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Buenas Tardes Compañero y Campañera.

As the *only* Latina addressing this plenary at this conference, who was not someone in Labor, I used to sue unions in the 80s for discrimination (Yeampierre exclaims, “Wo-o-o.”), and not an environmentalist. Hopefully, I can combine both charisma and strategy. Let me try to do that now. (Yeampierre chuckles.)

One of the things that Jerome mentioned in terms of the charge for this body of people is, “How you do clean it up? How do we come up with solutions for the Environment Justice Movement?” I should say that UPROSE isn’t *just* a Latino organization. It is the oldest Puerto Rican organization in the borough of Brooklyn. Our base is inter-generational; it’s multi-racial, multi-national, multi-ethnic because that’s how the environmental justice system in NYC works.

I am Chair of the NYC Environmental Justice Alliance, and I am here speaking on behalf of the NYC Environmental Justice Alliance. When Jerome talked about cleaning it up and presenting solutions, what that really has to do with, is that really all depends on *who* is at the table. I want to talk about who's at the table because it really means that we need to come up with a different paradigm. We need to think about how we do work. Green does not mean justice. Sustainability does not mean justice. You can have a sustainable community, and that does not mean that it is a “just community.”

In fact, for those of us who have been very successful at not only doubling the open space in our communities, defeating the siting of power plants in our neighborhoods, getting greenways designed, putting together a solid waste management plan for the city of New York, one of the things that we’ve learned is that our very successes, our environmental justice successes are now leading the way for gentrification. While we have been struggling and giving up time with our families and children to create open space, and to relieve the environmental

burdens that our communities suffer from, the developers are now using those very same successes to displace the people who have suffered in those communities from asthma, upper respiratory diseases, cancer, diabetes. That is a disgrace!

What we are told, is that in order to live in the neighborhoods, in order to afford living there, we need to live next to waste transfer stations. Justice and environment are not necessarily in hands with each other.

We need to think moving forward, how we do this planning. Community-based planning means having people who are in the impacted communities at the table, not for window dressing, not for us to serve as poster children, but for us to be decision makers, stakeholders in decision making. In order for that to happen, you have to do not a greenhouse inventory; you need to do a personal inventory. You need to do an institutional inventory of your unions, of your organizations, and determine who is management, who is making the decisions, how are the decisions being made.

It is very different from the way things have been done in the past, but you know what? The demographics are different, too. In NYC, the prediction is that there are going to be a million more people. NYC is not going to be able to sustain a million more people because we've got an aging infrastructure. We need to reduce emissions, carbon emissions by 30 percent. How do you do that? How do you sustain these people? These people have to feel like they're stakeholders in the decision making process.

There was a time, and the reason I talk about making sure that decision making is a little more "melanin-infused." One of the reasons that I raise that is that this environmental justice movement grew out of the civil rights movement. Those of us who are here, myself, Jerome, Cecil from WEAC (Cecil raise your hand), Vivian from Los Cadermos; we are the sons and daughters of the civil rights movement. We are the ones that had the opportunity to go to college. We are the ones that, coming from these communities, had an opportunity to get an education and come back to help transform not only the conditions of our community, but to be able to build indigenous leadership that could speak truth to power. We are those people, and we are really happy to be able to do this work.

The problem is this: that the very people who struggle to make it possible for us to go to school, for us to get an education because they needed to assuage the guilt of “separate, but equal,” have a very difficult time dealing with us at the table. And we’re here. We’re at the table even if we have to *bring* our own table.

I am saying this, because what it means is that you need to really think differently about what your commitment is to addressing climate change and building community power. What does that really mean? Are you willing to give up the cab when you walk outside and you see that cab go right by Cecil, so that it will pick you up when Cecil was there first? Are you willing to give up the cab?

I share that with you because the truth is that if we’re going to reduce carbon emissions in the US, if we’re going to build “just relationships” and alliances with each other, it means that we’re going to have to come up with a different structure of doing that. It means that we’re going to have to give up some things.

In NYC when we put out the plan, people threw their hands up in the air and started complaining about congestion pricing and eight dollars. I said, “What are you willing to pay for your children to be able to breathe easier?” Are we not willing to give up *anything*? Are we not willing to give up any sacrifices? How do you come out of your comfort zone to be able to build these “just relationships?”

Let me read, and I think all of you know this. You’re union members. You know how to organize. You know the principles of building community power. You know how to do a power analysis. What I’m talking about is something different. I’m talking about mixing it up and making sure that you can sort of sit back and make sure that the people look very different, because honestly, the demographics demand it. We are going to have to work in a very different way.

In NYC, where we work and have these “just relationships” with the Urban Agenda and the Apollo Alliance, and Ed Ott [Executive Director of the NYC Central Labor Council/AFL-CIO], and Joanne Derwin [Project Director, Urban Agenda] we talk about that fact that these jobs, these jobs are going to be taken by what we call “the disengaged youth” in our community. Just a few months ago when I was at the Borough President’s office, I heard a union, which will remain nameless, talk about how “they needed to make sure that these young people, when they apply for these jobs, don’t have criminal records, that they’re clean, that they, that they,” and we’re saying, “But wait a minute. Some of these people *do* have criminal records not related to the job. These young people deserve these jobs.” The man went on about how people were retiring from that union, and they were looking to fill up these jobs, but they needed to be “clean.” The following day *that guy* was indicted for violating the RICCO Statutes.

I have to say, “Wait a minute, the standard is different here.” We need to look at those policies, those standards, and really make sure that they are relevant to the jobs at hand. That it doesn’t become disparate impact for our communities. That on the face they look like they’re even-handed, as they have historically looked, but that the impact is one that continues to marginalize people.

If that continues to happen, we are not going to be able to build community power. We’re going to continue to organize as we do in New York City, in California, in the Southwest, in Detroit. We will be organizing our communities. We know that with climate change, and one of the things that I often say is that, “When the US has a cold, Puerto Rico has pneumonia. What that means is, that if it’s going to be bad environmentally for everybody, it’s going to be worse for communities of color, like we know happens in New Orleans.

Many of our communities live near brownfields. In fact, just let me quickly read this:

“Nationally, people of color make up the majority of residents living in neighborhoods within two miles of the nation’s commercial hazardous waste facilities. Nearly double the percentage in areas beyond two miles. We also make up 70 percent of the residents in neighborhoods with

cluster facilities. Nine out of ten EPA regions have racial disparities in the location of hazardous waste sites.” What that means is like I said, “When the US has a cold, Puerto Rico has pneumonia.” Our communities are the most vulnerable communities. Communities of color and low income communities are the ones that are going to suffer the most from climate change.

This is something. We’re now in a particular place in history in America where we could work together in a way that we *never* have before. Honestly, in order for us to be able to do that, it really means that you have to be able to give up the “cab.” My question is: “Is that something you are able to do, can you do that? Are you willing to do that?” This is a conference where, you know, I got up here and said that I’m the first Latina (she laughs) to address the plenary. In NYC, donde se habla español. I have to ask, really in your organizing, you pick a location near Wall Street; you do it during the day so you ask, “Who is going to attend?”

The other thing that is extremely important is that this be an inter-generational effort. The fact is that whatever we plan now is going to have an effect in 2030, 2050. One of the young people at my organization went to a recent rally on “Climate Change” where he had seen the trailer. He didn’t see the trailer was based in NYC, and he didn’t see a *single* person of color on the trailer. He said, “Should I do this?” I said, “Yeah, you’ve got to go, you’ve got to do it.” [He replied] “But they didn’t include us in the trailer and it’s NYC.” I said, “Yeah, I know. You have to ask the question. You’ve got to go.”

It is extremely important that we change the paradigm and that means changing the power relationships and falling into a different comfort zone with each other. Because unless that happens, Cecil’s going to continue to *not* get the cab (Cecil, you’re not having it, right?). We’re going to say, “You know what? At the end everyone is going to lose!”

This is a tremendous historical opportunity that we have right now. The jobs range from everything from developing the materials, for developing for building high performance building, to constructing, landscaping. Everything that you could imagine, including the equipment that we use to retrofit vehicles in our communities. All of those things are green jobs. All of those things are opportunities for economic development.

The environmental justice is *never* against development. Sunset Park, which is the community that I work in, is one of the largest walk-to-work communities in New York City. We've got 1200 manufacturers there. We support those jobs. They're extremely important to our community but we also ask questions, "At what cost? Can the incentives and the support necessary for these manufacturers to start building green and developing green infrastructure, is that there?" All of those things are extremely important to us. We urge you to always ask the question: is environmental justice leadership at the table; who's missing? Because if they're missing, we *can't* move forward. Muchas gracias.