

A Catholic Theological Reflection on the Proposal for a Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CALL TO ACTION



1. Why This Moment Matters

The world stands at a decisive moral crossroads, and the Church's teaching shows a clear light towards a just and sustainable future. The accelerating climate crisis is driven above all by the continued combustion of coal, oil, and gas and the expansion of the means of their production. This continues to threaten the conditions for life, peace, and human dignity, now reaching a planetary scale. This is no longer a matter of abstract future risk. The impacts are already devastating communities, especially people who are poor, Indigenous communities, and the nations least responsible for the crisis.

Catholic social teaching is always evolving, reading the signs of the times. Catholic Teaching on ecology forms part of the wider social teaching of the church and cannot be seen in isolation. This aspect of Catholic Teaching has been strengthened greatly based on scientific advances and a greater global consciousness highlighting ethical responsibilities. In 1990 St. Pope John Paul II emphatically stated that "Today the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the responsibility of everyone" (Message for the World Day for Peace). As Pope Francis has taught consistently in *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*, ecological destruction and social injustice are inseparable. Climate change is not merely an environmental issue; it reflects collective moral failure rooted in distorted models of development, unchecked power, and the refusal to accept limits.

At the same time, existing global climate governance remains structurally incomplete and subject to vested interests. The Paris Agreement, signed a decade ago, addresses emissions but does not regulate the exploitation of fossil fuels themselves. Governments can—and routinely do—pledge climate ambition while continuing to expand fossil fuel extraction. This contradiction, which at times can feel like deception, now represents one of the gravest threats to achieving climate goals and protecting human life.

The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (FFNPT) Initiative arises as a response to this moral and structural gap. Its core proposal—to halt new fossil fuel expansion, manage a fair phase-out of existing production, and ensure a just transition—aligns closely with Catholic Teaching, the natural order of integral ecology, and the Church's long-standing commitment to peace, justice, and multilateral cooperation.



Understanding the Fossil Fuel Treaty (FFT)

A GLOBAL INITIATIVE TO END FOSSIL FUELS & ENABLE A FAIR TRANSITION TO CLEAN ENERGY

1 What is the FFT?



A global initiative to phase out fossil fuels by ending the expansion of coal, oil, and gas and enabling a fair, cooperative transition to clean energy. We can call it simply Ending fossil fuels.

2 Purpose of the Treaty



Address the root cause of climate change: fossil fuel production



Complement the Paris Agreement by focusing on supply, not just emissions



Advance international cooperation for an equitable transition to renewable energy

3 Core Treaty Goals



Non-proliferation – No new fossil fuel exploration or expansion.

Managed phase-out – Coordinated decline of existing coal, oil & gas production.



Just transition – Protect workers, communities & vulnerable nations in the energy shift.



4 Who Is Supporting It?

Countries actively engaged in FFT discussions include: Antigua and Barbuda



- The Bahamas
- Cambodia
- Colombia
- Federated States of Micronesia
- Fiji
- Nauru
- Niue

- Pakistan
- Palau
- Republic of Marshall Islands
- Samoa
- Solomon Islands
- St. Kitts and Nevis
- Timor-Leste
- Tonga
- Tuvalu
- Vanuatu

[Updated list check](#)

5 Political Momentum in the UN



The Treaty is seeking a **negotiating mandate within the United Nations system**, aiming to frame it as a complementary mechanism to climate diplomacy at the **UN General Assembly (UNGA)** and other global forums.

6 Global Opportunity: Colombia's Phase-Out Conference



First International Conference for the Phase-Out of Fossil Fuels — April 2026

Colombia announced it will host this landmark summit to **bring countries, scientists, civil society, Indigenous leaders, and industry together** to chart pathways for fossil fuel phase-out and just transition cooperation.



This conference is a strategic moment for the Treaty initiative — signaling emerging political leadership, especially from the Global South, and building momentum for diplomatic engagement in climate governance.

2. Theological Foundations for Action

The Church's response to the ecological crisis, and climate change specifically, is grounded in enduring principles and virtues:

- **Dignity of the Human Person:** This principle grounds Catholic social teaching and is rooted in the belief that all people are created in the image and likeness of God. All people have equal dignity and rights "to the basic goods that every human person needs to live and thrive" which include "the right to a safe environment." This leads to the universal destination of all goods – that no individual or group has a greater right to the gifts of creation than any other.
- **Love and Justice:** To love is to will and act for the good of the beloved. Love requires justice as the cardinal moral virtue of giving each person their due: protecting their natural rights through fulfillment of natural responsibilities. Love is particularly expressed through social justice that reforms systems, structures, and policies. As such, love must be "civic and political" (LS 231)
- **Care for Creation:** Creation is a gift, not a commodity. To knowingly destabilize Earth's life-support systems is to violate humanity's vocation. 'to till and to keep the garden of the Lord' (Gen 2:15). Creation belongs to God (Ps 24:1), reflects God's goodness (LS, 12) and is a "continuing revelation of the divine" (LS, 85). **The Preferential Option for the Poor:** The gravest harms of climate change fall on those who contributed least to the problem. Continued fossil fuel expansion perpetuates structural injustice. As Christians we are called to "love our neighbour." This core principle of our faith can no longer ignore questions of ecological justice.
- **Intergenerational Justice:** Future generations have a moral claim on today's decisions. Expanding fossil fuel infrastructure transfers suffering and instability to those yet unborn and without a voice, a form of harm for which it is increasingly hard to claim ignorance.
- **Prudence:** This is the cardinal moral virtue of "right reason in action." Amidst the climate crisis, prudence requires action guided by the best available science. This is the cornerstone of the U.S. bishops' document Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good.
- **Integral Ecology:** Because everything is interconnected, technological solutions alone cannot resolve this crisis. True solutions require a renewal of our relationship with creation, a deep ecological conversion, inter-disciplinary responses, and courageous structural change.
- **Common Good:** These are the conditions for shared human flourishing. The Church stresses that governments exist to protect and promote the common good. The Church also emphasizes the principle of subsidiarity: problems of global scale require cooperative global responses grounded in justice and law. Amidst these responses, Pope Benedict XVI declared, "The Church has a responsibility towards creation, and she considers it her duty to exercise that responsibility in public life, in order to protect earth, water and air as gifts of God the Creator meant for everyone, and above all to save mankind from the danger of self-destruction."

- Solidarity: St. John Paul II defined this term as “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.” Given the long-term impacts of the climate crisis, Pope Benedict XVI stressed, “A greater sense of intergenerational solidarity is urgently needed. Future generations cannot be saddled with the cost of our use of common environmental resources.”
- Peace: Since injustices create the conditions of conflict, the Church describes that peace is “an enterprise of justice.” Today, climate breakdown is a threat multiplier for conflict, displacement, and instability. This is why Pope Benedict XVI asserted, “If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation.”

The prophetic witness of the Churches of Africa, Asia, and Latin America through their recent 'call for climate justice and the common home' reinforces this conclusion. Their joint call for “ecological conversion, transformation, and resistance to false solutions,” in a spirit of synodality, reflects lived pastoral experience on the frontlines of climate disruption. For those on the frontlines, resistance to fossil fuel expansion is not ideological—it is a matter of survival, dignity, and peace.

3. Why the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Deserves Special Church Engagement

The FFNPT Initiative should be understood not as a substitute for the Paris Agreement, but as a complementary and necessary development. Paris sets climate goals; the FFNPT addresses the unresolved question of how to manage the exit from fossil fuel production itself.

From a Catholic perspective, the moral logic of such a treaty is familiar. The Church has long supported international agreements that place limits on practices posing grave, systemic harm—whether nuclear weapons, landmines, or chemical arms. Fossil fuel expansion now belongs in this category, given the overwhelming scientific and moral evidence of its consequences, the threat it poses to all life on this planet, to God's creation.

Supporting the principles of an FFNPT does not require the Church to endorse specific technical policy details. It does require the Church to speak clearly about moral direction: that continued fossil fuel expansion is incompatible with care for creation, justice for the poor, responsibility to future generations, and the theological foundations of our faith that honor God as the Creator and humanity as entrusted with care for Creation and all our neighbors.



4. A Call to Action for World Leaders

In the lead-up to the first conference on the FFNPT and on the road to COP31 in Turkey, we urge world leaders to:

1. Join the bloc of nations promoting the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. Follow the example of countries like Vanuatu and Colombia, recognizing that international cooperation is the only path to an orderly transition.
2. Integrate the end of fossil fuels into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). The next Nationally Determined Contributions must include explicit timelines for phasing out fossil fuel production, aligned with science and equity.
3. Protect Environmental Defenders: Guaranteeing the safety and binding participation of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and women in decision-making, recognizing their sovereignty over their ancestral territories.
4. Guarantee, through international agreements and concrete operational plans, that no one will be left behind. This means guaranteeing equal rights alongside differentiated responsibilities throughout the process and in terms of the benefits.

5. A Call to Action for the Church

This moment calls for moral courage, and active support for positive initiatives seeking to systematically address climate action and global peace. Silence or neutrality now risks complicity in a system that is harming the most vulnerable and undermining peace.

ACCORDINGLY, THE CHURCH IS INVITED TO:

1. *Speak Clearly by signing the Manifesto for our Common Home*

Bishops, episcopal conferences, and Catholic leaders should state plainly that continued expansion of fossil fuel extraction is morally indefensible in light of Catholic social teaching on creation, justice, and the common good. Through signing the manifesto, they affirm the legitimacy of international efforts—endorsing initiatives including the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative—that seek to coordinate a fair and peaceful global transition away from fossil fuels.

2. *Center the Voices of the Poor and the Global South*

Catholic advocacy must amplify the lived experience and moral witness of communities already suffering the consequences of climate breakdown, hearing and amplifying both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, in fidelity to Jesus's compassionate ministry for the suffering.

3. *Promote a Just Transition*

The Church should insist that climate action include protections for workers, communities, and countries economically dependent on fossil fuels, rejecting both false solutions and unjust burdens.

4. *Witness Through Its Own Institutions*

Catholic dioceses, religious orders, universities, and financial institutions should align investments, energy use, and public advocacy with the moral direction articulated in *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*.

5. Conclusion: Choosing Life, Peace, and Hope

The question before the Church is not whether climate action is politically convenient, but whether fidelity to the Gospel permits continued acquiescence to an economic and energy system that knowingly endangers life. The choice to embrace instead a healthy and sustainable economy for the sake of the common good is not a loss; it is an act of faith, hope, and love.

In this decisive hour, the Church is called to help humanity choose life—through truth-telling, pragmatic partnership with science, solidarity, and courageous commitment to a just and peaceful transition for our common home.



A Catholic Theological Reflection on the Proposal for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative

1. Introduction: A Moral Moment of Truth

The proposal for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (FFNPT) arises from a stark moral reality: the continued expansion of fossil fuel extraction and use is incompatible with the flourishing of life on Earth. From a Catholic perspective, this is not primarily a technical or political problem, but a deeply moral and spiritual one. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation reveal a profound rupture in humanity's relationship with God, with creation, and with the poor. The question before the Church is therefore not whether climate action is optional, but whether fidelity to the Gospel permits continued participation in an economic system that knowingly sacrifices human lives and ecological integrity for short-term profit.

Pope Francis frames this moment with characteristic clarity:

"We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental." (*Laudato Si'*, §139)

The Catholic tradition, particularly as articulated in *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*, provides a coherent moral framework for evaluating the FFNPT. Drawing on Scripture, Catholic social teaching, natural law, and the preferential option for the poor, this reflection argues that the principles underlying a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty are not only compatible with Catholic teaching, but flow directly from it. Prudential judgment is required in shaping policy mechanisms, but the moral direction is unambiguous: humanity must rapidly and justly move away from fossil fuels, and binding international cooperation is a morally legitimate—and increasingly necessary—means of doing so.

2. What is the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty?

The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (FFNPT) Initiative emerged from growing recognition of a structural gap in global climate governance. While the Paris Agreement commits states to limit warming and reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, it does not regulate the production of coal, oil, and gas - the most significant causes of global climate emissions. There is no explicit mention of 'fossil fuels' within the Paris Agreement. Governments can therefore pledge climate ambition under the UNFCCC while simultaneously licensing new fossil fuel extraction and infrastructure. This contradiction has become one of the principal drivers of climate overshoot risk.

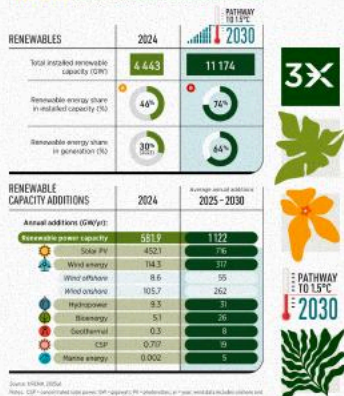
The FFNPT Initiative traces its origins to work beginning in 2019, supported by a Climate Breakthrough award, and entered the public arena with its official launch during Climate Week NYC in September 2020. From the outset, it proposed a treaty framework structured around three interdependent pillars: non-proliferation, meaning an end to new fossil fuel expansion; a fair and managed phase-out of existing production, guided by equity and historical responsibility; and a just transition, ensuring social protection, alternative livelihoods, and financial support for workers, communities, and countries currently dependent on fossil fuel revenues.

Since then, the Initiative has grown from a civil-society proposal into a broad, multi-constituency coalition encompassing scientists, health professionals, cities, youth movements, Indigenous leadership, faith communities, and an expanding group of supportive governments. Its strategy combines public advocacy with diplomatic engagement, seeking to build political momentum for intergovernmental cooperation on fossil fuel supply.

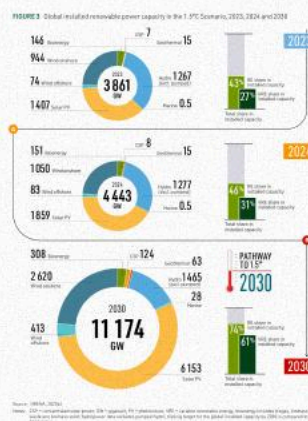
A COMPLEMENT TO THE UNFCCC

The FFNPT is designed to operate outside of but aligned with the UNFCCC. Like treaties addressing nuclear weapons, landmines, or tobacco, it would be negotiated as a stand-alone international agreement rather than as an amendment to the Paris Agreement. This reflects political reality: the UNFCCC's consensus rules, producer-country resistance, and crowded agenda make binding supply-side commitments extremely difficult to achieve within COP decision texts. A complementary treaty among a coalition of willing states allows norms to be established, cooperation to deepen, and pressure to build from the outside—while still reinforcing Paris goals.

FIGURE 2 TRACKING COP28 OUTCOMES: **TRIPLING RENEWABLE POWER BY 2030**



DELIVERING ON THE BLUE ECONOMY



Caption: Figure 1. The UAE Consensus recognizing the Transition away from Fossil Fuels (TAFF). Reproduced from MISEREOR, "COP 30 Briefing."

Legally and politically, this complementarity is straightforward. Nothing in the Paris Agreement prevents countries from coordinating fossil fuel phase-out. On the contrary, Article 2's temperature goals and Article 4's call for rapid emissions reductions and a balance between sources and sinks implicitly require a managed decline in fossil fuel production. An FFT would help countries deliver their nationally determined contributions by aligning production with carbon budgets, reducing stranded-asset risk, and strengthening the credibility of climate commitments.

The equity dimension is particularly significant. While the Paris Agreement acknowledges common but differentiated responsibilities, it provides no shared framework for fairness on the supply side of the transition. An FFT would explicitly address differentiated responsibility, finance, and just-transition support—issues of central concern for many Global South countries, for whom phase-out without international assistance is politically, economically and morally untenable.

Recent political developments underscore both the urgency and the limits of existing processes. COP30 in Belém (November 2025) did not produce a new UNFCCC roadmap or explicit fossil fuel phase-out plan, reflecting persistent geopolitical divisions and resistance from major producers. At the same time, momentum has continued to build outside the COP text, including Colombia's efforts to convene intergovernmental cooperation toward a managed phase-out. The planned First International Conference for the Phase-Out of Fossil Fuels, co-hosted by Colombia and the Netherlands in April 2026, marks a further step toward translating moral clarity and political intent into practical cooperation.

3. Grounding Church Engagement Theologically

The proposal for a new treaty to manage the wind down of fossil fuels in a peaceful and orderly manner is very much in line with key principles of Catholic Social Teaching and the promotion of this international approach to addressing one of the most complex and critical challenges of our time resonates with the vision set out in *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*, but also in the many calls to dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts across Catholic Social Teaching since its inception.

CREATION AS GIFT, NOT COMMODITY

Catholic theology begins with the confession that creation is a gift, lovingly willed by God and entrusted to humanity. The biblical mandate "to till and to keep" (Gen 2:15) establishes humanity's vocation to care for God's creation. *Laudato Si'* rejects the idea that humanity has absolute dominion over creation. We are part of nature, deeply embedded in it and called to a relationship of mutual responsibility. Creation has its own integrity and purpose before God; it is not merely a warehouse of resources for human consumption. "Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us." LS, 66

Therefore, “we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures” and indeed over the earth itself, for “God rejects every claim to absolute ownership” (LS, 67; Psalm 24; Lev 25:23).

Pope Francis explicitly rejects an extractive vision of dominion:

“The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves.” (Laudato Si’, §6)

The ongoing expansion of fossil fuel extraction reflects precisely this distortion. Climate change is not an unforeseen accident of development but the foreseeable consequence of treating the Earth as expendable. As Laudato Si’ teaches:

“The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all.” (Laudato Si’, §23)

To destabilize the climate system knowingly is therefore to damage a fundamental common good. In this light, the FFT reflects a moral logic the Church has long supported: when a practice poses grave, systemic harm to human life and dignity, the international community has both the right and the duty to impose limits. Just as the Church has endorsed treaties restricting nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, so too her magisterium had already established the moral foundations that imply the need for collective restraint on fossil fuel expansion when the evidence of harm is overwhelming.

THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR AND CLIMATE INJUSTICE

Catholic social teaching insists that examination of our conscience begins with the poor. “At Medellín, the bishops stated forcefully that the Church, to be fully faithful to her vocation, must not only share the condition of the poor, but also stand at their side and work actively for their integral development.” (Delixi Te, 90) Climate change is not morally neutral; it is structured injustice. Those least responsible for greenhouse gas emissions—low-income communities, Indigenous peoples, small island nations, and future generations—are already bearing the heaviest burdens.

Pope Francis is unequivocal on this point:

“The gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest.” (Laudato Si’, §48)

Extreme heat, food insecurity, water scarcity, and forced displacement are not future threats but present realities. To continue expanding fossil fuel production under these conditions is to perpetuate what Catholic theology rightly names as structural sin. Laudato Si’ goes further, naming a moral imbalance between nations:

"A true 'ecological debt' exists, particularly between the global north and south." (Laudato Si', §51)

Pope Leo has re-iterated the structural nature of sin in the economic structures that dominate: "We must continue, then, to denounce the "dictatorship of an economy that kills," and to recognize that "while the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few." (Delixit Te, 90-98) The FFT directly engages this injustice by calling for an end to new fossil fuel expansion, a managed decline of existing production, and international support for a just transition. These pillars align closely with the Church's commitments to solidarity, global equity, and restorative justice. The treaty framework is not an ideological intrusion but an attempt to institutionalize moral responsibility in an unequal world.

INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE AND MORAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Catholic moral theology affirms that responsibility extends across generations. The goods of creation are destined not only for the present but for those yet to be born. Pope Francis insists:

"The notion of the common good also extends to future generations." (Laudato Si', §159)

Despite this, governments and corporations continue to approve new fossil fuel projects even though existing reserves and production already exceed what can be safely burned. This is not ignorance; it is moral negligence. It knowingly transfers risk, suffering, and instability to future generations who have no voice in today's decisions.

Laudate Deum intensifies this warning:

"To continue with business as usual is irresponsible, and we cannot hide behind false hopes or empty promises." (Laudate Deum, §56)

The FFT embodies an intergenerational ethic by asserting that some resources must remain unexploited for the sake of humanity's future. This resonates deeply with the biblical tradition, which condemns accumulation that deprives others and praises restraint rooted in justice.

INTEGRAL ECOLOGY AND THE REJECTION OF TECHNOCRATIC ILLUSIONS

A defining contribution of Pope Francis' magisterium is the critique of the technocratic paradigm—the belief that technological solutions alone can resolve crises created by moral failure and excessive consumption. While renewable energy and innovation are indispensable, they cannot substitute for ethical limits.

As Pope Francis warns:

"Technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels... needs to be progressively replaced without delay." (Laudato Si', §165)

Laudate Deum reinforces this urgency:

"The world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point." (Laudate Deum, §2)

The fantasy that carbon capture or future technologies will allow indefinite fossil fuel expansion without consequences reflects precisely the paradigm that *Laudato Si'* critiques. The FFT confronts this illusion with a moral truth long affirmed in Catholic theology: true liberty is the freedom to choose rightly (De Libertate, St. Augustine) , and virtue includes the strength of restraint. Temperance, humility, and care for the common good demand that humanity choose to relinquish what does not protect the wellbeing of life, not only what can be invented.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND THE GLOBAL COMMON GOOD

The Catholic tradition consistently affirms the legitimacy—and necessity—of international cooperation in the face of global threats. Climate change respects no borders. The principle of the universal destination of goods obliges nations to act beyond narrow self-interest, especially when the conditions for peace and human survival are at stake.

This conviction is deeply rooted in the Church's social magisterium on peace and multilateralism. In *Pacem in Terris*, Pope St. John XXIII affirmed that global problems require global responses grounded in moral order:

"The common good of all peoples today demands that relations between States be regulated not by force of arms, but by the norms of reason, justice, law and mutual respect." (*Pacem in Terris*, §80)

He went on to argue that issues affecting the whole human family require institutions capable of acting at that same scale:

"Today the universal common good presents us with problems which are world-wide in their dimensions... and which therefore cannot be adequately tackled or solved except by the efforts of public authorities endowed with a wide power, structure and means of the same proportions." (*Pacem in Terris*, §137)

Pope Francis stands squarely within this tradition when he calls for binding global action on climate change, warning that fragmented approaches undermine the common good:

"International negotiations cannot make significant progress due to positions taken by countries which place their national interests above the global common good."

4. Listening to the Churches of the Global South: A Pastoral Witness

The call to support the FFT aligns with the call for climate justice that has been powerfully articulated by the Catholic Episcopal Conferences and Councils of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean in their joint document ahead of COP30, *A Call for Climate Justice and the Common Home: Ecological Conversion, Transformation and Resistance to False Solutions*. This document does not speak from abstraction but from lived pastoral experience on the frontlines of climate disruption.

The bishops and councils insist on the inseparability of justice and conversion:

“There is no climate justice without ecological conversion, and there is no ecological conversion without resistance to false solutions.”¹

Their appeal is notably pastoral and dialogical, in a spirit of synodality, inviting the global Church to listen attentively to communities already bearing disproportionate burdens. Rather than rejecting development, the document calls for discernment, warning against approaches that preserve unjust structures under new names:

The text denounces the “masking of interests under the language of ‘green capitalism’ and ‘transition economy,’” and cautions against solutions that commodify nature while leaving patterns of exploitation intact.²

This witness from the Global South strengthens the moral case for initiatives like the FFT by grounding them in concrete human suffering and hope. It underscores that resistance to fossil fuel expansion is not a luxury of wealthy nations, but a pastoral necessity for communities whose land, coastlines, water, and livelihoods are already at risk.

5. Responding to Common Objections: A Pastoral and Theological Clarification

ENERGY POVERTY

The concern that limiting fossil fuel expansion will worsen energy poverty must be taken seriously, but it cannot be allowed to obscure deeper truths. Catholic teaching affirms access to energy as a means to human flourishing, not as an absolute good detached from consequences. Fossil fuel dependence has not eliminated energy poverty; it has often entrenched it while exposing vulnerable communities to pollution and climate impacts. A just transition—central to the FFT framework—seeks to expand access to clean, affordable energy without sacrificing health, land, or future stability. Furthermore, current reserves already contain enough fossil fuels to power the world for decades; far longer than the atmosphere can absorb without disaster (check and cite). No further extraction can be justified even in the name of “supporting development.” Additionally, Catholic teaching urges advanced nations to accelerate the deployment of clean energy, while designating priority use of fossil fuels to those developing nations. This is a call for advanced nations to radically end their use of fossil fuels, and certainly not continue prospecting and extracting, in the false name of supporting the poor (Energy, Justice, and Peace, Pontifical Academy of Science, 2013).

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC "REALISM"

Appeals to realism frequently function as moral resignation. Catholic prudence does not equate realism with inaction. Pope Francis rejects the comfort of delay: "To claim that the economy and technology will solve all problems is to conceal the real issues." (Laudato Si', §109)

True realism acknowledges physical limits, scientific evidence, and moral responsibility. The continued approval of new fossil fuel projects despite known consequences is not realism; it is denial and moral complicity in destruction.

6. An Urgent Call to Governments, World Leaders and the Church

In light of the theological reflections in this paper, and the urgency of a change of heart to answer the growing cries of the earth and the poor, it is essential that everyone plays their part. The UNFCCC process sits on the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' - CBDR - which in many ways reflects the principles of subsidiarity and the common good in Catholic Social Teaching. Each person, community and institution has a part to play in addressing the transition away from fossil fuels and a just and orderly transition.

With regard to the role of all Governments, 2026 presents a significant opportunity to choose a path of peace and strengthened multi-lateral cooperation. The first conference on ending fossil fuels in Santa Marta, Colombia, in April 2026 will offer a significant step towards a meaningful roadmap to end fossil fuels. It will be a key step on the road to COP31 in Turkey.

As a result, we urge all governments to:

- Join the bloc of nations promoting the Treaty on the Fossil Fuels. Follow the example of countries like Vanuatu and Colombia, recognizing that international cooperation is the only path to an orderly transition.
- Integrate the end of fossil fuels into NDCs: The next Nationally Determined Contributions must include explicit timelines for phasing out fossil fuel production, aligned with science and equity.
- Protect Environmental Defenders: Guaranteeing the safety and binding participation of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and women in decision-making, recognizing their sovereignty over their ancestral territories.

This moment calls for moral courage, and active support for positive initiatives seeking to systematically address climate action and global peace. Silence or neutrality now risks complicity in a system that is harming the most vulnerable and undermining peace.

ACCORDINGLY, THE CHURCH IS INVITED TO STEP FORWARD AT THIS CRUCIAL TIME:

- **Speak Clearly** by signing the Manifesto for our Common Home Bishops, episcopal conferences, and Catholic leaders should state plainly that continued expansion of fossil fuel extraction is morally indefensible in light of Catholic social teaching on creation, justice, and the common good. Through signing the manifesto, they affirm the legitimacy of international efforts—endorsing initiatives including the Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative—that seek to coordinate a fair and peaceful global transition away from fossil fuels.
- **Center the Voices of the Poor** and the Global South Catholic advocacy must amplify the lived experience and moral witness of communities already suffering the consequences of climate breakdown, hearing and amplifying both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, in fidelity to Jesus's compassionate ministry for the suffering.
- **Promote a Just Transition** The Church should insist that climate action include protections for workers, communities, and countries economically dependent on fossil fuels, rejecting both false solutions and unjust burdens.

Witness Through Its Own Institutions Catholic dioceses, religious orders, universities, and financial institutions should align investments, energy use, and public advocacy with the moral direction articulated in *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*.

7. Conclusion: A Pastoral Call to Conversion and Hope

The Church's engagement with the proposal for a Fossil Fuel Treaty is ultimately a matter of pastoral fidelity and commitment to peace. The convergence of papal teaching, episcopal witness from the Global South, and the cries of the poor leaves little room for ambiguity. The moral direction is clear: continued fossil fuel expansion contradicts care for creation, justice for the poor, responsibility to future generations, and the pursuit of a just and lasting peace.

As *Pacem in Terris* reminds the Church and the world:

"Peace on earth, which man throughout the ages has so longed for and sought after, can never be established, never guaranteed, except by the diligent observance of the divinely established order." (*Pacem in Terris*, §1)

What is required now is not fear, but courage; not despair, but conversion. The Church is called to accompany humanity through this transition with truth aligned with science, courage born of compassion, and hope in the ever-bountiful God—trusting that choosing courageous change for the sake of life is not a loss, but a profound act of faith and a concrete contribution to peace among peoples.

SUGGESTED REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Magisterial and Ecclesial Documents
 - Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (2015)
 - Pope Francis, *Laudate Deum* (2023)
 - Pope St. John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (1963)
 - Catholic Episcopal Conferences and Councils of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, *A Call for Climate Justice and the Common Home: Ecological Conversion, Transformation and Resistance to False Solutions* (2025)
- Catholic and Faith-Based Resources
 - Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development – <https://www.humandevlopment.va>
 - Laudato Si' Movement – <https://laudatosimovement.org>
 - Vatican News, Environment and Climate – <https://www.vaticannews.va>
- Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative
 - Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative – <https://fossilfueltreaty.org>
- Climate Governance and UN Processes
 - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – <https://unfccc.int>
 - Paris Agreement – <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>
 - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – <https://www.ipcc.ch>
- Analysis and Commentary
 - Carbon Brief – <https://www.carbonbrief.org>
 - Dialogue Earth – <https://dialogue.earth>
- These resources are offered to support further theological reflection, pastoral discernment, and informed engagement with global efforts to address the climate crisis.

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