

An Immigrant's Love for American Democracy

Fighting to maintain voting rights is a part of my legacy

By Dr. Folabi Olagbaju

On August 6, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, a moment that goes down in American history as finally guaranteeing African Americans the right to vote in a country they fought for. A country that many help build. A country that many died for.

As I came to learn after moving to America in 1985 from Nigeria, one of the greatest privileges of becoming a citizen of the U.S. is the right to vote in a democracy and have your voice heard.

Voting rights are the foundation of all other rights: a living wage, housing, healthcare, clean water, and clean air. We cannot have a healthy environment without a truly functioning democracy that works for all, especially communities of color who historically bear the heaviest burden of pollution and voter suppression.

So, I work every day to defend those rights. I have three children, and one of the main reasons I do this work is the desire to leave them a better and more just world than the one I came into. I also want to make sure I leave a legacy gift to keep fighting for these rights and for my planet even after I'm gone.

Only with a truly functioning and representative democracy can we meet the urgency of combating the climate crisis and ensure a livable planet for our children and grandchildren.

There is a saying in my native village: "You don't miss your water, until your well runs dry." This adage is appropriate for the way we Americans relate to our democracy. One thing I learned growing up in Nigeria



Greenpeace US Democracy Director Folabi Olagbaju addresses a 2021 Juneteenth rally coordinated by Moechella, a DC-based GOGO band.

is that once you lose your democracy, it is nearly impossible to get it back. I am afraid that if we do not urgently act to protect American democracy, we will follow the path Nigeria has gone down.

Nigeria was once a promising and thriving democracy but suffered for decades under a succession of military dictatorships. As a result, I had to fight for democracy. In this struggle for representation, I lost a brother to political violence and a dear friend to a police bullet at a peaceful pro-democracy protest. Unfortunately, the country I once loved and knew is now a democracy in name only.

As I was in Nigeria watching its democratic system

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An Immigrant's Love (cont.)

fall apart, the U.S. was the model of democracy and what we all aspired to in much of Africa.

I remember it was in my village in southeast Nigeria when I heard Jesse Jackson give his “Our time has come” speech at the 1984 Democratic National Convention. Because we had no electricity at the time, I heard Jackson’s speech on a car battery-powered radio, and marveled at the power and beauty of American democracy!

I still remember the pride I felt with my first vote as a naturalized citizen during the 1992 presidential election which elected Bill Clinton. I remember taking my kids with me as I cast my vote for our first Black president, Barack Obama, in 2008.

Now that freedom to vote is under threat and our democracy is at a tipping point. We have witnessed concerted efforts to overturn a free



Greenpeace activists across the world placed melting penguin ice sculptures outside government buildings in 2020 to call for a global ocean sanctuary. Greenpeace's Folabi Olagbaju joined these activists with a penguin ice sculpture near the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C.

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The failure of the democratic system in the U.S. would have far-reaching consequences for global human rights and efforts to address the urgent and growing climate crisis. I want to make sure this never happens by fighting today to preserve democracy and our planet, and by fighting tomorrow with a lasting legacy.

Dr. Folabi Olagbaju is the Democracy Campaign Director at Greenpeace USA. He holds a doctorate in political science from George Washington University and has a wealth of experience as a human rights advocate and recognized leader in the global social justice movement. His work has elevated labor movement campaigning, cutting edge environmental justice organizing, and his ongoing commitment to economic and immigrant justice.

and fair election, and violent efforts to prevent a peaceful transition of power. We saw election deniers vie for key electoral posts that would enable them to subvert future elections.

Spring has sprung, and so has tax season

We find ourselves in two seasons — spring and tax season — so the beauty of the natural world AND your finances may be top of mind. Here are two ways you can combine them to make an impact on the people, species, and planet you care about.

Stock gifts: Take stock of your impact by donating stock to support Greenpeace! Donating appreciated stock comes with a series of benefits for your finances and our planet. Scan the QR code on the right to get started, or visit FreeWill.com/Stocks/GreenpeaceFund.



IRA gifts: Are you 70.5 or older? If so, your IRA can be a valuable tool in protecting our planet. IRA gifts can also reduce your future tax burden, and help you satisfy a Required Minimum Distribution if you have to take one. Scan the QR code on the left to get started, or visit FreeWill.com/QCD/GreenpeaceFund.

2023 Brings New Opportunities for Giving

In late December 2022, Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, which was signed into law in the closing days of the year. The massive legislation included the Secure 2.0 Act of 2022, which is primarily designed to encourage retirement savings for future generations of Americans.

This portion of the legislation also included a provision to expand qualified charitable distributions (QCDs) from individual retirement accounts. IRA QCDs allow tax-free gifts to charities of up to \$100,000 per year. The new law allows a special one-time election to make QCDs through charitable remainder trusts and gift annuities for up to \$50,000.

For more information, please contact your tax advisors about this new way to enjoy tax-free charitable giving.

Charitable Giving Strategies to Consider

1. Qualified charitable distributions (QCDs) from IRAs are advantageous for eligible individuals. Although no charitable deduction is available, the income tax that is normally owed on withdrawals is avoided.

QCD rules:

- Individuals must be at least age 70.5 on the date of the gift.
- QCDs can come only from IRAs, not 401(K)s or other retirement accounts.
- A maximum of \$100,000 may be given annually.
- The transfer must come directly from the IRA custodian.
- QCDs can be made only to public charities, not to private foundations or donor advised funds.
- Distributions can be used to satisfy a person's pledge.

2. Making gifts of appreciated assets, such as stock or mutual funds, allows you to avoid the capital gains tax that would be due if the assets were sold, offering tax savings even if you use the standard deduction.

3. Those with donor advised funds can direct gifts to public charities. You may be able to itemize by making a larger gift to a donor advised fund, from which annual gifts can be made over several years. Contributing appreciated securities to a donor advised fund provides added tax savings.

4. And life-income gifts such as charitable remainder trusts and charitable gift annuities offer several advantages to satisfy philanthropic goals. *Unfortunately, Greenpeace is no longer offering gift annuities at this time*, but we can still let you know how these work. Because deductions for remainder trusts and gift annuities tend to be larger, you may be able to itemize in the year that a gift is arranged. Payments from life-income gifts may be attractive to those who would normally make bequests to charity through a will or living trust—providing income tax and possibly capital gains tax savings. Remember, the new SECURE 2.0 law allows for a special election to use IRA QCDs to give through split-interest gifts.

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Red Foxes are nocturnal and roaming hunters with keen senses, and they can even hear small mammals moving underground. They live in underground dens, but at certain times during the year, they also live outside in dense vegetation.

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GREENLEGACY

Greenpeace's Biannual Newsletter



A bee fills up its pollen corbiculae in the botanic gardens of Hamburg, Wandsbek. Healthy bee populations are of ecological and economic importance worldwide. There is an urgent need for the elimination of bee-harming pesticides from agriculture.

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Greenpeace Fund is consistently ranked among the nation's top charities — for our achievements and for the high percentage of revenue that goes directly towards the protection of the planet.

Greenpeace Fund is recognized by Charity Navigator as having demonstrated excellent accountability and transparency.

Greenpeace Fund is proud to be a part of the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) and to carry the “Best in America” seal from Independent Charities of America. Of the one million charities operating in the United States today, it is estimated that fewer than 5% meet or exceed these standards and fewer than 2,500 charities have been awarded this seal.

