

Evolve with us!

Young people are on the front lines of the dawning renewable energy revolution. We realise that building a renewable energy future will define our generation and that smart, farsighted action on climate change is an investment in our future.

One hundred young people from 26 countries came to a four-day International Youth Summit in Montreal at the start of the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol in Montreal. They said:

“We ask governments for a just transition to low-impact renewable energy and insist on the removal of fossil fuel subsidies. Human rights and social justice must be included in the transition from fossil fuel dependence. Projects involving nuclear energy, large-scale hydro-electric power and waste incineration do not contribute to sustainability. Carbon sequestration is a last resort to mitigating climate change.”

This is just part of a growing movement of young people who are taking their future into their own hands. Across the globe, students and young people are leading grassroots efforts to purchase green energy, invest in sustainable transportation and complete retrofits and energy audits on campus and in local areas.

The North American youth renewable energy movement began with clean energy purchases on a handful of campuses in the mid-late 1990s. More than 80 educational institutions in North America are buying renewable energy, in the order of 500,000 MWH per year. More than 30 campuses have installed over 11 MWH of renewable energy and at least five institutions are completely powered by it. Hundreds of colleges and universities have joined the Campus Climate Challenge, a campaign to bring clean energy, like solar and wind, to campuses across the continent.

We know the problem. We also know that the solution lies in clean, renewable energy. We are capable of confronting climate change - and doing so is an opportunity to transform society for the better. The oil era is coming to an end and young people have already begun evolving toward a renewable energy future: we are vowing to make our own communities cleaner and more sustainable. We need our leaders to keep pace with our commitment, and we are calling on our governments to seize the moment and evolve with us ■

Elissa Smith (20) is President of the Canadian Youth Environmental Network and North American Representative on the UNEP Tunza Youth Advisory Council.