

Remarks by Teresa Homsí (Class of 2022)
Raising of the Peace Flag, April 22, 2022 (Earth Day)

As many of you know, today is Earth Day. And to reflect on this moment, we need to look back to the first Earth Day in 1970.

There was a lot that led up to that first Earth Day. For one, pollution was synonymous with prosperity. And industries were not held accountable for dumping sludge into our waterways or releasing contaminants into the air. In fact, the public remained largely unaware of the detrimental impacts of industrial development and how a polluted environment impacts people.

It took a national awareness campaign and a concerted effort by students, elected representatives, academics, journalists, union workers, faith groups, and many other communities to initiate what became the first Earth Day.

That Wednesday, April 22 in 1970, 20 million Americans - 10% of the total US population at the time - took to streets, parks, and auditoriums to protest the impacts of 150 years of unregulated, unethical industrial development.

Within that same year, the United States Environmental Protection Agency was established, and within the next five years, the US saw the influx of a number of environmental laws. Some of these included the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and many more. These policies are still in effect today and are crucial to our environment and public health.

Earth Day 1970 was a powerful mobilization because it brought people together from a diverse range of perspectives and backgrounds, all in support of a shared, collective cause. This movement was made successful because: 1) people were informed, and 2) people *cared* - they cared enough to rally together, to vote, and to work for something greater than themselves.

We have Earth Day 1970 and millions of civically engaged citizens to thank for water we can drink and air we can breathe.

But that is not where this story ends. We have to continue to show up and prove that we care. I believe it is our responsibility to do so, for our fellow people and for our planet.

We live in a world of wounds. And the only way for us to heal and rise above is through caring and collective action. This is difficult. Social and environmental causes -peace movements- are inherently contrarian. They require us to critically examine our system's faults, demand change, go against the status quo, and challenge power structures.

These are not easy feats, but they are necessary. Today, many of those same policies I had referenced are under attack - they have been deliberately weakened and ignored; agencies

meant to enforce them face cuts and corruption. And in the face of climate change, these policies are not enough.

It's troubling - but apathy is NOT a valid answer. We have come a long way, and there is still a way to go. Progress is not linear either - it requires nurturing and constant investment, but fortunately, action is the antidote to despair. And caring, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable global issues, is what gives us results.

Environmental and social movements - when they're loud, they can make waves.

They have in the past, and they can, they should, and they will today - so long as we show up and prove that we care.

Thank you.