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Good afternoon. I come from the Yuchi and Anishinaabe nations. My home is in Oklahoma. I have been a community organizer for Indigenous rights, environmental justice and climate justice for more than 30 years. I don't believe that I'm old enough to do anything for that long, but here I am.

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(Applause)

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I'm an Indigenous woman who lives in the heart of oil and gas country. And what that means for me is that I am in a constant state of thinking about the environment and climate change. And so I want to share a few things that I know and have learned along the way in my work. One is, we cannot rely on those who created the problem to fix it.

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(Applause)

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Two, we need to move with an urgency that is not happening now. And three, we need leaders who are experiencing the harm to be the ones coming up with the solutions.

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So it is clear that world leaders are looking for solutions to this climate crisis, but they are looking for them through a lens of the economy. And so that means they are moving with a casualness that doesn't make it seem like there's a real emergency. And they're also being sold, then, solutions that are basically band-aids and not actual cures to the problem. They're being sold techno fixes and market schemes that really maintain business as usual. And instead, we need to be thinking about what could be different.

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So I was recently at the United Nations Conference on Climate Change, COP26, that just happened in Glasgow, Scotland, just this past month. And it was apparent to me that those who

created the agenda are also part of the problem. First of all, they created an admittance policy that was really a policy of exclusion for many grassroots communities across the world and especially those of the global south. That policy also ensured that the largest badge delegation at COP were fossil fuel lobbyists. Can you believe that? Actually, I can, because this has been sort of the norm at COP since its beginning. Which is why we need a shift in who are the leaders that they're listening to. And the shift in leadership are coming up with the solutions. We need the knowledge and expertise of those at the frontline. And by frontline I mean, those communities and peoples who are experiencing climate change today and some who have been experiencing the harmful effects of climate change for decades now. Those are the frontline leaders that we need to be looking to for their expertise.

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So I want you to imagine with me, if at that negotiating table at COP, if those who were dealing with the actual harms today were in that room and negotiating the solutions. What if the people who have been living sustainable lifestyles and in relationship with the land had been some of those folks in the room making those decisions? What would it have been like if grassroots leaders had been given significant participation in those negotiations? What would be different?

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Well, first off, this global climate conference would not have led with net-zero as the solution to this climate crisis we're in. Net-zero -- not actually eliminating greenhouse gas emissions -- but net-zero being a sort of greenwashing of business as usual. It basically means that you can wash your hands of pollution in one community if you can afford to participate in a few offset programs.

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So, for example, you can invest in the continued existence of a forest in South America, of Indigenous peoples in their lands that should capture carbon. What it means then, you are, in theory, obligated from the harm that you've caused a pollution at a facility in another low-income community -- and very likely community of color -- in another part of the world. That's just wrong. And it just doesn't work. I mean, I know people, real people, I know their names and their families on both ends of the spectrum, of the net-zero spectrum. I know people who live at the fence line of harmful oil refineries who are polluting their communities, and I know the Indigenous people who are farming the forests in Brazil. And neither of those communities are benefiting from these programs in ways that are building empowerment for their communities and building sustainability for their communities, and they're often pressured into these programs with little or no choice.

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So I want to try to explain net-zero a little bit differently in a way that might be a little more tangible. If you think about it as, kind of, like the net part of your paycheck. You get a job, you negotiate a pay and you feel really excited about that. But on that first day, that first payday, you feel the crunch of it's a lot less than you thought it was going to be. And it's the same with the net-zero emission targets, right? It sounds good on the front end, but when it all comes out in the wash, it's much less than what we need to have happen to impact real significant change right now.

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So what we need is a shift in leadership. We need leaders who are moving with the urgency that people are feeling harm and hurt today. And we need leaders who are moving with the values about community and about the land and the relationship with land. Those are the kind of leaders that we need to have leading with the solutions and the negotiations of addressing this problem on a worldwide level. So that kind of leadership, if we just shifted those two things about urgency and values, that would help all of us worldwide. Because what we need is a set of leadership that is going to do the work that we need to have done, which is to move away from dirty, extractive, harmful energy to solutions that are local, community-based, community-held, regenerative energy models. And they exist. They exist in communities where people are saying, "Hey, if the government is not going to help us, we're going to do what we need to do right now." And they are doing these projects in their communities. So instead of investing in a carbon capture project that aims to put carbon pollution into the ground, a technology that's not been proven to really work and still puts communities at harm because it relies on the continued existence and construction of harmful pipelines that are dangerous, prone to leaks and even explosions sometimes. And so -- But these community projects are happening and they're having success, and I want to share a few with you.

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So in Richmond, California -- between two cities and next to a major Chevron oil refinery that is spewing out greenhouse gases and other toxic chemicals into the neighborhood -- community leaders worked with community organizations like Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Rich City Rides, Urban Tilth and Communities for a Better Environment. And they took on Chevron to hold them accountable and won. And won resources to build a solar farm in their community. They also built a bike co-op to encourage young people and others to bike in the city and built community gardens to grow healthy organic food for themselves and schools.

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(Applause)

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In rural Kentucky, a community, a rural community who has long relied on coal to fuel their community, they've been organizing with Kentuckians for the Commonwealth and also created a solar project that is helping low-income families reduce their utility costs and created thousands of jobs.

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In the Four Corners area of Arizona, Native Renewables, a woman-led Navajo Hopi organization is providing electricity from solar to off-grid homes. A community that has long been harmed by the devastating effects of fossil fuel extraction, is now able to rely on an energy source that is clean and Indigenous-led.

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After hurricane Maria devastated the islands of Puerto Rico, Organización Boricúa worked with local farmers to provide direct and immediate support to those communities by providing water, shelter, health, food, the weekly agro ecological brigades and solidarity brigades, and they rebuilt homes and rebuilt farming infrastructure to make sure that they maintained food sovereignty.

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In Brooklyn, New York, in a highly industrial neighborhood of Sunset Park, the community organization UPROSE helped lead an effort to create a solar farm, a first community solar co-op in the state of New York. It is an 80,000 square foot rooftop solar garden that again is providing affordable energy to the neighborhood and to small businesses as well.

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The fight against the Line 3 pipeline in Minnesota and other states has highlighted the amount of water that those types of projects have used. And it's caused a threat to the natural wild rice that grows in the lakes there. And so community people have worked to hold state and federal agencies accountable for water standards in order to protect their cultural preservation and the wild rice.

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And in New Jersey, Ironbound Community Corporation, along with the New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance, has helped push legislation that has enabled the state to deny

permits, any new permits, to already overburdened, overpolluted neighborhoods. And it's set a standard for other states to use, which has become a historic environmental justice legislation for the country.

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These are the kinds of solutions that we need to see happen. These are the kind of leadership that we need to see happen, and we need these solutions happening by the thousands nationwide and even globally. Because these solutions are not only attacking the emissions at their source, but they're doing it by providing jobs and wages and policies that are addressing racism and colonialism and economic inequity. This is the kind of leadership we need. We need this dramatic shift to help us all. This dramatic shift in leadership. Just these two things: The urgency in which we move and the values on which we move with. My grandmothers taught me that we need to have care, responsibility and action when it comes to our community. And those are the kind of leaders that we need leading this fight.

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And if we are going to be serious about addressing this climate crisis, here are the steps that I need people to do. I need you to bring frontline leaders into those negotiating spaces. Bring them in. Ask them what's happening and the harms that are happening. Ask them what needs to be done. And listen, hear them. And then invest and implement in exactly what they said in the exact ways they said to do it, because those changes are the changes that are going to stop the problems that we're having and then stop the acceleration of the climate crisis. And it's going to help slow down the violence of the storms and the sicknesses that people are dealing with, with conditions like asthma and others. And it's going to stop, you know, the continued drought and wildfires. Those are the solutions that we need to have happen. And I need you all to help carry, not only the ask to shift that for our communities, but also those values.

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So I ask you, I invite you to join me in this, and I challenge you to go out and challenge our elected leaders and others. And if they're not doing the right job, then tell them who the leaders are that need to be there. We need frontline leaders to be in the spaces.

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Thank you.

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(Applause)