

2018 joint statement on climate justice by Bishops' Conferences

The following appeal is issued by the Church leaders of the continental groupings of episcopal conferences. It is addressed to government leaders and representatives and it calls on them to work towards an ambitious implementation of the Paris Agreement for the people and the planet. In particular, we ask for a COP24 Summit (Katowice, Poland, December 2018) able to prove a milestone on the path set out in 2015 in Paris.

Faced with the growing urgency of the current ecological and social crisis, building on and inspired by the work done on the ground over the past three years by so many courageous actors around the world - within the Catholic Church and beyond - to promote and “live” the messages carried by the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*¹, **we call for ambitious and immediate action to be taken in order to tackle and overcome the devastating effects of the climate crisis.** These actions need to be taken by the international community at all levels: by persons, communities, cities, regions, nations.

We have heard “*the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*”. We have listened to the call of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, and we stand in solidarity with our Brother Bishops who have already taken stances against the limitless and dangerous use and exploitation of our Mother Earth’s resources, as well as our current models of development, supported by financial institutions and systems that put life, community, solidarity, and well-being on earth after profit, wealth and unbridled growth. **We must be prepared to make rapid and radical changes (LS171) and resist the temptation to look for solutions to our current situation in short-term technological fixes without addressing the root causes and the long-term consequences.**

Our call is based on the following principles:

- **Urgency:** “*Time is a luxury we do not have*”². There is a growing awareness in the public opinion, also thanks to scientific research and data, that there is no time to waste and we want to bring that urgency into concrete plans aiming to move towards a fair share of resources and responsibilities, where the big emitters take political accountability and meet their climate finance commitments. “*We can see signs that things are now reaching a breaking point, due to the rapid pace of change and degradation*” (LS 61).
- **Intergenerational justice:** “*Young people demand change*” (LS, 13). Their future is in grave danger and our generation is not doing enough to leave them a healthy planet. Being so short-sighted

¹ Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of the Holy Father Francis on Care of our common Home. 24 May 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

² Conference *Laudato Si': Saving our common home and the future of life on earth* (Rome, 5-6 July 2018) <http://laudato-si-conference.com/>.

is an unacceptable injustice. *“Consequently, intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us”* (LS 159).

- **Human dignity and rights**, in particular of the most vulnerable, must always be at the center of the climate agenda. In implementing the Paris Agreement, human rights must be effectively protected, respected and upheld both in national policies and on the ground. Governments should show their efforts in this sense in their Nationally Determined Contributions and in their funding choices for adaptation and resilience.

And therefore we demand policies that include and acknowledge the following calls and elements:

- **1.5°C to stay alive:** We have a moral duty to keep global warming to “well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels”, as agreed by governments in the Paris Agreement. Pope Francis: *As we know, everyone is affected by the climate crisis. Yet the effects of climate change are not evenly distributed. It is the poor who suffer most from the ravages of global warming [...] Many of those who can least afford it are already being forced to leave their homes and migrate to other places that may or may not prove welcoming*³. Many millions of migrants will follow. A fair and just ecological transition, as required by the Paris Agreement, is a matter of life or death for vulnerable countries and people living in coastal areas.
- **We need a deep and durable shift towards sustainable lifestyles** and bold political choices that could back those efforts to address overconsumption and drastically cut ecological footprints at individual and community levels⁴. *“All these actions presuppose a transformation on a deeper level, namely a change of hearts and minds”*⁵.
- **Special traditions and knowledge of Indigenous communities must be listened to, effectively protected and preserved:** they offer valuable solutions for the care and sustainable management of natural resources. *“It grieves us to see the lands of indigenous peoples expropriated and their cultures trampled on by predatory schemes and by new forms of colonialism, fueled by the culture of waste and consumerism”*⁶. False solutions which use natural resources as

³http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/june/documents/papa-francesco_20180609_imprenditori-energia.html

⁴ *“In this framework, along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a “culture of care” which permeates all of society”* (LS 231)

⁵http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/july/documents/papa-francesco_20180706_terzoanniversario-laudatosi.html

⁶ Synod of Bishops, [Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology](#), 8 June 2018

production commodities (such as large hydro, agrofuel or cash crops) at the expense of indigenous communities' rights cannot be defended.

- **A financial paradigm shift is necessary.** *“Financial institutions have an important role to play, as part both of the problem and its solution”*⁷. It is nowadays necessary and urgent to establish a system of transparency, efficiency and evaluation in conformity with – among others – the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Paris Agreement, and that financial markets be regulated according to these global frameworks. We call for a finance which serves society, builds communities and promotes integrity, equality and justice.
- **The energy sector must be transformed:** We reiterate our urgent call to “put an end the fossil fuel era”⁸ through a rapid transition to an economy powered by renewable energy, as we know from scientists that most fossil fuel reserves need to remain underground. That requires phasing out fossil fuel subsidies and shifting investments away from corporations that continue to explore for new fossil fuel reserves in a way that is incompatible with the Paris Agreement’s goal of limiting temperature rise. In parallel, ambitious efforts are needed to ensure a just transition in which workers from affected industries are supported and investments are directed towards supporting renewable energy systems. Building safe, affordable, reliable, and efficient energy systems based on renewable sources, which meet communities’ development needs, can help tackle poverty, inequality and environmental degradation.
- **We must rethink the agriculture sector.** Agriculture should pursue its fundamental function of providing healthy and nutritious food and making it available and accessible to all, thus contributing to eliminating hunger worldwide. Agriculture should not be solely used for its potential to capture carbon, nor to favour the interests of large businesses at the expenses of poor farmers and the health of people. Agroecology should be especially promoted as a particularly adaptive and resilient practice, especially for smallholder farmers, and as a model ensuring human well-being, stronger communities, and care for the environment.

The above mentioned points are also at the heart of the several actions the wide Catholic community is carrying out to turn the vision of *Laudato Si’* and the Paris Agreement into practice. We renew our commitment to take bold steps to live the change we call for within our institutions. We firmly believe that this ecological conversion is also a spiritual challenge. We encourage all the initiatives within and beyond the Catholic Church that already witness that living more sustainably is possible, achievable and fairer. Ultimately, this is key to the survival of human kind.

BISHOP SIGNATORIES TO THIS DECLARATION:

⁷ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/july/documents/papa-francesco_20180706_terzoanniversario-laudatosi.html

⁸ World bishops' appeal to COP21 negotiating parties, October 2015: <https://www.cidse.org/newsroom/press-release-catholic-church-world-wide-calls-for-urgent-climate-action-and-for-a-major-break-through-at-the-cop-21-paris-conference.html>.

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**THE GLOBAL CATHOLIC
CLIMATE MOVEMENT**

Written in collaboration with the Catholic networks Caritas Internationalis, CIDSE and the Global Catholic Climate Movement