



GARN
GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR
THE RIGHTS OF NATURE

GARN's response to the Present Crisis

For some time, the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (GARN) along with many Indigenous peoples, scientists, movement leaders, and academics, have warned that humanity is living dangerously out of balance with the natural laws of Mother Earth. With the impacts of COVID-19, we are now facing the greatest global health crisis we have seen in a century; but this is not only a health crisis— it is a systemic, economic and social crisis that reveals and magnifies the underlying inequalities and injustices of our society.

This virus is selective; so too is the response. It attacks above all those with immunodeficiencies (the elderly, those with prior respiratory health issues and other conditions) but it also reveals societies' asymmetries and exposes the inherent flaws of the neoliberal economic and capitalist system, affecting in a disproportionate manner those who are most vulnerable (indigenous people, homeless people, migrants, those in situations of domestic violence and those with no stable employment). If there was ever a time to rethink our societies and our dependence on a globalized industrial system, it is now. The socio-environmental roots of the pandemic are being ignored, especially by the media, and meanwhile a dangerous military discourse is propagated. In the face of this negligence, it has become urgent to point out the actual root causes of the pandemic; to see the problem for what it is—a question of our unbalanced relationship with Nature—and to raise our voices and write a new story.

This virus is reinforcing what Indigenous peoples have been saying for a long time: we need to reconnect with nature and restore a respectful relationship with Mother Earth. The ecological problems that we face today—deforestation, the loss of biodiversity, mass species extinction, climate change— are not unrelated to the current pandemic: it is important to remember that both the pandemic itself and the inability of societies all around the world to adequately respond, are the direct result of unsustainable human practices. Wildlife poaching and wild meat trade allow for unknown diseases to spread from animal to human populations; air pollution makes humans more vulnerable to respiratory diseases and may even contribute to the diffusion of airborne pathogens; the untenable population density of urban areas all but ensures that any disease with a high degree of virulency will immediately become a pandemic.



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We are already seeing Nature's response to the pause on human activities that the COVID-19 crisis has forced; its consequences are easily visible, even to the naked eye. Around 191,000 daily flights have stopped, and quarantines around the world have resulted in a sharp decline in the use of fossil fuels, leading to a reduction in global GreenHouse Gas emissions, especially CO2 and NO2. People and communities around the world are searching for solutions to the pandemic, as well as looking beyond the quarantines. This crisis has demonstrated our profound level of interconnectedness; it has shown the strength of the human spirit, our ability to come together to care for one another, and the ability nature has to heal and recover when we slow down.

On the other hand, however, it has also shown how governments and corporations are willing to take advantage of the crisis to advance their own interests and their profits, even in the midst of the widespread human misery and the looming economic recession. Many companies and extractivist states have seized the opportunity to lobby for lower environmental regulations, to enforce the removal of protest encampments, and to divert scrutiny from their activities. Other alarming trends include totalitarian surveillance, nationalist isolation, and big data control.

The Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature, a global network of more than 300 organizations around the world working to recognize and respect the Rights of Nature, is mobilizing itself and its members to address this crisis and historical moment. The time is now to transform human consciousness, to redesign failing, consumptive economic and social structures, and to create a framework for living in harmony with Nature grounded in the recognition of the Rights of Mother Earth. GARN will adapt to the current situation, work virtually and will keep cultivating the knowledge of Nature Rights through online platforms and dialogues, telling the story from Nature's perspective.

We need to understand that, all things considered, the coronavirus is not the worst-case scenario as far as pandemics go. If a virus were to come along with a similar rate of infection and incubation period, but a greater mortality rate, it would decimate humanity. If human society does not change its practices, it is only a matter of a time before this happens. If it is not a virus, Mother Earth will find a way to make us disappear if we continue destroying it. We need to pass laws that minimize this possibility and give Nature rights.



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Nature's rights laws are inherently future-minded: unlike most existing legislation they are not concerned with maintaining short-term economic stability so much as ensuring the long-term survival of the human species. What is at stake is nothing less than that. We can no longer afford to take our existence upon this planet for granted, nor, indeed, life on this planet as such, and we need legislation that is up to the task. Therefore, GARN calls on civil society and on governments at every scale—local, regional, and national—to put the Rights of Nature on an equal footing with related Human Rights (the right to healthcare, clean water, healthy environment), and to immediately adopt laws that recognize these inherent rights, and that steer us away from our own destruction, and the destruction of the planet that is our only home. Now that there is silence, listen to what Nature has to say.