Worldward is an organisation campaigning on the simple idea that we need to focus our climate change ambition on achieving not just net zero, but climate restoration. Climate restoration means not only do we have to reduce our emissions to zero rapidly, but also set a target to remove as much CO2 from the atmosphere as we can to try to repair the climate as far as possible. Currently, we have a narrative of net zero, that, at some specified point in the future, we will reduce our emissions to net zero, and we will limit warming to a certain amount. It is a narrative of damage limitation, but still leaves an unsafe and dangerous climate for future generations for, at best, centuries to come, and at worst, a millenia. Climate change is already causing suffering to millions today, so accepting net zero as the height of our ambition, accepts that suffering as ok, or unavoidable. That idea is fundamentally incompatible with climate justice, as well as being an unnecessary adoption of a pessimistic, even nihilistic philosophy about the future.

Climate restoration changes that. Not only does it heighten our ambition, it also gives us a pathway to a future that is not just “less worse” (like net zero does) but is better than today. Climate restoration recognises the climate today is apocalyptic for millions around the world, and rather than just resolving “not to make it too much worse,” provides a mechanism for improving it. Climate restoration would include two key components- first, mitigation to net zero, then massive and sustained removal, initially using natural climate solutions and, as time goes on, through the development of technologies like direct air capture, enhanced weathering, sustainable conceptions of BECCS, and likely other emerging technologies as well, to sequester the built up CO2 in the atmosphere and start reducing atmospheric CO2 levels. Mitigation and removal must be viewed independently of each other, and both are necessary to achieve restoration.

Of course, the ambition is high. But it is geophysically necessary. Furthermore, even if we don’t fully achieve restoration, we still end up with a better world for trying. CO2 removal is a must for all the IPCC mitigation scenarios, and restoration would hugely scale up interest and investment in removal technologies. One of the key worries about removal is mitigation deterrence which is why mitigation and removal must be viewed as completely separate from each other. Finally, and importantly, restoration is an inherently compelling narrative: hopeful, positive and potentially galvanising action for climate justice across the political spectrum.