Call to Action for World Leaders to Proactively Address the Adverse Psychological and Social Impacts of Climate Disruption

We the undersigned representatives from the mental and physical health, human services, emergency management, climate change, faith, racial justice, civil rights, arts, and youth communities of the world recognize that climate change is a real, dangerous, and rapidly worsening crisis that is already producing, and will increasingly generate, significant physical, economic, and ecological harm.

Equally important, but often unnoticed, is that climate change creates very serious psychological, emotional, spiritual, religious, moral and social impacts worldwide. Left unaddressed, the mounting psychosocial maladies will diminish the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities everywhere. They are also likely to thwart efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions, prepare for climate impacts, and reduce climate change to manageable levels.

We therefore call on public, non-profit, private, and civic leaders in the U.S. and around the world to quickly recognize the very serious risks posed by climate disruption to the psychosocial health and wellbeing of humanity.

We also call for preventative psychosocial resilience building programs to be rapidly established in the U.S. and around the globe. The initiatives should build awareness of simple skills and tools individuals and groups can use to calm their emotions and thoughts in the midst of climate-enhanced trauma and stress. They should also help people understand how to learn, grow, and thrive even in the midst of climate-enhanced adversity and stress. These resilience building programs will not only help people adapt, cope, and thrive in the midst of climate-enhanced adversities, they will also build humanity’s capacity to respond constructively to many types of traumas and stresses.

In addition, we call for the mental health system as well as emergency medical services, emergency management and other core elements of the emergency services infrastructure in the U.S. and globally to be significantly upgraded to the levels needed to respond to the growing adverse psychosocial impacts of climate change.

The Failure to Address the Adverse Psychosocial Impacts of Climate Change

Slashing greenhouse gas emissions and protecting nature’s ability to sequester carbon are essential to reduce climate disruption to manageable levels. All public, private, and not-for-profit organizations as well as residents in the U.S. and worldwide have a responsibility to dramatically cut their emissions.

Even if emissions are rapidly cut, however, climate scientists have determined that global temperatures are likely to rise close to, or beyond, two degrees Celsius (3.6° F) above preindustrial levels in the future. This increase will produce a wide range of destructive impacts. It is therefore essential to prepare for and adapt to the now inevitable adverse impacts of climate disruption.

A number of communities and governments have initiated climate preparedness programs. However, as laudable as these efforts are, few focus on building the capacity of individuals and groups to cope psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually with climate-enhanced adversities. To the extent that the psychosocial impacts of climate disruption have even been acknowledged, the emphasis has been on better post-disaster trauma treatment.
This is a tragic error. As temperatures rise, so will the frequency and intensity of sudden or overwhelming extreme weather events that generate anxiety, depression, anger, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other mental distresses. There will never be sufficient resources available to treat all of the people impacted by the growing number of these events. The only way to prevent significant psychosocial consequences is to prepare people in advance by teaching resilience skills.

Equally important, but less obvious, is that climate change generates a wide range of chronic toxic stresses. Research has found, for example, that hotter temperatures precipitate increased aggression. Climate-enhanced illnesses and diseases as well as economic disruptions and job losses often trigger anger, depression, and hopelessness. Moral distress, helplessness, and despair will continually rise as people grapple with the physical damage, spiritual, and existential implications of the crisis.

The psychobiology of trauma and stress indicates that when people lack sufficient skills and resources many adopt self-destructive coping behaviors such as alcohol and drug abuse. Without preventative measures, maladies affecting children and families, organizations, communities, and whole nations will also rise including aggression, racism and other forms of systematic oppression, crime, violence, and terrorism.

Few climate preparedness and adaptation programs address these destructive psychosocial effects. Nor do many mental health, educational, or human services organizations offer resilience building programs. Without rapid major investments in resilience building, the mental, physical, and spiritual health and wellbeing of millions of people worldwide will be seriously impaired. Emotionally dysregulated individuals and groups will have little interest in reducing emissions or preparing for climate impacts. This suggests that the failure to proactively address this issue also threatens to undermine efforts to reduce emissions and prepare for climate change.

**An Urgent Call to Action to Launch Resilience Building Programs Worldwide**

We therefore call on all government, non-profit, academic, private sector, and faith leaders in the U.S. and worldwide to recognize that climate change is a major threat to the psychosocial health and wellbeing of humanity, and for preventative psychosocial resilience building programs to be quickly established around the globe to address the problem. The programs should seek to build the capacity of individuals and groups of all kinds to use simple skills and tools to use climate-enhanced and many other types of traumas and stresses as catalysts to learn, grow, and thrive. We also call for significant rapid improvement in the mental health and emergency services infrastructure to deal with rising adverse psychosocial impacts.

For ideas on how you can increase psychosocial resilience, research supporting this statement, or to become involved with discussions about building psychosocial resilience go to: (a link will be inserted here soon)

Signed,

After the call to action is circulated, a list of signatories will be added here including ITRC members and others in the mental health, human services, faith and other related fields.

You can view a current list of signatories here: [http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/itrc-call-to-action/#signons](http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/itrc-call-to-action/#signons)