

# Field Notes for transformation



**“When we choose hope over despair, we make necessary breakthroughs. When we choose hope despite fear, we act with courage and creativity.”**

KELLE LOUAILLIER | PRESIDENT

## Necessary breakthroughs

Dear friend,

As I sit down to write this note—my 30th anniversary with the organization fast approaching—I’m surrounded by keepsakes that remind me of what we’ve built together. There’s the poster for our 1991 Academy Award-winning documentary “Deadly Deception: General Electric, Nuclear Weapons, and Our Environment.” There’s a photo of our team beaming after the adoption of the global tobacco treaty in 2003. There’s a 2016 picture of women marching through Lagos, Nigeria for water justice. Each of these representing the incredible impact of our community.

But today’s headlines demand that we accomplish so much more. Tens of millions of people are being displaced by climate change. People across the U.S. and around the world cannot access safe, clean water. And our brazenly dishonest president would like to dismantle democracy on behalf of corporate profit. It can be overwhelming.

In these moments, I take heart in some words from Howard Zinn that one of our philanthropic partners shared: “To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.”

When we choose hope over despair, we make necessary breakthroughs. When we choose hope despite fear, we act with courage and creativity.

These are the moments that make us who we are as Corporate Accountability.

### Staring down disaster

In late March of 1992, when Debra “Chas” Chasoff accepted the Academy Award for our film “Deadly Deception,” my tears were streaming. Watching her thrust the 8.5-pound gold prize into the air while declaring “Boycott GE!” was one of the most thrilling moments of my life. One billion people heard our call. And GE’s deadly impact was a secret no more. (For more on Chas’ remarkable life and how “Deadly Deception” won the Oscar, check out the tribute on our blog: [CorporateAccountability.org/Blog](http://CorporateAccountability.org/Blog))

When we launched the Nuclear weaponmakers campaign in 1984, the fear of nuclear annihilation was nearly paralyzing. Much like with today’s climate crisis, it was easy to feel powerless. Reflecting on the threat of nuclear war for more than a moment could cause nauseating dread. It was more comfortable to be numb and pretend it wasn’t happening.

But our organization faced this existential crisis and confronted those driving and profiting from it. In the midst of nuclear fear, we mobilized focused, strategic action.



We defy the odds and organize until justice is real. Our team—pictured here at the 2016 U.N. climate talks in Marrakech, Morocco—dares to demand just climate policy free of Big Polluters' influence.

Through millions of people taking effective action and tactics like "Deadly Deception," together we moved the nuclear weapons industry leader out of the way of peace. Boldly, ambitiously, and in the name of human survival, together we made breakthroughs that defied all the odds.

**From a demand for justice to international law**

It was a cold and rainy day in the early 1990s, and we were developing our long-range goals for our new tobacco campaign. The question before us was, "What would success look like in challenging Big Tobacco?" One audacious answer was, "Make Big Tobacco pay!"

It was an outrageous idea at the time. This industry had incredible political reach and was ruthless in expanding its business. (This was the industry that would, in 2012, send gunmen into the Nigerian home of our board member Akinbode "Bode" Oluwafemi, put a gun to the head of one of his children, and murder his brother-in-law. For more on his story of tragedy and courageous organizing, please read "In Poor Countries, Antismoking Activists Face Threats and Violence" in The New York Times from March 12, 2018.)

Nevertheless, we resolved to hold Big Tobacco legally and financially liable that very day. It felt nearly impossible. But it was necessary, and it was exhilarating. And together with courageous allies like Bode, we organized until we saw it enshrined in international law less than 10 years later. Today, governments from all over the world are joining together to launch lawsuits to hold Big Tobacco liable.

**Meeting the climate crisis**

It's victories like these that make me believe in my heart of hearts that Corporate Accountability has a critical role to play in realizing climate justice. Already, thanks to our campaign, governments representing nearly three-quarters of humanity have stood up and demanded Big Polluters stop obstructing climate policy. And just weeks ago, many of these governments formally called for a conflict of interest policy to, in effect, kick Big Polluters out of climate treaty talks and beyond.

The climate crisis can feel insurmountable. But Corporate Accountability has always made a way out of no way, because you are with us. As Howard Zinn writes, "If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act... And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory."

Let's live as we believe human beings should live and, despite the forces arrayed against us, make our stand for justice.

Onward,

KELLE LOUAILLIER | PRESIDENT



**CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY**  
 10 Milk Street, Suite 610 • Boston, MA 02108  
 617.695.2525 • CorporateAccountability.org

