

Keya Chatterjee Transcript

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Mila Atmos: [00:00:31] Welcome to Future Hindsight, a podcast that takes big ideas about civic life and democracy and turns them into action items for you and me. I'm Mila Atmos.

Mila Atmos: [00:00:52] So my hometown is Jakarta, it's the capital of Indonesia and also the second-largest megacity in the world. It's home to 30 million people. It was originally built on a marsh at the mouth of a river, so it's really low lying to begin with and it's prone to flooding. And Jakarta is sinking, you know, because of climate change, and it's sinking ever more rapidly. As far back as the 80s, I remember being a teenager, we talked about moving Jakarta, meaning the seat of government, to Celebes Island, which is much less populated, but we've never done it. But now with more insane traffic, I think the average speed of travel during rush hour is five kilometers per hour, which is insane, and really crazy flash flooding when it rains. People are talking about truly moving the capital. People are seriously considering moving the seat of government and five million people because of climate change. That's quite a tipping point. Is it really the answer, though, moving a capital here or building a higher seawall over there? It feels like a Band-Aid for an amputation. Jakarta's been on my mind a lot recently because I've been thinking about how the climate might figure into our conversation about the social contract and also because world leaders are meeting in Glasgow right now at the U.N. summit, COP26, and President Biden is coming in slightly empty-handed because his agenda on the climate is being held ransom by Senators Manchin and Sinema. As a species, we humans are very bad at dealing with systemic crises. COVID and climate and, indeed, racism have proven that point. Big systemic problems are met with piecemeal policies or individual finger wagging. So the problems become acute and in the case of climate an existential threat. Meanwhile, we sit around feeling guilty and kind of stuck. But here at Future Hindsight, we hope to help you get unstuck to find the things you can do to help make change. So this week, we're going to turn the

season's lens of the social contract to climate. How about a reimagined compact between people and the planet between current and future generations? Is it possible? What would it need to include? I'm joined today by Keya Chatterjee. Keya is the executive director of the U.S. Climate Action Network and author of *The Zero Footprint Baby: How to Save the Planet While Raising a Healthy Baby*. Thank you for joining us.

Keya Chatterjee: [00:03:42] Thank you for having me.

Mila Atmos: [00:03:44] So you've called it. The social contract is broken. I tend to agree, but I don't see it as broken beyond repair. How do you see it? Is it repairable and where would you start that repair?

Keya Chatterjee: [00:03:56] I don't think it's broken beyond repair at all. I think that we can repair it, and I think that the pathway forward is to create a society where we take care of each other instead of a society where we feel like it's everyone for themselves. And that's going to be necessary in an era of climate chaos, which is here, whether we like it or not. What we can do is we can prevent it from getting so bad that humanity itself is at stake, and that is what we need to do right now. And I actually think that we've made some progress in this direction, especially in terms of the way we talk about domestic policy in the U.S. I think that we've actually made some progress through the narrative of the Green New Deal in getting there and helping people understand we got to take care of each other in the middle of all these crises, which is where I think the social contract really needs to go. And we've been seeing in the past few weeks that while we've gotten some of this understanding in the U.S., it is so far from ubiquitous. And in fact, we still have one entire party that is essentially promoting fascism and white nationalism. And so when I say we've made all this progress, it's really only with one of the two parties that operate.

Mila Atmos: [00:05:14] So from my perspective, I feel super frustrated watching the negotiations around the Build Back Better Bill and the Reconciliation Bill go around in what feels like decreasing circles in Washington. And I'm guessing, even though you feel optimistic that you're also experiencing some of the frustration, since this is something that most people want. I mean, we know this from all the polling, right? How can you talk about the bill and the ideas in the bill without it being boxed into more polarizing politics, to your latter point?

Keya Chatterjee: [00:05:45] Yeah. Well, I mean, I think what we have been seeing is that we, the people of this country who want to take care of each other have not yet built up enough political power so that the things we want in society are pushed for by elected representatives. We still have a lot of elected representatives who are bought and owned by corporate interests, and these are greedy corporations who will stop at nothing to increase their bottom line. Many of them are fossil fuel corporations. Many of them have been extracting from communities, have been extracting from the land for a long time. Many of them are pharmaceutical companies, which in our society have a positive kind of aura right now because I know I'm really grateful to have gotten a vaccine. But the reality is that these are companies that are making it so that drugs that are well past their patent still cost us enormous sums of money that many, many people rely on. You know, albuterol for asthma, insulin for diabetes, and by the way, these are diseases that are all getting worse because of the climate crisis caused by the fossil fuel industry. And so the U.S. Chamber of Commerce buys a bunch of politicians and then buys a bunch of ways of undermining our democracy, and it results in the will of the people not being heard. As you said, we know that people want this. People want this across party lines.

Keya Chatterjee: [00:07:11] One party doesn't actually represent the people, even who vote for them, who do want the things that are in this bill. And so I'm maybe in a different position, maybe even on the term polarization. I don't necessarily think polarization is bad. I think we need to have moments where we say, "OK, this is a moral call to action. Which side are you on? You have to pick a side right now." Are you on the side of childhood hunger or are you on the side of giving parents resources in order to buy food? And you literally have quotes from Senator Manchin saying, "oh, well, if parents don't work, then why should we have money for the kids?" It's like, so you're going to punish children, you're going to make them starve. Same thing on the climate crisis. We have to have a moment where we say, "which side are you on?" Do you want us to have a stable climate where we can provide food and water and shelter for people? Or do you care so much about fossil fuel executives who are giving you money that you don't care? You have to pick a side. I actually think this is a moment where we have to polarize a little bit more and force people to say which side they're on to clarify that for everyone.

Mila Atmos: [00:08:15] To that end, you know, to achieve this clarity, why is economic and racial justice so important to be at the center of any new contract for the climate?

Keya Chatterjee: [00:08:26] It's really what caused the climate crisis, this system of white supremacy that we live in. And I say that because when I look at where would we have put coal-fired power plants? Where would we have put exploding pipelines? We know that wealthy white communities don't want those things. And if we were not willing to sacrifice communities of color, Black, Indigenous, Asian, we would not have gone down this route. In the 1970s, when President Carter wanted to go to solar, we would have gone that way. But the fact that we were willing to sacrifice communities of color made us go down this path that leads to climate chaos, that leads to a whole series of massive health implications, as well as societal implications. It's very hard to keep a functioning society when you have, time after time, communities being devastated, whether it's by floods, whether it's by fires. We had a season in the summer that were 60 wildfires. At the same time, whole communities were burnt to the ground. We had storms like Ida that not only displaced huge numbers of people, the United Houma Nation especially affected in Louisiana, but actually killed people in their homes all the way in Philadelphia, New Jersey, New York, again, predominantly people of color being affected, predominantly people of color being affected by the impacts of climate change. And that's because of a system of white supremacy that we live within, where people of color have worse outcomes than people who are white. And that we need to fix that because it's the underlying problem that got us into this situation. So everybody in our society benefits if we can actually dismantle white supremacy as we tackle the climate crisis, as we tackle all of these crises.

Mila Atmos: [00:10:11] So to address this problem of power, what do you think it will take for politicians to view climate action in this light, you know, as central to the social contract?

Keya Chatterjee: [00:10:21] We've seen a lot of movement and this surprises people sometimes to hear, but for the first time, we actually have seen even Republicans talking about how they want climate action. And the reason that we got here is because of activism. And we've seen that activism has resulted in the changing of views of politicians. When politicians are scared that they're not going to get re-elected, they will start to listen to people. And that's really hard to do in our society because our

democracy is so broken. It's so influenced by money, so influenced by dark money, in addition to even the money we know about. And so, fixing our democracy has to happen at the same time as our activism, then we have to point it towards our democracy, as well as towards climate action. But we know that climate activism moves positions. The Green New Deal is a great example of a framework that just didn't exist, but activism brought it about. Activism from the Sunrise Movement, in that case. You know, initiating a change in the dialogue about what is possible, opening up this dialogue to say a whole range of other things are possible.

Keya Chatterjee: [00:11:37] Internationally, we're now looking at a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty as being a way of framing this crisis so that politicians cannot ignore it. But it will take activism to actually make it real because what we're fighting against is that politicians are very susceptible to doing the bidding of greedy corporations instead of the bidding of the people because of the way our system is set up. So we have to constantly fight against that. I often say, like, this is actually very simple. We know we have a moral obligation. We have wind, solar, batteries, we have these technologies. And so it's a crisis with a solution. It's one we caused; we can solve. But then, like the missing part of that triangle is like, we don't do it because fossil fuel corporations are so embedded in our democracy. Even utilities are in our state legislatures in such a deep way that we can't move legislation through them because they're resistant to change and they own those politicians. And so we've got to get the money out of politics. And we have to get really engaged in activism.

Mila Atmos: [00:12:44] What is the one thing that would signal to you that we're actually still making progress?

Keya Chatterjee: [00:12:48] Yeah, I mean, I guess that's the thing to me. I need a signal that we are actually, like, legislating the pollution reductions that the administration is saying that they want, that those are actually in law. And then beyond that, what I'm looking for is, are we continuing to move towards a society where we are taking care of each other, where we are not allowing large corporations to cheat on their taxes and steal from us as the quote-unquote common sense of how we should run things? To me, it is very disturbing when there are politicians saying, "oh well, we cannot change this current dynamic where corporations and individual wealthy people cheat on

their taxes because that would be unfair." And it just tells me they don't really understand what the word fair means.

Mila Atmos: [00:13:40] We're going to take a brief break to hear from our sponsor, but after that Keya is going to help us think through how we can bridge the generation gap when it comes to climate action, and she's going to share some steps we can all take to support young people who are increasingly anxious about and activated by our changing climate.

The Democracy Group: [00:14:01] But first, I wanted to talk to you about The Jordan Harbinger Show, which is a podcast you really should be listening to. And I know that every day somebody tells you that you just have to listen to some podcast and you nod and you say "sure," and then you never listen to it. Don't let that happen here. Each episode of The Jordan Harbinger Show is a conversation with a different, fascinating guest. And when I say there's something for everyone here, I really mean that. There's so much to choose from. Jordan's done an episode all about birth control and how it can alter the partners we pick and how going on or off of the pill can change elements of your personality. He's also covered stories like how a professional art forger somehow made millions of dollars while being chased by the Feds and the mafia. If that's not worth checking out, I'm not sure what is. You can't go wrong with adding the Jordan Harbinger Show to your rotation. It's incredibly interesting. There is never a dull show. Search for The Jordan Harbinger Show, that's H-A-R-B as in Boy, I-N, as in Nancy, G-E-R, on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

Mila Atmos: [00:15:11] Let's go back to my conversation with Keya Chatterjee. She's the executive director of the U.S. Climate Action Network.

Mila Atmos: [00:15:20] Keya, I wanted to loop back to something that our last guest on the show talked about, Minouche Shafik. She's a former central banker and policymaker who's now director of the London School of Economics, and we were talking about her book on the last show, *What We Owe Each Other*, which is her kind of outline of what a new social contract might look like. And Minouche highlighted this tension in the social contract between young and old. You know, older people tend to vote more conservatively. Younger people are underrepresented in government or not represented at all. And this generational tension plays out a lot in conversations around the

environment. You know, I have two teenage sons who are extremely concerned about the future of the planet, but neither of them are old enough to vote. So what do you see as young people's place in a social contract for the climate?

Keya Chatterjee: [00:16:07] Well, I think that activism by young people has been a central theme of every successful social movement. And I think that their voices have to be heard. And I think that they have to be listened to. And I think that there's a fine line between listening to and being grateful for it, and also becoming patronizing. There's this meme out there where somebody's hand is just above water and they're drowning in the water and they're expecting somebody to, like, reach out and put their hand out and help them out. But in fact, the person comes and just slaps them a high five. And that's what we do, often, to youth activists. We're like, "oh, you make me so hopeful. I'm so proud." But then do we actually help the youth activists get the thing they're fighting for? I actually don't think that we, as parents, we as adults are doing enough right now. And I say that because I see, like, right now in front of the White House, there have been five young people on a hunger strike demanding that the Reconciliation Bill pass in a way that gives them hope that the climate crisis will be dealt with. I don't see a lot of older people doing stuff like that. I don't see that kind of activism. So I mean, we actually started a project called Arm in Arm for Climate to give people who aren't in the youth activism space a path to leadership because I believe people are out there, and I'm very sympathetic to the fact that our lives are very busy and especially for people who have parents who need to be taken care of and kids who need to be taken care of. It's hard. But I also think that there's a big onus on us as parents to really figure out how can we engage in the ways that lead into our own strengths but really become part of the movements that our kids are a part of. And certainly, on climate change, we've seen Fridays for Future, we've seen Sunrise movement, we've seen so many powerful youth climate voices, and I think that we really need to match those voices with support because at the end of the day, you know, as you said, we as adults are the ones who can vote. We the adults are the ones who might be fortunate enough to have a bank account so that we could divest our money from banks that are doing bad so that we can boycott things. We are the ones who have jobs so that we could participate in a strike. We just have more of those tools and resources as adults, and we need to figure out a way to come and keep the demands of young people, but actually use those assets we have as adults like our power to vote, but also our power to become disruptive and boycott and do other things to make sure that those demands are met.

Mila Atmos: [00:18:54] So does Arm in Arm do that? Does it help parents get on the other side of the youth and help them up?

Keya Chatterjee: [00:19:02] Yeah, not just parents. I should say parents and broadly defined parents as in people who really want to see future generations have a livable planet. It's about food, water, air, shelter, you know, just the basics, really. It's a place where we can hold fast the demands that young people have, but we can bring our skill sets and privileges as adults to that struggle. So our first actions were in May, when everything had shut down. We did about 20 actions around the country as part of the launch just to show what it looks like to actually do what we call disruptive humanitarianism, where we disrupt the system in a way that immediately helps people around us. We planted gardens in places that were slated to be developed for fossil fuels and turn them into community gardens. We shut down 30 streets in Washington, D.C., to demand that the speed limit be lower. We open up streets for kids to play in during the pandemic and won in that struggle. So since then, we've been running trainings twice a month and we've been, you know, starting to actually, like, travel and go to actions once people were vaccinated, so we brought three buses of people out to protest a dirty tar sands pipeline that was going through indigenous territory in northern Minnesota called Line Three and have been organizing folks to stop Mountain Valley Pipeline, have been organizing around Southern Company and their coal ash spills. So we have now started to very carefully in an era of COVID, because our core way of working is that we do want to take care of each other in ways that are led by grassroots activists, by indigenous activists, by black activists, by people of color, have been going out into communities and doing actions. We know that we're not going to get everything that we need from this reconciliation bill because we don't have the power that we need. We also know from research that it only takes 3.5% of the population to engage in direct action to actually be able to change society in a fast and deep way. Whether that means overturning a dictator or something else, we have all these examples from around the world. We know how it works. We have a blueprint and we just need to be able to like, get into practice and implementation. And Arm in Arm is a way to come into the movement and learn that practice.

Mila Atmos: [00:21:30] That is a fascinating statistic that only 3.5% of the population needs to be engaged to make change. But the United States is so addicted to

individualism, you know. And we are a show about actually tools for citizens to make change. What are some things that- what are two things, actually, that individuals can do toward these big collective goals?

Keya Chatterjee: [00:21:54] I'm probably unusual in that I do a lot of the individual action things because it enables me to be able to really, myself, experience and understand the world that we are actually fighting for. Like, I want to live in that world now and to the extent possible, I try and do that. And I have privileges that allow me to do that. And so like we do have solar panels and batteries and we don't own a car. And all of these things are actually positive in our life, but involve a lot of advocacy to make it possible. I live in Washington, D.C. I'm a hyper-local elected official. I fight really, really hard for the public transit that allows me to not have a car every day. And I know that not everyone has the luxury to do that, and it makes me fight even harder when there are national bills that would bring public transportation to rural areas. So for me, I actually do do a lot of the individual things, but it's through a frame of like really trying to envision the society we need. And that's really where we need people is in building that society and building up the political will for that society. So I think that whatever your skillset is, we need you. So if you're an artist, we need banners, we need movement art. If you're a singer, we need songs. If you're a database person, every movement needs a database person. We need spreadsheet people. If you really love to knock on doors, we need that, people who love to talk to people, too. There's a home for you wherever your skillset is and whatever you love to do and even whatever your issue is. Obviously, we have lots of needs in the climate movement, but you know, to me again, these issues are really interconnected. So if you're working on homelessness or ending gun violence or some of these other issues, like, I do see these issues as actually very interrelated and fundamentally to moving to a culture where we take care of people and we put racial justice as the heart of our efforts and we take a human rights and a health approach to thinking about how we take care of people. And so whatever your skill set is like, I guarantee you, we need it.

Mila Atmos: [00:24:02] It's definitely true. Everybody has something to offer. I believe that, too. So you talked about disruptive humanitarianism earlier, and so I'm sure this is new to most people who are listening to this podcast. Can you define it for us one more time? And sort of if I wanted to get engaged as a disruptive humanitarian, what would I do?

Keya Chatterjee: [00:24:21] So we encourage people to not act alone because, actually, we're trying to counter the idea that it's everyone for themselves. So, with Arm in Arm, we encourage any three people to come together and you can just go onto the website and start a hub. And the first thing you'll do is get put into an online training so you have the skills you need to get started. But really, what disruptive humanitarianism is is a call to not accept the status quo and be willing to disrupt, but to do so in a way that immediately helps people around you. So some of the examples I gave of like planting gardens where pipelines are going to go or planting trees in places that are slated for development or also using your body to stop something bad from happening that otherwise would hurt people is also disruptive humanitarianism. So certainly there are times when we are putting our bodies between a fossil fuel industry project and its implementation in order to create that immediate benefit for the people around us, but also do so in a way that is looking out for the people and that is led by the people themselves. So it's not something you're doing for something, it's something that we are doing together as a community.

Mila Atmos: [00:25:35] Yeah. So I have a question about COVID and I've seen some interviews you've done like just when the pandemic started and how it ties in with what we want to achieve with the climate. Early on, we expected it to be like the great equalizer, and there was even hope that we might adjust as humans to be less carbon intensive. And that really hasn't happened. Like this idea that nature is healing? You know, nature wasn't healing. Or at least that's not how it was in the end. And the rich are getting richer and the poor were becoming poorer and even less advantaged. So from these COVID days, from the early days and even into today, is there anything we've learned from the pandemic that can help us in our approach to climate?

Keya Chatterjee: [00:26:21] Yeah, I mean, the issues are really intertwined, what both do is they reveal things about society. Certain things have been revealed during COVID. I know where I live, it's very visibly obvious that there are people still riding the bus to go to work and there are people who are able to stay home. And the people who are still riding the bus to go to work are mostly people of color, and they're more likely to be women than not. That reality existed before, but it was revealed. There are some bad things that were revealed about us about society during COVID, and I think that we need to look at those really hard and understand how to move away from them. We're

still in a situation right now where the entire continent of Africa does not have access to vaccinations. The entire continent. We're not talking about a few countries here and there, like really, by and large, the continent of Africa does not have access to vaccines. What does that say about us and our willingness to take care of each other as humans? I said at the beginning, I do feel like this past election cycle, we pushed politicians to get back into a frame of taking care of each other. And that's why we even have this Build Back Better proposal on the table because of organizing that push for that.

Keya Chatterjee: [00:27:44] But we are so far from having that framework for around the world, and we really see that with COVID. Hopefully, it is a cautionary tale. You know, climate is a lot like COVID and that like you can't expect to leave anyone behind and for all of us to thrive. It's just not how it works. If one continent has no access to vaccines, we don't get to deal with this disease. If one continent has no way of dealing with the climate crisis, we don't really get to deal with the climate crisis, and so we need to be able to work with each other. I think we're very lucky that we have processes like the United Nations where we can try to do so and the World Health Organization, et cetera. Unfortunately, a lot of those talks tend to crumble because the United States and other rich countries don't come having done their homework and are untrustworthy. And so those processes unravel, which sometimes lead people to point fingers at the process, rather than the fact that, well, the United States just showed up without the legislation to do what they said they were going to do, without the resources that were promised to the rest of the world without a commitment to human rights. Well, if that's how the United States is going to show up, I don't blame the U.N. when things don't go well in those conversations. At that point, we have to hold up a mirror and say it's our government and why is our government that way? It's because our democracy is broken. It's because we have, like, a dismantling of our society that we all have to take some responsibility for and lean into fixing. And so there's just a million parallels. And also just the reality is that pandemics, in general, are also just a result of a not sustainable way of living. Why do you have these zoonotic diseases? Why do you have diseases jumping from animals to humans? It's because we have no respect for the habitat of the animals, and we start bringing that into a situation where they have no choice but to enter our habitat because they're crowded and we're creating these disease conditions by our unwillingness to live within the bounty of this planet, which is enormous. It's amazing what this planet will provide for us in terms of food and shelter and water. It's incredible bounty that we have, but we've set up this society where all

that bounty goes to just a few people and our society operates around those people and their desire to destroy nature, essentially, and in so doing destroy humanity and like, we've got to turn that around, and that's for a pandemic and that's for the climate crisis.

Mila Atmos: [00:30:24] Well, this episode will be coming out for COP26 for the U.N. climate talks meeting in Glasgow. You just mentioned and hopefully they will also, you know, talk about the fact that we're encroaching on natural habitat that is causing these zoonotic diseases. And we know it's not the first time that we have had these kinds of diseases plague us. So on some level, climate policy has to be on a global scale. But that scale, though, seems to breed inaction. So is there a solve for that? Is there a way for regular folks to engage with it? Because, you know, Scotland seems really far away, like we're not all going to COP26, you know, we're not going to Glasgow. I mean, I'm not.

Keya Chatterjee: [00:31:05] There is a global solidarity set of days of action where anyone can take action, November 6th and 7th. So anyone can organize an action and take an action. There are lots of ways to plug into what's happening, even in a distributed way. There's always the opportunity to call your representatives, you know, oftentimes people think like, "oh, well, my representative is already good or my representative is already bad, so it doesn't matter. I'm not going to bother." But it actually does really matter. You know, at the beginning of October, it was really unclear whether we were going to be able to keep this piece of legislation alive, and it was kept alive because the progressive caucus really held together and held the line. What gave them the courage to do that is that they were getting phone calls, they were getting thanks, they were getting hugs from constituents. And so even if your member of Congress is already very good, it helps to call. And the converse of that is like my member of Congress is so bad that I will never be able to move them, and it is not even worth my breath to call them. But actually, we see that that is not the case. The reason that members of Congress who are taking bad positions are often taking bad positions is because they're getting all this money. But why do they want all that money? They want that money because they want to win the election. And even in our broken democracy, you still need people to vote for you to win an election, so they really do care what people think. And I think that sometimes people forget that. And so if you're going to take five minutes to do something, it really doesn't take that long to contact your member of Congress. And what they'll do is they have a little notebook that the

person who answers the phone has. And they'll note just with a tick mark which side you were on of a particular issue. And if they get a lot of calls on a particular topic, they absolutely raise it with the member.

Mila Atmos: [00:32:49] Yeah, that's good to know because that was going to be my next question. Like, is democracy really going to get us there? You know, like, do we need to step aside from this old philosophy of the social contract? And you know, it's so bound up with liberal democracies, and whether, actually, our current system works?

Keya Chatterjee: [00:33:05] Yeah, I mean, I think that we can struggle for both things at the same time, you know, climate justice and a functional democracy. And in fact, we really have no choice but to struggle for both things at the same time. And the number I was giving, 3.5% of the population is actually a number- most of those examples come internationally from countries where there wasn't a democracy and they were fighting for democracy, and they were able to tear down a dictator with just Keya Chatterjee: 3.5% of the population. So whatever the form of government, there's only so long you can govern if the people aren't with you. So even if our democracy is a little bit broken and needs some pretty serious repairs here and there to make it easier to vote, to get money out of politics, to make it so a very small number of people who represent a very small number of people can't shut everything down. Those reforms, yes, are needed, but also, like we see, even in autocracies, the will of the people at some point must be heard when the people are in solidarity and willing to act.

Mila Atmos: [00:34:12] So you mentioned in this context that you are a local representative in your neighborhood and you're advocating for more public transportation and you're doing this work as well. So what is the source of your passion? Because it seems to be boundless.

Keya Chatterjee: [00:34:26] It is not boundless. Certainly, my time is not boundless as much as I wish I had one of those, like, Harry Potter little time machine things. For me, it probably comes from a lot of places. Like, certainly in my day-to-day life, I'm very driven by it being my job as a mom to fix things so that my kid has at least the same kind of opportunities that I have had. I also just feel like it is my job as a descendant of my ancestors to do them proud. They fought really hard for a lot of things, including independence from the British Empire and fighting colonialism; fought really, really hard

so that I could be here today and a feeling that like I owe it to my ancestors to not be the generation that let it all fall apart and that made humanity crumble because we didn't have a stable climate on the only planet we know of that has a stable planet for humans. So I feel both a responsibility to the past and the future.

Mila Atmos: [00:35:34] Oh, that's beautiful. So how do you keep cynicism at bay? Because this problem is big, you know, sometimes the scale just makes you want to give up.

Keya Chatterjee: [00:35:44] Well, it's by having a community around me of people who I love, who are activists or neighbors and being in that community and that communal space. Individualism, you know, somehow became the frame of the way people think in this country. But really, individualism is for the birds. It's not a way to survive. It's not a way to take care of people; that we need people around us in order to be whole and in order to get the work done. Really, for me, it's like seeing the people around me, even seeing my son, you know, my son, participated in the Fridays for Future climate strike, you know, and he's like, very worried about his attendance and his grades, and he's worried about what he was going to miss, if he was going to miss this test. But he was like, "you know, but I'm going to do it." And I see the people around me and I just think like, we do it together, you know? I often use the metaphor of a choir where everyone in a choir breathes some time. But the song doesn't sound that way. And it's because we let each other take turns, taking breaths. And I think, like, as a society, we also have to really acknowledge the power of rest. A nap can be the most revolutionary thing you can do in a lot of moments and just making sure that you have a community around you and that you all allow each other that space to rest and heal and have fun and a movement should be joyful. No one wants to join something that's not fun. So it's got to be fun and full of friends and allow room for rest because I'm motivated by wanting to save humanity. Well, what is humanity? It's our ability to still make art, still make beautiful things, and appreciate those things. You know, I have no fear for humans as a species, humans will somehow survive. We're a scrappy little species. What I fear for is humanity. And so I want that humanity to be a part of our organizing culture, the arts and the song and the dance and the rest and the community is what I'm trying to save. That's what gives me hope. And that's a core part of organizing in my mind.

Mila Atmos: [00:37:40] Oh, excellent. I was just about to ask you what makes you hopeful. And you've just told me all about it. That's tremendous. I agree we need humanity and not just the survival of the species. So on that note, thank you very much, Keya Chatterjee. She's the executive director of the U.S. Climate Action Network and author of *The Zero Footprint Baby: How to Save the Planet While Raising a Healthy Baby*. Thank you for joining me on Future Hindsight.

Keya Chatterjee: [00:38:08] Thank you for having me.

Mila Atmos: [00:38:14] The pandemic came up a lot in this conversation. We thought, of course, last year in the beginning that it would be the great equalizer and it turned out not to be. And in fact, as Keya said, it became a revealer of the truth of the way things actually are. And so those truths have been pretty painful and deadly.

Mila Atmos: [00:38:35] On the next episode of Future Hindsight, we're going to be talking to Professor Michelle Goodwin. She's a law professor, a leading thinker on public health and reproductive health, and she really helped me think through the ways in which the social contract is broken for so many Americans when it comes to our health and our bodies, especially people of color—a real eye-opening conversation. That's next time on Future Hindsight.

Mila Atmos: [00:39:03] This podcast was produced for Future Hindsight by Sara Burningham, Reva Goldberg, Zoe Sullivan, and Bart Warshaw of the Cocoon Collective. Zack Travis is our Associate Producer. Until next time, stay engaged.

The Democracy Group: [00:39:28] This podcast is part of the Democracy Group.