

The Transformation of Corporations, Global Financial Institutions and  
Government:  
*A Quaker Approach*

*A Speech Delivered by Laura Ward Holliday  
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Friends:

First I want to thank you for sharing this time with me. Secondly, I want to thank the committee of this Gathering, who extended the invitation to come and share with you in this beautiful setting, for thinking I had something of importance to say. And thirdly, I want to thank me for having the nerve to show up.

I was excited when I was provided the theme of this Gathering... swimming in living waters. For you see, I have been swimming in living waters my entire life.... sometimes upstream and sometimes downstream. As I mature and grow wiser, I think it would be much easier for me to just go with the flow. While I sometimes do, that has not been the reality of my life. I have learned that life has a rhythm. Like the living waters, it ebbs and flows. And, as we recognize we are a part of the living waters, hopefully, we will learn to ebb and flow.

I want to share a story with you. In 2001, tropical storm Allison hit my city, Houston, Texas. Its destruction caused 22 human deaths, severe damage to homes, businesses, to the Texas Medical Center, where 30,000 lab animals died, and 5 billion dollars in property damage. I was personally affected by the storm in that both my home and business were pretty much destroyed. One night I went to bed, looking forward to enjoying the restful sound of the rain. Before sunrise the next morning, I was knee deep in water. Within 24 hours, my home was destroyed, my business equipment, personal belongings and my sense of security. Until that moment, water had been a source of pleasure and enjoyment... serenity and peace. Suddenly, it had become a destroyer of possessions and also my peace of mind.

During this experience, I had the occasion to come in contact with governmental agencies such as FEMA, which has been in the news a lot lately, and with non-profit corporations such as the Red Cross and United Way. I also encountered for-profit corporations such as giant oil and energy companies and retailers like Wal-Mart and others. All my adult life I had been a donor to organizations like the Red Cross and the United Way. I, like a lot of citizens in this country, had the utmost confidence in the governmental agencies and non-profits to deliver goods and services to those in crisis situations. While a level of service was provided, what I witnessed as a recipient for the first time in my life was a level of incompetence, bureaucratic indecisiveness and the inability to deliver. At the same time, I witnessed and observed oil companies and retailers marshal their enormous resources, distribution systems and people into action to provide my city with the ability to deliver goods and services to people in need.

After reflecting on this experience, while anticipating the next body of living waters coming in from the Gulf of Mexico, I realized the power of these entities called corporations—their ability to do an extreme amount of good even as they wreak havoc and destruction on the environment and peoples of the world.

I watched people serve others and work for the common good while working for and being a part of a business entity whose bottom line was maximized profit and domination of market share. These people weren't faceless; they were people who had the same goals and aspirations in life as you and I. They were people who needed to work in order to support their families and secure their later years through investments.

In short, I observed their ability to deliver services and work together where all interests, both self and commercial were threatened by environmental conditions over which they as individuals and powerful commercial business institutions had no control. Yet, and as I well knew, they were, whether they liked it or not, part of an economic system that denied health benefits to workers, raped and abused the environment, disparaged the poor through dumping and burying toxic waste in their neighborhoods, and who dominated and manipulated politicians through the use of money.

In light of daily news reports of corporate corruption, environmental crises such as climate change and global warming, the adverse affects on the ecology of humans and the planet, the influence of money in the political arena and the impact on domestic governance, my awareness that the general non- recognition of the connection between all these factors was of constant concern to me. It brought home more deeply my growing awareness of the interconnectedness between humans, business, government and environment. It forced more deeply into my consciousness the awareness of that awesome Oneness that is a constant and continuing theme in my life.

I had been concerned about the role of corporations for some time but had shared this with no one and was even unaware that others had similar concerns around this issue. However, in November, 2004, while attending the general meeting of Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), a Friend I met for the first time introduced me to the Quaker Institute for the Future and its Summer Research Seminar being convened in Bar Harbor, Maine, the following summer.

In retrospect, it was clear to me that this meeting was not by chance. It confirmed one of my core beliefs that there are few if any coincidences or accidents in this life and that all things happen for a reason... that all life experiences are connected with the choices we make and that we and our experience is a part of a vast data base that we all share. We are like magnets that draw to us what we want to experience. Sometimes we are the teacher and sometimes the student depending on what role will give us what we need to learn from the experience.

In any event, I felt called to register and participate.

The Seminar offered the prospect of Meeting for Worship for the Conduct of Research which appealed to me because discernment, intuition, and leadings from a Source greater than myself are what I rely on to live my life. So, I showed up in Bar Harbor Maine even though I had no clear research project. I knew only that I would be with a group of people with concerns similar to my own. It was two weeks before I became clear about a specific topic. As Friends shared their topics of research, it seemed they were all connected in some way to the relationship between global governance, transnational corporations, global financial institutions and their impact on the environment and people's daily lives. My topic came into view and I realized how the pieces of the puzzle that began with a personal crisis in 2001 led me to this moment. As a result, I chose to explore this relationship and its global effects. The beautiful coming together of this group in a place of peninsulas and islands surrounded by water heightened my sense of being led by the Spirit—the Spirit moving in living waters.

I began to focus on how we as Quakers can impact this relationship in a strategic way that would serve the interests of humanity and Earth. Could corporate behavior toward people and the environment be transformed from the global prevailing model where the primacy of shareholder interest dominates most world economies? Could there be a transformation in their methods of operations that would serve their shareholders interest while lessening the destruction of the environment and also serve the public good?

I had felt strongly for some time that corporate sway over national governments, leads to policies that provide corporations with excessive profits to the detriment of people and planet. It was apparent that something had to change. While I believe change can and will occur in stages, I am clear that a new corporate model is needed that will shift the use of resources for domination and control, to a focus of providing for the needs of people, communities, and the environment.

Let me say more of why I see this as so vital to our human-Earth future.

Corporations dominate essential life sustaining sectors of our economies such as food, water, medicine, natural resources and the environment. So, I profiled five global corporations, whose market values measured in billions and who ranked in the top 500 in the world. These businesses are engaged in the sectors of oil, construction/engineering, pharmaceuticals/bio-technology, food, logistical war support and retail. They are British Petroleum, Halliburton/Kellogg Brown and Root (KBR), Novartis, Monsanto and Wal-Mart Stores. We are all aware, in a general sense, of how much their corporate influence shapes and determines governmental policies and laws both domestically and globally. This influence and dominance impact economies, environments and global governance.

I want to explore with you for a moment how these institutions became so very powerful in the United States and how the relationship between legislatures, both state and federal, their authority to pass laws and the judiciary's authority to uphold and interpret those laws, created this current atmosphere and reality of dominance, global influence, and degradation of Earth's environment at the expense of people.

In Marjorie Kelly's book, *The Divine Right of Capital; Dethroning the Corporate Aristocracy*, she gives an early history of corporations, their original missions and how they became so powerful. Originally, American corporations were chartered and regulated by state legislatures with the mission of serving the public good. They are still regulated by states; however their mission has changed. Prior to 1885, corporations were considered artificial entities under the law. This status changed in 1886, when remarks in the preface of a US Supreme court case, *Santa Clara vs. Southern Pacific Railroad*, Chief Justice Morrison R. Waite confirmed the principle that corporations enjoyed the same rights under the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment as did natural persons. That amendment states in part that no State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. Although the original intent of this amendment was to protect freed slaves from abuses, this ruling allowed it to be used to protect corporations and their interests. Therefore, in the name of substantive economic due process, between 1905 to the mid 1930s, more than two hundred economic regulations were invalidated.

In 1919, in *Dodge vs. Ford Motor Co.* the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that a business corporation is organized and carried on primarily for the profits of the stockholders. In the 60s and 70s, corporations continued to use court decisions to evade social responsibility, for example, by attacking the requirements to label products, evading the ban of the advertisement of tobacco products, and prohibiting unannounced inspections by OSHA.

In the 80's, corporations faced hostile takeovers, lawsuits from shareholders against management, and demands from large institutional funds such as state, county and municipal pension funds. To maximize their profits they instituted cost cutting measures such as lay offs, continued union busting, the hiring of part-time employees and the elimination of health benefits. In the 90's, because of tax loopholes and corporate welfare, taxes from corporations declined and public subsidies to corporations increased.” (1) As a result of all these factors, in the twenty first century, 51 of the largest economies in the world are not countries but corporations. (2) This is an example of the relationship between laws passed by state legislatures, interpretations by the highest court of the land, and the impact on economies and populations.

Corporate crime is rampant and citizens are being bilked out of billions of dollars because of corporate greed. For example, in my hometown, Enron was the poster child for corporate greed. Enron was one of the largest employers in Houston, Texas, employing around 21,000 residents before filing bankruptcy in late 2001. As in most companies, the rank and file employees were hard working and loyal. Not only did they work hard, they also believed in their company. This loyalty and trust was reflected in their personal investments in Enron. As we are aware, these people not only lost their livelihoods, health benefits, retirement, savings and investments but also their homes, belongings and sense of a secure future. Some of them had spent their entire working lives at this company and had invested heavily in company stock. Enron was a fixture in the

community. Its name was on baseball stadiums; their building was a recognizable tower of the skyline of downtown Houston, the company supported the arts and gave generously to a wide range of projects. You may ask how this can happen with all the governmental regulatory oversight, such as the Securities and Exchange Commission, Department of Justice and state and federal prosecutors, all having a mandate to oversee their activities.

Well, as reported in the December 28, 2005 CORPORATE CRIME REPORTER, in a report titled CRIME WITHOUT CONVICTION: THE RISE OF DEFERRED AND NON PROSECUTION AGREEMENTS, the Department of Justice implemented a policy in 2003, not to prosecute major corporations committing serious crimes in major bribery and fraud cases in exchange for cooperation against culpable executives, implementation of corporate monitors, and fines. Prosecutors have entered into twice as many of these agreements, as they had in the previous ten years. To give you a few examples of corporations that have entered into these agreements with the Department of Justice between the period of 1992 to 2005 are Hilfiger, John Hancock Mutual Life, MCI, Merrill Lynch, Shell Oil, America On Line, Bristol Myers Squibb, KPMG, MCI, Monsanto, Prudential Securities and Sears. (3)

America's largest private contractor in Iraq, Halliburton/Kellogg Brown and Root, with a Department of Defense multibillion dollar contract funded by you the taxpayer, has been accused through one of its subcontractors of fueling an illicit pipeline of cheap foreign labor to Iraq, provided by young men from poor countries on the promise of jobs in Jordan (4) The board of Halliburton has now voted to sell KBR and I'm sure the damaging image to the parent company was an important factor in this decision.

In spite of this backdrop and the public's unfavorable view of corporate behavior, according to Fortune Magazine's eighth annual World's Most Admired Companies conducted in 2005, our profiled corporations came in as follows: Wal-Mart Stores number 2, British Petroleum number 22, Novartis number 48 and Pfizer, the world's largest pharmaceutical who operates Monsanto's Pharmaceuticals Business came in at number 17. (5)

In case I have not yet said enough to persuade you that my focus on corporations is one of Spirit-led concern for our global community—human and natural—that stems from a warranted perception of their harmful behavior, let me say more of how this behavior is supported by the legal and political systems and the role of our government due to its domination of global institutions.

Government is the second component of this relationship. It allows the extraordinary political access and influence corporations have on its operations. I call them the third legislative branch of Congress because of their influence. You have heard the old adage "money is the mother's milk of politics." Because of the staggering financial support members of Congress receive from these institutions; our government is ripe for corruption, influence peddling, criminal behavior, the buying of political influence, and governmental and corporate abuses. For example, in reviewing lobbying reports filed in

2004 reflecting donations to the Senate of the United States alone, our profiled corporations made donations in the amount of \$18,982,602. (6) The pharmaceutical and health products industry spent more than \$800 million in lobbying and campaign donations at the federal and state levels in the past seven years; \$675 million on its lobbying operation alone. Only the insurance industry spent more.

These huge investments have paid off, resulting in favorable laws and tens of billion of dollars in additional profits. This type of spending has led to favorable regulatory policy at the Food and Drug Administration, the main regulatory agency for this sector. In 2003, the industry hired about 3000 lobbyists, with more than a third of them being former federal officials. In 2004, 52 percent of the lobbyists listed were former federal officials. In that same year, there were 15 former Senators, 60 former members of the House of Representatives as well as high-level staffers to powerful members of Congress working as lobbyists. (7)

Corporations make donations to tax-exempt political committees, non-profit organizations and others that contribute to individual campaigns. One of the most infamous examples of these contributions was to a non-profit, the US Family Network, a so called public advocacy group, which described itself as a grass-roots organization but which was funded almost entirely by corporations linked to Jack Abramoff and tied to ex-House member Tom DeLay. (8) According to the Center for Public Integrity, in the last presidential campaign “nearly \$87 million of the contributions went to federal politicians in donations with almost 69 percent going to Republican candidates. Top recipients of the industry’s campaign money include President George W. Bush, which exceeded \$1.5 million, and members who sit on committees that have jurisdiction over pharmaceutical issues.” (9)

So Friends, when you have this type of spending, you have access, you impact policy and laws, you have the ability to strikes a blow at the very heart of our republic and constitution which is suppose to protect the rights and interests of its citizens. Do you see how our testimonies of integrity and equality are violated and the consequences of that violation for peace, simplicity, and community?

In addition to the financial influence on governance, laws and policy, when you investigate the people who serve presidents at cabinet levels, in top positions in governmental agencies and global institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, you begin to understand the corporate connection with governance. These are some examples of high profile players who move from the corporate world, to government positions to global institutions:

Robert McNamara served as president of the World Bank after serving as Secretary of Defense in the Kennedy administration. Prior to this position, he was president of Ford Motor Company.

George Shultz was president of Bechtel Corporation, became Nixon's Secretary of the Treasury and served as chairman of the Council on Economic Policy. He then became Secretary of State under Reagan.

Caspar Weinberger was a Bechtel Corporation vice president and general counsel and later became the secretary of Defense under Reagan.

George H. W. Bush was founder of Zapata Petroleum Corporation, became US ambassador to the United Nations under Nixon and Ford and served as CIA Director in the Ford administration. He then became president of the United States. After his presidency, he served as a senior director of the Carlyle Group until 2003 and is presently a shareholder in what is believed to be the largest private equity firm in the world.

Paul Wolfowitz, although an academic prior to his political career, was a prominent architect of the ambitious foreign policy of George W. Bush known as the Bush Doctrine, served in the Bush one administration as under-secretary for defense policy under Dick Cheney who was then Secretary of Defense. His views are neoconservative and he was a leading proponent of the 2003 Iraq War. He assumed the presidency of the World Bank at the insistence of America and Europe on June 1, 2005

Then lastly, we have Dick Cheney who served as Secretary of Defense during the first Bush administration, became CEO of Halliburton and is currently the vice president of the United States and the list goes on.

The ease by which persons that runs corporations, those who serve on corporate boards move between the corporate world and governments is astounding. When you have this exchange of the same players in both government and corporations, you can understand and realize the influence that is exerted within these institutions. It is a blatant conflict of interest and a breach of fiduciary duty to the American people to have this blurring of roles between corporations and government.

Because of the cost of winning a seat in Congress or getting elected on the state or municipal level, politicians turn to corporate donors in order to raise the necessary funds. We are in need of campaign finance reform in order to remove this money incentive that impacts every level of government, its laws, policies and regulations. The relationship between money and the ability to make and interpret laws has a direct effect on every sector of the American economy and the environment.

The last component in this inter-relationship is that of the global financial institutions such as development banks, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These institutions make loans or guarantee credit to 184 member countries. They finance projects such as roads, power plants and schools. They also make loans to restructure a country's economic system by funding what is called structural adjustment programs which are beneficial primarily to multinational corporations and the elites in the developing country. This money is only made available, however, after the recipients,

usually developing countries, agree to policy reforms in their economies—in short, to implement a structural adjustment program. (10) The President of the World Bank is by tradition an American, and the IMF President is a European. How do U. S. corporations benefit from the lending programs of the World Bank and IMF?

The type of projects the IMF and World Bank finances are big and expensive projects. They require huge quantities of materials and technical expertise to the debtor countries. The US Treasury Department calculates that for every US dollar the United States contributes to international development banks, US exporters win more than \$2 dollars in bank-financed procurement contracts. (11)

Because these loans are subject to terms and conditions under the structural adjustment program, the borrowers must agree to the hiring of foreign corporations to supply the materials, expertise and to operate these projects. This leads to foreign companies exploiting natural resources, causing widespread environmental degradation, removing people from indigenous lands, putting in projects that ensure their continuing reliance on this foreign maintenance and expertise exacerbates poverty in most countries and causes millions of people to suffer. Since the 1980s, this policy has helped create a net outflow of wealth from the developing world, which has paid out five times as much capital to the industrialized countries as it has received. (12) In essence, this system benefits US contractors and the corporations they work for and does not alleviate poverty, which is within the mission of the World Bank.

Many of us are aware that corporations are now patenting many of our food sources. But relatively few are aware that our global water supply is being privatized. According to the United Nations, over 1.3 billion people in the world today lack access to clean water while 2.5 billion do not have adequate sewage and sanitation. In excess of 31 countries are considered to be in water-stressed areas. Worldwide demand for water is doubling every 20 years, at twice the rate of population growth. By the year 2025, demand for fresh water is expected to outstrip global supply by 56 percent. (13) Governments are selling their water delivery and treatment systems to private corporations. Others are granting long-term leases or concessions for the delivery of water services and the collection of revenues. And yet others are contracting out the management of water services for an administration fee. The World Bank's program encourages third world governments to sell off their public water services to foreign-based water corporations and advocates for the adoption of policies that promote privatization. (14) There are many examples of the inequities to the poorest of the poor in the rates they must pay for water as opposed to those who can afford to pay.

Under the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATTS) the rule on "domestic regulation" allows countries, on behalf of their client corporations, to challenge laws, policies and programs of another country which are considered to be a barrier to selling services. These rules apply to all levels of government-national, regional and municipal. And if a country's public water laws or programs are judged by a WTO trade tribunal to be a violation of this rule (e.g. by government subsidy), it will be

compelled to either change those laws or programs or face the prospect of economic sanctions. (15)

In the past ten years, three giant global corporations, Vivendi and Suez of France and Thames Water of England have quietly assumed control over the water supplied to almost 300 million people on every continent of the world. They now provide drinking water for profit in 56 countries. (16)

So Friends, we are seriously challenged. What can we do to change a system that is predicated on dominance, control of people and resources, with a legal and fiduciary duty to maximize profits even if it is to the detriment of the public good? How can we change global policies that degrade the environment and disrespect the will of people? What is the root of this behavior towards ourselves and our environment? How can we promote change of or within systems, governmental structures, institutions like multi-national corporations, the WTO, World Bank and the IMF? For these are deeply relevant questions for us who profess a concern for creation and have loving compassion for people everywhere. I don't profess to have all the answers to these questions. However I have a few suggestions of things that we as citizens may be able to do.

Because this is a complex legal, social and moral problem, there is no one solution but many approaches must be used to solve these problems. As I see it, there must be a top down, bottom up and transformational middle approach. These issues are not only political but also moral and spiritual. Addressing them will take political, legal, grass root activism and Spirit-led action. As an African Proverb says, when you pray, move your feet. We have a moral imperative as individuals and as a group to send our politicians a message that things must change. No more business as usual.

We don't have the time we have had in the past to correct these problems. The earth is saying so. Global conditions are saying so. Spirit is saying so. Through our individual organizations, we can work in coalition with other groups to facilitate change on the local, state and federal levels. We can run for positions within our local municipalities. We can lobby our local, state and national legislatures. We can increase our support for socially responsible organizations. We can support Quaker organizations such as Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), the oldest non-profit corporation on capital hill. We can utilize our educational institutions for research purposes to supply our organizations, yearly and monthly meetings with information that can be utilized in these efforts. We can use our existing distribution systems of Quaker organizations that have a worldwide presence to facilitate change. We can support cooperatives that are conducting business and relating to stakeholders in an alternative way.

I would like to share an amazing story of the Mondragon Cooperative in the Basque area of Spain that is providing a major alternative economic model to the shareholder corporation. From its origins forty years ago as an employee-owned cooperative manufacturing paraffin stoves, Mondragon has grown to 160 employee-owned cooperatives, involving 23,000 member owners, with sales grossing \$3 billion dollars US

in 1991. It is now the seventh largest corporation in Spain and is the world's largest worker co-operative. It has 38 industrial plants abroad and was expected to expand to 60 plants by 2005. It has a private university with 4,000 students. It has manufacturing, engineering, retail, and financial arms. It also owns the largest retail food chain in Spain. It has its own bank, a research institute, an entrepreneurial division, insurance and social security institutions, a health maintenance system and a health insurance cooperative. It is focused on relational cooperatives dedicated to the common good. The Basque government and the tax authorities of the Basque provinces have special measures to help co-operatives. (17) This is an example of government and a corporation acting in concert for the common good.

We can support food cooperatives that produce and sell local fresh food. We can demand that state legislatures crack down on corporations like Wal-Mart as the Maryland legislature did in January of this year when it passed a law requiring Wal-Mart to increase spending on employee health insurance because of the number of its employees receiving Medicaid. This measure is expected to be a model for other states.

- We can send a message to politicians and corporations through voting with our wallets. I highly recommend the purchase of a book, *The Blue Pages* a directory of companies rated by their politics and practices with over 4000 listings of companies and corporations.
- We can lend our minds, expertise, financial support and spiritual support to the Quaker Institute for the Future to support the work of those of us who are dedicated to focusing on global challenges.
- We can further educate ourselves about institutions like the WTO, World Bank and IMF.
- We must keep abreast of how our tax dollars are being spent through those institutions and apply political and public pressure on the appropriate committees and members of Congress to facilitate change.
- We can lobby our local politicians on these issues in a strategic targeted way.
- We can change corporate conduct by amending corporate charters in state legislatures.

One very recent example of local activism was demonstrated last month in Hercules, California, where, because of public pressure to stop Wal Mart from building in their community, the city council voted unanimously to use the public's power of eminent domain. This was the first time a local community has used the eminent domain doctrine to stop a Wal Mart from being build in the United States. I'm sure, as in Maryland, other local communities will use these two examples of local political activism as models to emulate. When ordinary people join together, in common purpose, they can accomplish extraordinary things.

On a global level, Robert Gottlieb, in his book titled *Environmentalism Unbounded; Exploring New Pathways for Change*, advances the proposition that trade agreements could include a mandated global minimum wage, a baseline of environmental requirements, or global debt relief. They could also include labor and environmental or human rights stipulations. Such standards and regulations will also work best when they are integrated into public forums for decision-making and accountability and are not limited as an exclusive private or voluntary activity. As he states, we can no longer separate ourselves from nature. (18) We all have a duty and responsibility to participate at any level and in whatever way we can from the bottom to the top.

I ask you to join me in visualizing a global silent protest, where individuals and groups all over the world would stop wherever they are and whatever they are doing for one hour to send a message to governments, corporations and global financial institutions that we as citizens of the world demand a change. If we can envision it, we can do it.

It is my belief that we have the power to transform first of all, ourselves, through changing our thoughts, our behavior and the choices we make and by remembering that we are connected to all things, animate and inanimate. We must remember that those immoral, soulless, institutions called corporations are made up of people; people, who breathe the air, eat the food, drink the water, love their families, and don't want to destroy their homes or Earth but need a pay check and who thus participate in a system of oppression of themselves and their environment. We can ask corporations to live up to their corporate codes of conduct and we can remind them that they can sacrifice a portion of their profits for the public good when the public interest demands it. We can remind ourselves that they each have that of God in them, as well as the profit motive. We have to also remember, that it is we who elect mayors, city councils, commissioners, state legislatures, judges, members of Congress and presidents. It is we who shop at Wal Mart, buy Viagra and Lipitor and invest in the stock market, have 401K plans and have no idea where they or our pension funds are invested. It is we who drive SUV's, add to urban sprawl, feel separate and apart from people, places and situations that take us outside our comfort zones. It is we who see genocide unfolding before our very eyes again and have done nothing meaningful to stop it. It is we who must demand that the government must stop wasting billions of dollars on wars and levees constructed out of materials and soil that have already failed.

We must demand environmental justice for all regardless of race or class and demand equity and equality of consideration for all.

The citizens of the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward in New Orleans, whose neighborhoods and lives were devastated during Hurricane Katrina, were victims of environmental injustices long before the storm. There were Brownfield sites, which are toxic waste dumps located in their neighborhood. And, what is a little known fact is that Exxon Mobil, who controlled politicians in the Louisiana state house, was allowed to drill wells in the 1960s. When they drilled, they cut canals through the wetlands; pile debris called spoil piles and built dykes that prevented the tides from providing water to the grasses. As a result, the

wetlands were destroyed around these sites. This is yet another example of governments allowing a corporate entity to dictate laws and policies that ultimately destroy the environment and where the interest of business outweighs the interest of the public.

Friends, the living waters we are currently swimming in are polluted, the ice sheets of Antarctica are melting, the Glaciers in Glacier National Park and on the peaks of Kilimanjaro are disappearing, and the seas are rising. We don't have the time to wait, defer or debate blame. We have the moral imperative to act and to act now.

In our observance of the many challenges facing not only mankind but also all inhabitants now living on earth, it is easy to feel overwhelmed, hopeless and helpless. Because of existing models of governmental, financial and political institutions by which global societies operate, the idea of impacting or replacing those institutions seems impossible. Yet we have come together to focus on that very idea. Why? Because daily, we see the equities and injustices visited upon the world's most vulnerable populations by those in power and in control of world resources. We see the prevailing energy of greed and excess rather than empathy and compassion for the starving and marginalized citizens of earth. For those now prevailing who have forgotten who they are and their relationship to their Maker and fellow sojourners, we must remind them that we are all children of the Light. And, though we as a people may be deluded in our thinking and actions, we must remember who we are. We recognize that our inherent goodness and truth must and will prevail. Therefore we are compelled to state emphatically: there is another way to make certain that resources that belong to all inhabitants of this Earth be shared in a just and equitable way. We must demand that our vast knowledge and technology be used to provide for the needs of all Earth's inhabitants; that governments respond to their constituents by creating an environment in all arenas which guarantee all persons the opportunity for a significant voice, an education in accordance with ability, guaranteed sustenance for the body, safe and decent shelter, freedom from manipulation and repression for the benefit of a few.

We are all children and creatures sharing this existence and it is our birthright to live according to our potential and to be able to exercise our freewill for the betterment of all. I invite you to support the upcoming Quaker Institute for the Future conference on the subject of Towards a Moral Economy and the book currently being written on this subject by holding it in the Light, through your financial support, prayers, leadings and discernment, to help figure out how to transform this world and its institutions. Never forget the interconnectedness and Oneness of all things and remember separation—disrespecting, disregarding or treating others with lesser regard—breeds conflict. I would like to end with a quote from something I wrote while reflecting on water some years ago:

“I have learned from the water that I am a part of the vast ocean of consciousness called God or the One. I have learned that I came ashore as a wave and crashed against the rocks and became a drop to fall back into the ocean, to go back into the Source as foam. I have learned that I am here but a split second in time. And within that split second, I experienced what has been termed life with all its confusion, trials and tribulations. On

my way to shore, I was so focused on where I was going that I temporarily forgot I was a part of the ocean on whose current I was riding. I forgot the entire ride to shore was but a blink in the consciousness of the ocean. I forgot that in order for the ocean to experience itself as a wave or a drop, I had agreed to be that drop and had also agreed to forget myself in order for the ocean to experience fully itself. After forgetting what I agreed to, I got caught up and started to believe I was the wave and then the foam on top of the wave. Then I became fearful of crashing against the rocks, and somewhere in my forgetfulness, I started to believe that when I crashed, I would be no more.

Well, the difference between sitting here now and at other times, I now know the rocks agreed to allow me to crash upon them. The wind agreed to carry me to the rocks. The sun agreed to shine and provide me with light to see where I was going. The birds agreed to sing during my journey. The waves from which I rise agreed to sing the sound of eternity. And I, now manifesting in human form, have agreed to sit and witness all of this once more.” (19)

Let us always remember, not only are we swimming in living waters, we are the living waters.