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Youth demands the end of coal in German lignite mine Intergenerational and climate justice to be implemented today not tomorrow

Nov 17, 2017. On the final day of the UN Climate Change Conference COP23, creative protests are taking off. Activists of the Youth Network for Political Action (JunepA) demonstrated with an almost 100-meter long and more than 2 meter wide banner on the morning of November 17th at the Hambach lignite mine. In front of the backdrop of the gigantic hole with its colossal shovel-wheel excavators, they unrolled the lettering "IT'S UP TO US TO KEEP IT IN THE GROUND". The enormous banner made headlines as early as 2015 at the climate summit in Paris as the indigenous peoples' banner. Today it is the banner of the youth. In an iconic place, JunepA is now calling for an immediate start to the phasing out of the climate killer lignite by carrying out an act of civil disobedience.

"Conferences are an important, but completely insufficient framework for climate protection," says Mira Jäger, spokesperson for JunepA. "In Bonn, thousands of delegates spent two weeks discussing how the climate targets from Paris can be implemented, but there is absolutely no sign of the radical change required by the 1.5°C target." Jäger refers to a Greenpeace study, according to which Germany must reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to a net zero by 2026 in order to prevent global warming of the Earth's atmosphere by more than 1.5°C compared to the pre-industrial level. On the contrary, however, German emissions increased in 2016 and 2017, maintaining one of the highest carbon footprints per person worldwide. The German carbon budget is almost exhausted, the federal climate targets will be missed by far. JunepA is therefore convinced that the only thing that can prevent an immensely dangerous climate change is the rapid phasing out of all fossil fuels, first and foremost the incredibly inefficient and destructive use of lignite coal. Facing the unambitious climate policy of the newly forming German government, the activists want to reinforce the position of all those who will feel the resulting consequences in the future as well as already today in the Global South.

But it is not just governments who must act, it is everybody. "Our society must be decarbonised as quickly as possible: the huge hidden costs of fossil fuels are many times higher than the costs of a fundamental social change," agrees Lea Heuser. She is the spokesperson of the Aachen Peace Prize, which recently awarded JunepA this year's prize in September. From the point of view of the association, climate policy can no longer be separated from peace policy. The wasteful lifestyle in the industrialized countries is plunging mankind into a climate catastrophe. "We are driving the most vulnerable people on our planet into desperate and hopeless plights. We are responsible for the suffering of increasing numbers of people who are facing catastrophic deaths and worldwide migration now and in the future," explains Heuser.

JunepA and the Aachen Peace Prize are calling for action, not empty words from so-called world leaders. Both organisations agree that concrete actions on the ground must be enforced by civil society and social movements. "We have to fight for global justice and intergenerational justice worldwide," says Mira Jäger. And indeed, the climate movement is growing and the pressure is increasing. Society is beginning to question the systemic and personal structures that are driving the climate catastrophe forward. "It is time that each and every individual takes action, otherwise life will soon become very uncomfortable for all of us," concludes Lea Heuser.

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