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On Responsible Consumption and Production

Capitalist societies, like many in the U.N., know one universal truth: natural resources drive social and economic progress. Industries require these resources to produce goods or offer services, which are consumed or patronized by individuals. This system keeps our society afloat. Unfortunately, however, if we continue to use these resources, most of which are non-renewable, in the fashion and at the rate that we do, the planet will suffer irreversible harm. This is why it is so crucial that we practice responsible consumption and production.

The bulk of responsible consumption rests on individuals and communities. The easiest way to keep this practice is by being mindful of the products you are consuming, and of their environmental impact. It is also important to keep in mind that not all products marketed as environmentally friendly, or “Fair Trade Certified”, truly are (Wong). This is why research is important. There are plenty of trusted online resources that have directories filled with certified environmentally-conscious brands and products, from those you may find in the grocery store to those in your closet.

Self-education has led me and my family, as well as many others, to limit red meat consumption. The U.N. estimates that the livestock industry accounts for 14% of global greenhouse gas emissions (“BBC: Do I Need”). If the demand for red meat lowers, then in

theory, so should supply. Since we have learned about the vast amount of carbon emissions they shamelessly produce, my family has also avoided patronizing companies like BP, Exxon, and Chevron (all of which are investor-owned), which produce fuel for cars and airplanes (“Revealed: The 20 Firms”). Limiting patronizing gas and oil companies as a whole should be avoided, which is why it is important to take public transportation when possible or opt for a hybrid or electric vehicle. Limiting consumption of these irresponsible brands and products may seem pointless on an individual scale, but it certainly is not. Change starts with individuals choosing to make conscious, responsible choices, who inspire others to do the same.

The most important thing an individual can do to promote responsible consumption and production is to call upon his or her government to pass laws that protect natural resources and limit carbon emissions. While living an environmentally conscious lifestyle is important, the bulk of the abuse of natural resources comes from large corporations with unregulated emissions. Most large corporations use non-renewable resources like fossil fuels, coal, and petroleum because they are currently readily available and are cost-effective. These materials, however, emit carbon dioxide when burned, creating a “greenhouse effect” in which heat gets trapped in the atmosphere (“Why Are Greenhouse Gases”). Calling upon politicians to lobby for and pass legislation that limits emissions of pollutants will inevitably lead to a decline in the “greenhouse effect” (Yaniz). Today, unfortunately, many government officials and politicians will turn a blind eye to regulating corporations—often in exchange for monetary or political support. This practice is to the detriment of the environment, and communities and individuals must not be afraid to whistle-blow and push for real change.

In addition to regulating carbon and greenhouse gas emissions, the government needs to hasten the transition to “green energy.” According to Laura Yaniz of AIDA, thirty-five percent

of all emissions come from energy production. This is why it is important to pressure the government into investing more time and money into renewable, “green” energy, like wind, solar, and geothermal sources (Yaniz). This transition is indicative of a hopeful future, but it is not happening fast enough. Luckily, in many countries, including the United States, constituents can influence policy by voting for officials that push for change. For the sake of the planet and all those that inhabit it, it is dire that we elect officials that will fight for green energy and limit thermoelectric and hydroelectric energy production.

Consumption and production drive social and economic progress. Given its impact on the environment, the importance of responsible consumption and production cannot be understated. It is a product of self-education, mindfulness, and a willingness to advocate for what is right. It is a responsibility that falls on individuals, communities, and governments worldwide. If we do not take these matters seriously, the health of our planet, and the future of all its inhabitants, will be at risk.

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