The events leading us to 2021 are a-historical in their gravity and their importance; in the grim
tolls they have exacted and the awful realities they have forced us to acknowledge. The
pandemic, the continued environmental degradation and the disparate impacts of both of these on
marginalized communities show us the fault lines inherent in so much of the status quo.
Historians may well look back on 2020 as the year of great tragedy and momentous change, but
also the year when world events afforded us great opportunity—the chance to make a sober
assessment of both the natural and the human environments, and of the inextricable link between
them.

When we emerge to the other side, weighted with our grief, as individuals and as nations, we will
have before us a chance to forge a 'new normal', one that distributes both the burdens and the
benefits of environmental change in an equitable manner, regardless of membership in any class, be
it marginalized or privileged. For all the loss these times have brought, there may also be gain, and
this gain may be the new worth we ascribe to certain jobs; a change in our modes of consumption; or
the simple yet powerful understanding that the similarities we share across race and class and
borders (meaningless distinctions to any pathogen) are far more vital than those things that separate
us.

PIEC 27 has a unique opportunity and a singular responsibility. Addressing environmental
change and the paths to an equitable future in any meaningful way requires a fundamental shift
in how we structure our lives; from the foods we eat to the forms of energy we consume; from
the value we place on disadvantaged populations and the value we place on the natural world.

How might the pandemic and the continued global environmental dissolution spur us to balance
the national and the global, spur us to understand that human rights is an issue that knows no
borders? What does the pandemic teach us about the natural world's resiliency; what do the
social movements teach us about ourselves? What, as we emerge from the upheavals, is the
narrative of the new normal to be?

PIEC 27 will acknowledge the reality of what 2020 has made clear, and not shirk from difficult
subjects. This begins with a wide-ranging series of panel discussions, led by experts in their
fields, that explore, on a local, national and global level, the questions and the answers that 2020
presents, with a particular focus on the systemic and structural elements that address
Environmental Justice. And all of our panels will speak to the larger question: did we have the
wisdom to see these global events as a critical moment in history? A chance to proactively
address the vulnerabilities and opportunities now made so plain? Did we have the wisdom to see
that the only viable and sustainable way forward is one that is there for everyone?