

**Tim Hollo**  
**IPAN conference, Canberra, 23 November 2023**  
**Connecting the climate and peace**  
**movements through transformative action**

Good afternoon, everyone, and thanks so much for having me here. I also acknowledge that we're meeting on land violently stolen from peoples who had lived here in diverse nations, in peace, since time immemorial.

Paying respect to all elders, I want to particularly acknowledge Dr Tjanara Goreng Goreng and Professor Mary Graham, from whom I've had the privilege of learning about Aboriginal political philosophy and practice, a politics grounded in respect for the natural world, respect for each other, and a deep appreciation for coexistence. And it's working towards that living politics, emerging from the living world, that I want to mostly talk about today.

Let's discuss ways not just to connect the climate and peace movements, not just to bring young, energetic climate activists into engagement with peace activism, not just to see the movements working together for greater power, but to reimagine them both as intertwined threads in the crucial project of imagining a better world, and living it into being. We need today, once more, the kind of thinking of the leaders of the conjoined peace and environment movements of the past – people like Petra Kelly, co-founder of Die Gruene, the German Greens – who said:

Feminism, ecology and nonviolence belong together and are interrelated [in] the big and the little war waged against us as individuals, against smaller countries, against the planetary environment, every single day.

Re-embracing, and rearticulating a politics of interdependence, of mutual respect, of coexistence, is how we should build connections between the peace and climate movements, and so many others.

Now, there are, of course, instrumentalist paths for the peace movement to work alongside the climate movement that are worth raising – because they're important pieces of work *and* they're ideas that can build the trust and solidarity crucial to the larger, transformative project.

One is that the climate impact of military services must be counted and challenged. This is a huge source of emissions, globally equivalent to the 4<sup>th</sup> largest country on the planet, the cause of destruction on a par with war itself, that is getting away with almost zero scrutiny.

Similarly, a solid piece of campaigning work around redirecting military funding and equipment towards climate disaster preparedness and response would be, I have no doubt, incredibly popular. The climate movement has done a lot of work building networks of people affected by disasters, such as the organisation *Bushfires Survivors for Climate Action*, so any work on this should be done in partnership with groups like that for greatest impact both for the work itself and for building solidarity.

There's also crucial solidarity work to be done around the efforts of both movements to decolonise – putting First Nations justice at the core, foregrounding the struggles of Indigenous peoples. From Jabiluka to Adani, fracking to nuclear testing and waste dumps, from Indigenous communities from the Torres Strait to Pine Gap being the first to suffer impacts, we must give space for First Nations people to lead them.

The next step is to learn from their system of governance to reinvent ours.

Because, let's face it, as we've heard a lot today, our systems aren't up to the tasks we're asking of them, whether it's tackling the climate crisis or safeguarding peace.

Our Westphalian geopolitics of sovereign states competing for advantage, in which war is "the continuation of politics by other means", as von Clausewitz put it;

our adversarial and exclusive domestic politics, privileging strength, seeing compromise as weakness, reducing avenues for the voices of the people to be heard by demeaning advocacy and criminalising protest;

the entwining of both domestic and global politics with rampant capitalism, steamrolling over the pretence of the rule of law in the quest for endless growth, fed by a world-view that normalises constant competition for dominance, institutionalised violence against each other and the natural world.

These are the systems that created the crises we face. How long will we keep asking them to solve them? How long before we shift our focus to imagining and living into being another world rather than objecting to elements of this one and demanding of those in power that they do things we know in our hearts that they won't do?

How long before we acknowledge that these destructive systems are collapsing and we can either try to prop them up by treating them as the only option, watch as they are corroded ever further, or get cracking with midwifing the new world that's struggling to be born.

I put this challenge to the Climate Emergency Summit in Melbourne in 2020, proposing that the emergency action we need is the community response to emergency – mutual aid,

sandbagging and distributing clothes and food, self-organising networks of action and support – rather than the emergency response of those in power – bulldozing communities, paving the way for corporations to profit, sometimes suspending democracy. We should, I argued, be supporting and institutionalising the mutual aid approach, using it to rebuild political and economic systems from the grassroots up, while withdrawing our consent from the destructive systems of domination.

I was asked there at the summit, as I always am, ‘do we have time for that?’ Don’t we just have to pressure governments to declare a climate emergency and act on it?

So I asked the crowd – does anyone actually believe that will happen?

Nobody said yes. Not even the questioner.

In the wake of COP27, where once again we were treated to a spectacle of negotiation, governments that are failing to meet their too-weak commitments casting blame on those doing less, sovereign powers unable to imagine cooperative coexistence instead of constant competition, made even harder by the overwhelming presence of fossil fuel lobbyists, it beggars belief that anyone could trust this system.

Meanwhile, local communities and city partnerships are cultivating networks of action, advising and supporting each other; a new, confederalist grassroots globalism of cooperative coexistence is starting to get on with the job.

Now I ask you the same question.

The peace movement, I note, is doing a better job in many ways of imagining a different world than much of the climate movement, and the *Charting Our Own Course* inquiry and report is a great example of that, very much in its democratic process, though, meaning no disrespect, not quite taking it to its logical conclusions in its recommendations.

Because, and we’ve already been challenged on this today, how likely do you think it is that, from within this system, an Australian government might chart an independent course? That it might renegotiate or renounce AUKUS and the US alliance, boot out US bases, walk away from the Five Eyes? We might be able to get war powers reform and end weapons sponsorship of school programs, and those are important. But peace for Australia will always be contingent on global peace. War is central to the Westphalian system – by design. And now we see the rise of autocrats, the trampling of the UN, the great powers rattling sabres.

Do you think peace is possible without transformative system change?

Do you think that changing Australia's behaviour within the existing geopolitical framework is any less impossible than transforming that framework?

To be clear, I'm not saying we should withdraw from UN processes, or stop attempting to pressure governments into changing direction. But I am suggesting that we stop trying to convince ourselves and others that they will, and use our advocacy to prove the failure of this system while putting more effort into building the next.

To again quote Petra Kelly: 'We must find a way to demilitarise society itself.' 'We call upon people everywhere never to ... allow themselves to become accustomed to the idea of war and the preparation for war ... We call upon people to build and develop communities of peace everywhere.'

Communities of peace. Communities of ecological sustainability. Communities of deep democracy. Communities of coexistence. Communities that, in this age of consequences, are able not just to survive, but thrive.

This is a project many of you, many of us, have been working towards for decades. But we've been distracted from it by a system that insists on its own permanence, convincing us that tweaks are the only realistic possibility.

Well, now, with the old world dying, there are seeds of this new world all over the place, from the Fearless Cities network to Rojava, grassroots Greens and Independents to renewable energy cooperatives, Mastodon and the online Fediverse to Covid mutual aid networks. It's through planting the seeds of these ecological communities of peace, cultivating healthy soils for them to grow in, building connections community to community, civil society to civil society, that a truly transformative coalescence of climate and peace campaigning can emerge.

Thank you