomorrow, Indigenous peoples and marginalised communi-

ties on the climate frontlines, and other living beings that share our beautiful lands, waters and sky with us. Greenpeace continues to confront, to learn, to be creative, and to be compassionate and courageous.

This book should not only be a book that shares insights into the exciting, moving and richly illustrated history of our organisation, thereby also sharing insights into the people who have contributed so much to it, but also be a book that shows this to everyone who has yet to become involved, and that encourages and motivates them to join the fight for a diverse, peaceful, clean and just world.

This is why the credo that motivates and drives us at Greenpeace, and those who support Greenpeace, is:

**IT IS NOT THE TIME TO REST, EVEN MORE SO NOW,  
BECAUSE OUR EARTH IS STARTING TO BURN.**



**Fascinating wonders of nature**  
Our earth is actually a planet full  
of fascinating wonders of nature,  
as evidenced by flocks of bright red  
scarlet ibis flying over a wetland on  
the coast of Brazil  
**5 February 2017**











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**Unforgivable environmental  
destruction**

Complete destruction of a  
primaeval forest area in Papua/  
Indonesia for the irresponsible  
expansion of oil palm mono-  
cultures. Palm oil is used in many  
foods, cosmetics and often even  
so-called biodiesel in Europe and  
North America, and is a major  
cause of rainforest destruction

**1 April 2018**









**Death in the net**

Gruesome image of a Pacific white-sided dolphin drowning in a Japanese fishing company's drift net. Around 300,000 small and large cetaceans and millions of other marine creatures are still dying as so-called bycatch in the drift, trawl, set and ghost nets of the world's oceans

**18 August 1990**









**»Point of no return«**

The polar regions are melting at a dramatic rate, affecting the climate and life all over the world. In August 2020, after years of study, Ohio State University warned of a »point of no return« for Greenland's gigantic ice sheet, which is up to three kilometres thick. A dangerous global tipping point because the melting, which will result in a sea level rise of around seven metres  
**17 March 2017**



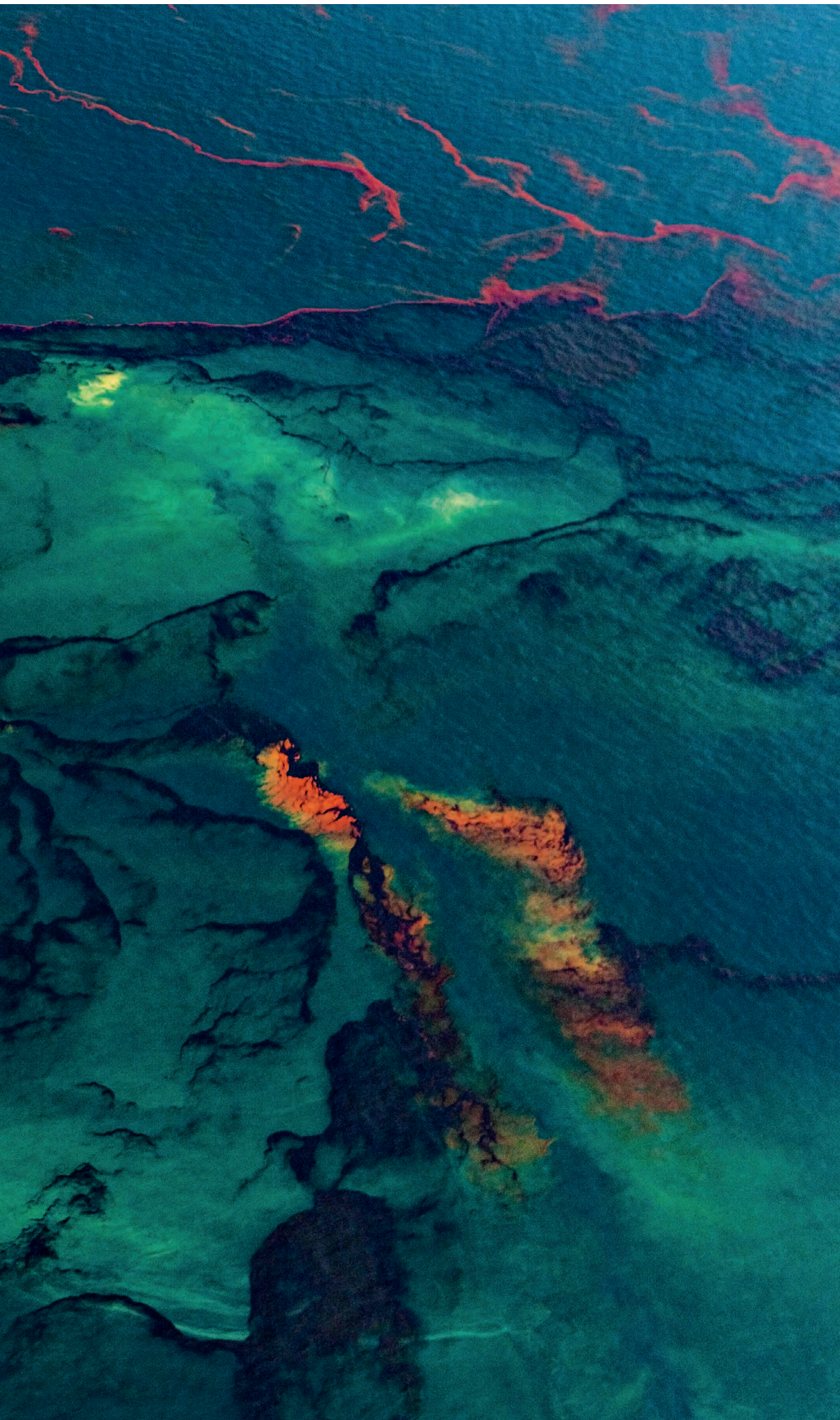












### **Ocean contamination**

The Deep Water Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, for which British oil company BP was responsible, was one of the biggest environmental disasters in history. The oil industry is still responsible for massive poisoning of our oceans, with accidents and daily oil spills a part of regular operations

**24 June 2010**



## A large pile of marine debris on a beach. The foreground is dominated by a chaotic mix of trash, including numerous clear plastic water bottles, a yellow buoy, a black helmet, a blue and white baby shoe, a green plastic comb, and various pieces of driftwood. A large, brown, fibrous object, possibly a piece of coral or a large piece of driftwood, is prominent on the right. In the background, the beach stretches out towards the ocean under a cloudy sky. A small red boat is visible in the distance on the left.

A large pile of marine debris on a beach. The foreground is dominated by a chaotic mix of trash, including numerous clear plastic bottles, a yellow buoy, a black helmet, a blue and white baby shoe, a green plastic comb, and various pieces of driftwood. A large, dark, textured object, possibly a piece of coral or a large shell, is visible in the lower left. The debris extends into the background, where a sandy beach and the ocean are visible under a cloudy sky.







### **Worldwide droughts**

Droughts are becoming more frequent and more severe, and they are now happening worldwide. Even the Amazon, which has the largest volume of water by far of any river on earth, is increasingly affected – as are its unique creatures

**27 October 2005**









### **Global coral die-off**

Corals, which are a species of cnidaria, live in close symbiosis with the smallest single-cell algae (zooxanthellae), which lend the corals their colourful appearance. This symbiosis usually has a very sensitive reaction to environmental changes. Even small temperature changes can cause the coral-algae relationship to break down. The stone corals lose their wonderful colours, are bleached, and die if the conditions do not change again. The current climate change may already result in a mass extinction of the corals, and according to the World Biodiversity Forum, a temperature increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius could kill off 70 to 90 percent of the stone corals, with 2 degrees causing 99 percent to die. This would mean that the most biodiverse biocoenosis found in the oceans, which has been developing for around 225 million years, could be wiped out in just a few decades – with incalculable consequences for all life on earth. This is one more dramatic result of the climate change caused by humans, and another reason to finally take consistent action against it

**1 March 2017**









**Contaminated food**

A villager in Shuanggio, China, holds contaminated oranges in his hands. The fruits, vegetables, grains and even the water were contaminated by nearby chemical factories – with cadmium in particular

25 May 2005

