2020 Congreso: Rising Up for a Just Recovery

August 11 & 12, 2020

Our 7th Annual Congreso celebrates the power and resilience of our communities as we confront white supremacy, a pandemic, and a federal administration anti-thethical to democracy and equality. As we reflect on the transformative possibilities of the current health, economic, and social crisis, a Just Recovery means releasing extractive relationships and reimagining our environmental, economic, political, and social systems. At this year's Congreso, community leaders from across the state will come together virtually to build power and grow the movement toward achieving the Just Recovery that is needed now more than ever.

About the California Environmental Justice Alliance

The California Environmental Justice Alliance is a statewide, community-led alliance that works to achieve environmental justice by advancing policy solutions. We unite the powerful local organizing of our members in the communities most impacted by environmental hazards – low-income communities and communities of color – to create comprehensive opportunities for change at a statewide level. We build the power of communities across California to create policies that will alleviate pollution and poverty. Together, we are growing the statewide movement for environmental health and social justice.

CEJA Members & Partners

2020 Congreso Agenda

Day 1: Tuesday, August 11, 2020

8:30 — 9:00 am	Zoom Orientation
9:00 —9:50 am	Welcome, Opening & Overview
	Break
10:00 — 11:00 am	COVID & Environmental Justice Workshop
	Break
11:15 — 12:15 pm	Kicking off the 2020 Elections: Know Your Rights & Vote for a Just Recovery - Presented by CEJA Action
	Break
12:30 — 1:15 pm	Documentary Screening & Discussion: The CRPE Green Zones Community Tour

Day 2: Wednesday, August 12, 2020

8:40 — 9:00 am	Zoom Orientation
9:00 —9:50 am	Welcome & Performance
	Break
10:00 — 11:00 am	SOMAH From Policy to Program: A Just Recovery in Action
	Break
11:15 — 12:15 pm	Just Recovery Workshop: Another World is Possible
	Break
12:30 — 1:00 pm	Environmental Justice Awards & Closing
1:00 — 2:00 pm	DJ Dance Party

Social Media

Take photos with our Virtual Photo Booth, follow @cejapower, and use the hashtags #2020Congreso and #JustRecovery

Session Descriptions

Zoom Orientations

These 15-30-minute sessions with live Q&A will provide a high-level tour of Zoom's features such as interpretation, to help you virtually participate in this year's Congreso.

Facilitated by:

- Bk Kwakye, Operations Manager at The Management Center

Day 1 Opening

This inspirational opening features a spoken word performance from award-winning poet Dominique Christina. We will then be honored by a keynote speech and Q&A from one of the century's most powerful and respected labor movement leaders, Dolores Huerta – Founder and President of the Dolores Huerta Foundation, and co-founder of the United Farm Workers of America with César Chavez. Overall, the opening session will ground us in the current crises of the Movement for Black Lives and the global pandemic, and how we can learn from the the past to have strength and fortitude to persevere through current and future challenges.

Featuring:

- Dolores Huerta, President and Founder, Dolores Huerta Foundation
- Dominique Christina, Poet
- Gladys Limón, Executive Director, CEJA
- Moderated by: Congreso Emcee Ernesto Arevalo, Northern CA Program Director, CBE

COVID & Environmental Justice Workshop

As the COVID-19 pandemic disrupts everyday life across the globe, it has also highlighted a number of long-standing inequalities in various communities across the United States. Through this workshop, participants will have an opportunity to learn how COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted EJ communities and vulnerable populations, and how those disparate impacts are rooted in our country's long legacy of environmental racism and discriminatory policymaking. Participants will also have a chance to learn how residents and organizations from across the state —from rural communities to urban cities, from the valleys to the coast—have organized and advocated for groundbreaking solutions for their regions. We believe that by focusing on the people most impacted by this crisis, and by letting communities lead, we can create a stronger, healthier, and a more resilient state for everyone.

Speakers:

- Tere Almaguer, Environmental Justice Organizer, PODER
- Jazmine Johnson, Land Use and Health Program Associate, PSR-LA
- Tiffany Eng, Green Zones Program Manager, CEJA

Kicking off the 2020 Elections: Know Your Rights & Vote for a Just Recovery - Presented by CEJA Action

November 3rd, 2020 will be a pivotal election for environmental justice communities. This year we have experienced the multiplying effects of living under COVID-19 while sheltering in place near oil sites, toxic exposure and climate change crisis. On this year's ballot, whether you are voting at home with your mail ballot or voting in-person at your nearest polling place, learn how to make sure your vote counts while sheltering in place, vote led by our social justice values, and to make sure CEJA and our member organizations are at the center of every political decision.

Speakers:

- Franco Garcia, Organizing Director, Environmental Health and Justice Campaign
- Lucia Marquez, Community Organizer, CAUSE Action Fund
- Mabel Tsang, Civic Engagement Program Manager, CEJA Action
- Esther Goolsby, CBE Action member and former candidate for Alameda County Board of Supervisor District 4
- Georgette Gomez, former Environmental Health Coalition Associate Director and current San Diego City Council President and candidate for Congressional District 53

Documentary Screening & Discussion: Center for Race, Poverty & the Environment (CRPE) Green Zones Community Tour

We close our first day of Congreso by premiering the first-ever documentary featuring a CEJA Green Zones Community Tour. CEJA's member organization Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment (CRPE) led this tour in October 2019, as the fourth in a series of Green Zones Tours across the state since 2018. CEJA's Green Zones tours are a unique way for environmental justice leaders from across the state to share stories, cross-strategize, and see similarities among our shared struggles, solutions, and victories.

This 10-minute video highlights the history of local resistance in the heart of California's oil and agricultural capitol, from the farmworkers' movement of the 1960's to the present day struggles and victories against the extractive oil and gas industry. It showcases community leaders in the San Joaquin Valley who are transforming their local areas' "toxic hotspots" into healthy, thriving neighborhoods. It clearly contrasts the destructive nature and level of pollution created by the fossil fuel economy and industrial dairy farming, with the ways that local communities are coming together to truly envision and create their own just transition.

Participants in this session will view a 10-minute documentary presentation, and engage in a 30-minute interactive discussion led by CRPE community organizers and advocates. Together, we will celebrate our environmental justice victories, learn how the Green Zones framework moves us closer to our north star of just transition, and find out how to take action by documenting and sharing our own environmental justice leadership stories.

Speakers:

- Juan Flores, Community Organizer, CRPE
- Tiffany Eng, Green Zones Program Manager, CEJA
- Moderated by: Isa Flores-Jones, Communications Associate at CEJA

Day 2 Opening

We kick off our second day with a powerful performance by Taina Asili. We will then hear an uplifting keynote speech by Mari Copeny, also known as "Little Miss Flint." At 8 years old she inspired then-President Obama to visit her in Flint, Michigan and brought national attention to the local water crisis. Mari's speech will bridge the previous days' stories of perspective and strength from our elders, and the hope and vision of future generations. This session will highlight our communities' power and resiliency as we rise for a truly just recovery, build long-term solutions for environmental justice, and realize that "we are the ones we've been waiting for."

Featuring:

- Mari Copeny a.k.a. "Little Miss Flint", 12 year-old activist leader
- Taina Asili, Musical performer
- Gladys Limón, Executive Director, CEJA
- Moderated by: Congreso Emcee Ernesto Arevalo, Northern CA Program Director at CBE

SOMAH From Policy to Program - A Just Recovery in Action

We fought for it, and it's here! The Solar on Multifamily Affordable Housing (SOMAH) program provides up to $100 million a year for solar on multifamily housing serving working class renters and environmental justice communities throughout California all while prioritizing local green job hiring. Our communities have been on the frontlines of pollution. Now we're knocking down barriers to the benefits of the renewable energy economy.

Learn how SOMAH went from policy to program and how we have continued to shape the program to advance access to energy equity and clean jobs in our communities. Join our discussion about how SOMAH, the largest investment in solar in the country, fits into a Just Recovery framework so that we can emerge from the current moment stronger and more resilient.

Speakers:

- Ayesha Abbasi, SOMAH Outreach Coordinator at APEN
- Monica De la Cruz, SOMAH Outreach Coordinator at EHC
- Gwen Chang, SOMAH Outreach & Curriculum Manager at CEJA
- Terez Sanogo, SOMAH Outreach Coordinator at CBE

Just Recovery Workshop: Another World is Possible

Environmental justice communities - including Latinx, Black, AAPI, and Indigenous communities - have long suffered from the cumulative impacts of environmental racism, white supremacy, and economic inequality. Now, they are also being hit the first and worst by COVID-19 and are suffering the impacts of the collapsing global economy, health system, and social safety net due to the pandemic. With all this, it has become painfully clear that our system is failing us. Yet, as the Zapatistas have urged, *another world is possible*. We have the power to build it together.

In this workshop, we will explore how to rebuild and pursue a truly Just Recovery for our communities. We will provide a brief overview of the Just Recovery framework, its guiding principles, and how to use it as a tool for local organizing and advocacy. Then we will dive into an engaging panel discussion, featuring representatives from CEJA's member and ally organizations, to explore how to use Just Recovery in our local and statewide work.

Through this session, participants will gain an understanding of how to use the Just Recovery framework as a tool for organizing, advocating, and advancing environmental justice in their communities. Participants will also have more knowledge about the opportunities to pursue a Just Recovery in California and feel empowered to take action.

Featuring:

- Jayeesha Dutta, Co-Founding Artist-Activist-Strategist, Another Gulf Is Possible
- Amee Raval, Senior Policy Researcher, APEN
- Alexis Sutterman, Program Associate, CEJA
- Moderated by: Gladys Limón, Executive Director, CEJA

Environmental Justice Awards & Closing

CEJA is honored to present our 4th Annual Environmental Justice Leadership Awards to the following leaders at the community, organization and decision-maker levels. The awardees were selected through a community-nominated process in recognition of their exemplary and critical environmental justice work and leadership.

Featuring:

- **Community Organization Award: Concerned Citizens of West Fresno**
  Presented by Ashley Werner, Senior Attorney, Leadership Counsel for Justice & Accountability
- **Community Leader Award: Tasha Williamson**
  Presented by Diane Takvorian, Executive Director, EHC
- **Decision-maker Award: Carmen Ramírez, Oxnard Mayor Pro Tem**
  Presented by Lucia Marquez, Community Organizer, CAUSE
- Moderated by: Congreso Emcee Ernesto Arevalo, Northern CA Program Director, CBE

DJ Dance Party

Top off the day with a virtual dance party to celebrate the joy and beauty of our collective movement!

Featuring:

- DJ Crystal Sparks

Keynote Speakers

Day 1 Keynote Speaker

Dolores Huerta

Dolores Huerta is a civil rights activist and community organizer. She has worked for labor rights and social justice for over 50 years. In 1962, she and César Chavez founded the United Farm Workers union. She served as Vice President and played a critical role in many of the union's accomplishments for four decades. In 2002, she received the Puffin/Nation $100,000 prize for Creative Citizenship which she used to establish the Dolores Huerta Foundation (DHF). DHF is connecting groundbreaking community-based organizing to state and national movements to register and educate voters; advocate for education reform; bring about infrastructure improvements in low-income communities; advocate for greater equality for the LGBT community; and create strong leadership development. She has received numerous awards: among them The Eleanor Roosevelt Humans Rights Award from President Clinton in 1998. In 2012 President Obama bestowed Dolores with The Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States.

Day 2 Keynote Speaker

Mari Copeny, a.k.a. Little Miss Flint

Twelve-year-old Mari Copeny is also known as Little Miss Flint because of her activism around the water crisis in Flint, Michigan. In May 2016, when she was 8 years old, she wrote a letter to President Barack Obama detailing the water crisis in her hometown and challenging him to visit. The president visited Flint and subsequently authorized $100 million to repair the city's water system. Copeny's activism made national news, and she has been using her voice to fight for social justice since.

Speakers & Performers

Congreso Emcee

Ernesto Alverado

Ernesto first joined CBE as an East Oakland member and joined the staff in April 2016. He's currently the Northern California Program Director. After graduating from UC Davis in Environmental Policy Analysis and Planning, he wanted to use what he had learned to help improve his community. Because of his experience with organizing as a member then staff member of CBE and his education, Ernesto is able to serve versatile roles, shifting from community organizing and communications to research and institutional organizing. He is committed to ensuring that the community's voice is heard and that the planning process is more accessible to residents.

Spoken Word Artist

Dominique Christina

Dominique Christina is an award-winning poet, author, educator, and activist. She holds five national poetry slam titles in four years, including the 2014 & 2012 Women of the World Slam Champion and 2011 National Poetry Slam Champion. Her work is greatly influenced by her family's legacy in the Civil Rights Movement and by the idea that words make worlds. She is the author of four books and a writer/actor for the HBO series High Maintenance Season 2. Her fourth book "Anarcha Speaks" won the National Poetry Series award in 2017.

Musical Artist

Taina Asili

Taína Asili is a New York-based Puerto Rican singer, filmmaker and activist carrying on the tradition of her ancestors, fusing past and present struggles into one soulful and defiant voice. Her music combines powerful vocals carrying themes of hope and liberation with an energetic fusion of Afro-Latin, reggae and rock. Asili's music offers a sound that spans continents, exuding strength of Spirit, inspiring audiences at venues across the globe. With an energetic horn section and infectious rhythms, Asili's music urges people to get on their feet and dance to the rhythm of rebellion.

Congreso Breaks DJ

DJ Que Madre

Que Madre is a Boyle Heights native and DJ. She's a member of the Los Angeles Chapter of Chulita Vinyl Club, which is an all women-of-color vinyl collective that uses music as a tool of resistance to fight against the erasure of cultures. She specializes in cumbia, latin, hip-hop & r&b. You can follow her on her IG at @que.madre.

Dance Party DJ

DJ Crystal Sparks

"Dancing DJ" Crystal Sparks is an actress, TV host, emcee and DJ who lives in Los Angeles. Her bright smile, high energy and real-life TV experience gives her presence a unique, polished edge. She earned her master's degree in Communications, and has reported and anchored the news in Columbia, MO (NBC), Jackson, MS (ABC) and Grand Rapids, MI (NBC). She takes pride in her diverse music taste, which allows her to DJ a wide variety of events.

Zoom Host

Bk Kwakye

Bk is a dynamic leader who is passionate about developing young leaders and uplifting the voices of marginalized communities. Since moving to the DC metro area, Bk has worked with young people in sexual education and capacity building and hopes to pursue a Master's in Social Work in the future. When not serving in their current role as Operations Manager at The Management Center, Bk spends hours cooking Ghanaian cuisine and practicing their green thumb.

Check out our Virtual Photo Booth!

Celebrate #Congreso2020 with our virtual photo booth by snapping a photo of your beautiful activist smile, complete with a unique Congreso filter and overlay! If you're feeling extra savvy, make your very own GIF or boomerang and share it on our virtual gallery or to Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. It's supported on all phone and computer web browsers excluding Google Chrome.

Environmental Justice Leadership Awardees

Community Organization Award

Concerned Citizens of West Fresno

The Concerned Citizens of West Fresno (CCWF) is a Black-led community group of Fresno residents who fought and won a multi-generational battle to end the illegal operations of the Darling meat rendering plant in the Black community of West Fresno. Residents have objected to the plant ever since 1947, when it began as a slaughterhouse and later expanded without proper permitting into a rendering operation. At the peak of operation, the plant processed up to 850,000 pounds of meat daily. Over the decades, residents responded to the stench, animal juice, stray dogs and flies that pervaded the neighborhood with multiple lawsuits.

In 2005, CCWF took on Darling Ingredients, a fortune 500 multinational corporation, through a combination of grassroots community organizing, advocacy work, mediation, and litigation. Upon discovering that the plant lacked a Conditional Use Permit to operate, residents jumped into action to collect over 500 signatures opposing the plant's planned expansion. Over the course of the fifteen years between the start of the campaign and the eventual victory, CCWF engaged in negotiations, mediation, and litigation, experienced huge setbacks, and persisted. Ultimately in February 2020, CCWF won a settlement agreement with Darling and the City of Fresno, requiring Darling to permanently shut down the rendering plant by December 2023.

As part of the agreement, Darling Ingredients has committed to paying the community organization $10,000 per each day the plant remains open past the agreed upon shut down date. Darlings' closure will allow residents to enjoy their neighborhood and community without the stench of the meat rendering facility. CCWF's victory will allow residents to more fully realize the benefits of the Transformative Climate Communities investments that are being made in West Fresno and create a safer, healthier, and more enjoyable community for all.
Against incredible odds, including government complicity with an incredibly well resourced opponent, the years of organizing by CCWF and their eventual victory is proof of the power of a community united to advance justice.

Community Leader Award

Tasha Williamson

Tasha Williamson is an activist and leader for racial justice in San Diego. Following the deaths of two of her son's friends, she co-founded the Compassion Project in 2008 to provide grief counseling and support for families who have lost loved ones to violence.

Williamson also founded the Community Assistance Support Team which works to end the cycle of violence and retribution that so often occurs after a gang-related shooting. In 2018, Williamson mobilized her community to protest the unjust killing of Earl McNeil, a Black man, at the hands of the National City police department.

Williamson has been a leading voice in the organizing and protests for the Movement for Black Lives in her community of San Diego. Most recently, she ran a courageous and path-blazing campaign for Mayor of San Diego, bringing the issues of domestic violence, police brutality and poverty onto the debate stage.

Decision Maker Award

Oxnard Mayor Pro Tem Carmen Ramírez

Oxnard Mayor Pro Tem Carmen Ramírez, has dedicated her life to social justice and public service. She is a staunch leader of environmental justice causes in the region where CAUSE organizes, standing with community and grassroots efforts to transform the community into a healthy, sustainable one. She was elected in 2010, after a long career as a legal aid attorney serving low-income communities in Ventura County. She has made environmental justice the hallmark of her public service, successfully fighting polluting projects in Oxnard, championing the transition to renewable clean energy in Oxnard and restoration of an industrialized coastline, as well as social and economic justice for her constituents.

2020 Congreso Sponsors

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Special Thanks

The CEJA team extends our appreciation and gratitude to our Alliance members and partners, community members, funders, sponsors, and allies for joining us and making our #Congreso2020 a success! We would also like to thank the following individuals for their support.

Congreso 2020 Emcee
- Ernesto Arevalo, CBE

Congreso 2020 Planning Committee & Volunteers
- Carolina Martinez, EHC
- Laura Benavidez, EHC
- Mayra Vega, SCOPE
- Paula Torrado, PSR-LA
- Siboney Arias, SCOPE
- Tere Almaguer, PODER

Virtual Photo Booth
- Studio Z Photo Booth

Design
- Design Action Collective

Contact Information

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