

Greenpeace

Organization: Greenpeace

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Description Established by a small group of activists in Vancouver in 1971 to protest American nuclear weapons tests, Greenpeace is now a global environmental organization monitored by a central council in Amsterdam, with 2.8 million financial supporters worldwide and offices in over forty countries. Its official mission statement is as follows: "Greenpeace is an independent, campaigning organisation that uses non-violent, creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems, and force solutions for a green and peaceful future. Greenpeace's goal is to ensure the ability of the Earth to nurture life in all its diversity" (www.greenpeace.org). As a nonprofit organization Greenpeace is funded by grants from individuals and charities, but to maintain independence it refuses money from governments, corporations, and political parties.

Greenpeace has been a source of controversy since its inception. While some have praised the organization for creating widespread publicity of environmental issues and successfully influencing policy decisions in numerous countries, others have criticized its approach. Greenpeace seeks to fulfill its aims through a variety of measures including lobbying of politicians and corporate executives, and campaigns to create market pressure (such as the boycotting of companies whose supply chains involve unsustainable practices), but the organization is probably best known for its nonviolent direct action campaigns. These contentious campaigns, which are designed to create memorable images and engage public interest, have involved such actions as cutting down government-approved genetically modified maize plants in England and placing them in decontamination bags, surrounding the headquarters of a paper-products company in Canada with police-style yellow tape marked "FOREST CRIME SCENE," and forming a human chain outside a coal power plant under construction in Thailand to force a review of the government's energy policy.

Greenpeace has contributed towards globalization in the sense that it has encouraged people to perceive the world as one place; it stresses the idea that actions taken in a community have global consequences, and uses this premise to inform its strategies and motivate its members. At the same time, in recognition of the increasingly global environmental consequences of industrial behaviour, Greenpeace acts as a response to globalization by highlighting and addressing these effects; thus, along with many other international non-governmental organizations, Greenpeace seeks to shape the globalizing process of which it is a part.

While Greenpeace is in favour of sustainable global trade, it opposes what it calls "the current form of globalisation that is increasing corporate power [and] leading to the overuse of natural resources, more pollution as we produce and consume more, and greater inequities both among and within countries" (www.greenpeace.org). Greenpeace claims, for example, that environmental regulations in wealthier countries have resulted in the exporting of toxic and dangerous technologies and materials to poorer countries. It also warns that the patenting of plants and animals may lead to reductions in biodiversity and corporate control of the world's food supply. Greenpeace argues that the World Trade Organization (WTO) has a history of promoting private corporate interests over health and sustainability, and makes the controversial claim that the WTO has effectively forced poorer countries to introduce potentially dangerous genetically modified organisms into their food supplies.

Greenpeace promotes the autonomy of individuals on a global scale; it encourages individuals to conceptualize themselves as global citizens whose rights and responsibilities extend beyond the borders of the community or nation-state, and to bring about global change through local interactions with corporations, governments, and the general public. While critics may argue that Greenpeace presents a threat to the autonomy of governments and corporations because of its disruptive protests and its insistence on more restrictive environmental, energy, and trade regulations, supporters of Greenpeace would counter that many current laws and industrial practices favour short-term economic goals over sustainability and health, and thus pose what is ultimately a greater threat to the autonomy of people worldwide.

Suggested Reading: **Weyler, Rex.** 2004. *Greenpeace: The inside story*. Vancouver: Raincoast Books.