

Catholic international organisations¹

facing up to climate change

“Our sister, Mother Earth, is our common house and the place of God's alliance with human beings and all of creation...”²

For our mission – building justice in solidarity with the poorest – we are deeply committed in our everyday lives to working with and for people suffering from climate change, defend their rights and uphold their dignity through empowerment, from an **integral human development** perspective. The poorest people are the ones most affected by climate change. We provide aid during humanitarian disasters, we carry out countless projects and support partners on all continents, especially in adaptation, sustainable agriculture and agroecology, pre-disaster prevention and risk management, and awareness raising. Therefore, in our advocacy, we bring the demands of those affected by climate change before national and international institutions, as well as the business community, challenging them to adopt policies and behaviour that promote human rights, social justice and sustainable development.

It is widely recognised that climate change can wipe out decades of development efforts³. So it is not a question of choosing between slowing down climate change and fighting poverty and hunger. On the contrary, action to tackle climate change is the key to eradicating poverty, hunger and malnutrition. Consequently, these processes are very closely interconnected and their success is mutually dependent.

1. Our call: a firm commitment in 2015 for the good of present and future generations

a) We underline the utmost importance of international agreements that contribute to sustainable development.

The 20th Conference of the Parties (COP20) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will be held in Lima in December 2014. After a lengthy process involving 20 conferences, another phase is taking shape ahead of the adoption in 2015 of a legal agreement applicable to all States. Progress is expected on proposed financial mechanisms designed to help developing countries, and on measures to improve funding effectiveness and accessibility. Countries have expressed their willingness to implement commitments to keep global warming within the limit of 2°C.⁴ These intentions urgently need to be translated into action via **a serious commitment, promptly backed by adequate funding, which entails a resolute change** in production and consumption patterns so as to promote short food chains –

¹ **Caritas Internationalis** is a worldwide confederation of 164 Catholic charities working together for social justice and an end to poverty, www.caritas.org **CIDSE** is an international alliance of Catholic development agencies sharing a common strategy in their efforts to eradicate poverty and establish global justice, www.cidse.org

² Document of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Aparecida, Brazil, in May 2007, 125.

³ African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Commission, UNDP, UNEP et al, *Poverty and climate change – Reducing the vulnerability of the poor through adaptation*, p. 29.

⁴ Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP), *Reflections on progress made at the fifth part of the second session*, ADP.2015.5. Informal Note, 7 July 2014.

recognising the paramount role of smallholder farmers – and **a pro-poor approach to avoid the adoption of false solutions** to climate change.⁵ We call on all political decision-makers, international organisations and civil society for a **new social contract**, which includes the environment and takes account of the impact of actions or inactions on future generations.

We underline the need to ensure **coherence and synergy** among the various conventions and policy instruments connected to climate change, sustainable development, poverty eradication and disaster risk reduction (DRR), as part of a wider **common framework for resilience**. This would lead to harmonised policy measures for better coherence and coordination, favour alliances and cooperation, optimise the use of resources and orientate decision-makers at each level.

We specifically request:

- **A decisive and binding agreement under the aegis of the UNFCCC in December 2015 in Paris**, which has concrete and positive effects for the world's population, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable people, who have not caused the factors that have brought about climate change.
- **From now until 2020, commitments under the UNFCCC that are ambitious**. As highlighted in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) fourth assessment report, a range of 25–40 per cent emission reductions by developed countries will give a 50 per cent chance of global average temperatures staying below a 2°C temperature increase.⁶
- **A new agreement for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** after 2015, with a focus on fighting poverty and boosting sustainable development, which incorporates robust actions to combat climate change reflecting UNFCCC commitments. The SDGs must contribute to a global low-carbon, green development pathway that is transformative; they should include a standalone Goal on climate action with specific and quantified targets, and should mainstream climate change under those SDGs whose progress it can threaten.⁷
- **Coherence between climate action and disaster risk reduction**, aligning goals and objectives of the frameworks for DRR after 2015 (Hyogo+) on the one hand, and climate change on the other, and enabling coherent programmes at international, national and local levels to enhance community resilience.

b) **We maintain the need for funding and cooperation for sustainable development.**

⁵ Agricultural and technological practices that increase sustainable productivity, food security and resilience are being promoted, with potential negative impacts. See, for example, CIDSE, *Climate-smart agriculture: The Emperor's new clothes?*, October 2014 at <http://www.cidse.org/articles/item/640-climate-smart-agriculture.html> as well as Coordination SUD, *Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture: un jeu de dupes?*, September 2014, at http://www.secours-catholique.org/IMG/pdf/Fiche_ACSA_CCD_C2A.pdf

⁶ http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/syr/en/contents.html

⁷ Eg Goal 2: sustainable agriculture, Goal 6: availability and sustainable management of water, Goal 7: reliable and sustainable energy, Goal 11: resilient and sustainable cities, Goals 14-15: sustainable use of oceans, seas and terrestrial ecosystems, etc. See *Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals*, A/76/970, 12 August 2014.

We stand up for **climate justice**, which ensures that the people who are most vulnerable to climate change (including those affected by environmental disasters caused by it) have access to knowledge and the necessary financial and technological resources to build their resilience.⁸ We welcome political guidelines that give **equal importance to mitigation goals and adaptation programmes, as well as to loss and damage mechanisms** as a result of climate change. At the same time, we ask that governments establish concrete action plans backed by sufficient and predictable funding.

We specifically request that:

- Industrialised countries honour their commitment to **contribute sufficient amounts** towards the 100 billion USD per year required for the **Green Climate Fund (GCF)**. Such funds should be coming mostly from public finance, in order to address the needs of the poorest and to catalyse the greater amounts that are needed. Taking up the call of developing countries to see the GCF capitalised rapidly, we call on governments to ensure that at least 15 billion USD (grant equivalent) is paid into the GCF over the next three years as an initial resources mobilisation.
- **50 per cent** of public finances for climate change should be allocated to **adaptation** for communities already affected, and in particular to smallholder farmers.
- Any delivery of finance should ensure transformative change on the ground to ease the transition towards truly sustainable development in developing countries. Cooperation for **environmentally sustainable and socially just development** – for example, by scaling up agroecology – should be fostered and clean technologies shared. The over-commercialisation of natural resources and the creation of market mechanisms that undervalue the inherent worth of nature must be avoided.
- For the sake of climate justice, in order to provide the necessary means for vulnerable countries to adapt and transition to decarbonised societies, additional public finance and new sources of finance should be mobilised, and **fossil fuel subsidies reformed**.
- The funds provided to developing countries as climate finance, including through the Green Climate Fund, should be **additional** to, and not replace, existing development aid. On the other hand, there should be more strategic coordination among the various funding mechanisms on climate, development, poverty and disaster risk reduction.

c) We call for a halt to the extraction pattern, which causes ecological damage and accelerates climate change.⁹

Deforestation, soil degradation, pollution, the depletion of natural resources, and human settlements on land vulnerable to disaster are all notable practices that affect the quality of human life and accelerate climate change. The **uncontrolled transformation of land** is the human activity which, above all others, aggravates the vulnerability of societies, hitting the

⁸ Caritas Internationalis position at the 18th Conference of the Parties (COP18) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

⁹ Caritas Internationalis, *What climate change means for feeding the planet*, p 25. It is important, however, not to overlook the impact of alternative sources of energy, such as **bio-fuels like palm oil**, which are having devastating effects on communities, notably in the Pacific.

poorest and most excluded groups hardest. The problem of climate change is, first and foremost, a problem of sustainability.

We ask States to continually adapt the principle of **common but differentiated responsibilities**, amid evolving circumstances. Indeed, this is a dynamic principle that does not separate countries of the North from those of the South, but rather creates different obligations in terms of each country's situation.¹⁰ The **social and ecological responsibility of companies** should be strengthened in a consistent and complementary way.

We propose that:

- Greater ecological and social responsibility be enhanced among companies,¹¹ by drawing up **public sectoral policies for responsible and sustainable business practices**.
- Mandatory requirements should be established so that companies step up their due diligence efforts regarding the social and ecological impacts they have, especially in the territory of their host countries. For example, companies should be made to recognise and respect the customary ownership of lands and natural resources by indigenous communities.
- A duty to inform the public about the environmental impacts of companies' operations should be introduced, to help people understand the consequences of consumption choices, and promote **socio-cultural change** so that consumers, communities and individuals adopt socially and environmentally responsible conduct.

d) We seek to ensure the right of the most vulnerable groups to participation in decision-making and to share in benefits

We stand up for participatory democracy and promote a culture of dialogue in order to seek lasting solutions. Despite the huge resources poured into global discussions about climate change, **the world's poorest people, women, children and other vulnerable groups, including indigenous ones, have no say or representation** in public decision-making, and yet they are struggling to find solutions under very difficult circumstances. Defending the climate is a social interest that requires full legal protection¹² as well as strong monitoring and social control mechanisms.¹³

We insist on:

- The creation of **national, regional and local platforms to enable the participation** of affected groups in developing sustainable development policies and plans – including climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction – in each country. Such platforms should adopt a rights-based approach, defining responsibilities and

¹⁰ *A Christian view on climate change*, Report to the Bishops of COMECE (Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community), 2011, p. 19. Available in English, French and German at www.comece.eu

¹¹ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *The vocation of the business leader: A reflection*, 30 March 2012, http://www.justpax.it/eng/home_eng.html

¹² *Crisis económica, opción por los pobres y cuidado de la creación – Por un desarrollo humano, integral y solidario*, Statement of the Justice and Solidarity Department of CELAM, Bogotá, 20 February 2010.

¹³ Aparecida Document, 474–d.e.

entitlements for all stakeholders, and help identify targets, indicators and benchmarks to ensure transparency and accountability.

- The full implementation of the principles of **ILO Convention no. 169**,¹⁴ particularly those regarding prior consultation and participation (Article 6) and the right to decide on development priorities (Article 7), taking into account the impact on local populations, **especially indigenous people**, of climate change on the one hand, and of large investments on the other. These processes should be supported by adequate public funding.
- The adequate representation of the most vulnerable groups, notably smallholder farmers, **within the UNFCCC system**, and the creation of appropriate conditions to enable their active participation.

2. Our reality: poor people are worst affected by climate change

Every day, we work shoulder to shoulder with the poorest and most vulnerable communities, and we see the situations in which they live, as well as the impacts of climate change on their survival strategies. In recent decades, bishops on several continents have drawn attention to the effects of climate change.¹⁵

The interconnection between climate change and sustainable development derives from the fact that climate change limits integral human development; in turn, sustainable development is vital for climate mitigation and adaptation.¹⁶ The damage caused to natural resources and biodiversity poses a direct threat to the survival of our planet.¹⁷ Extreme weather events induced by climate change cause more and more frequent humanitarian disasters, destroying the advances made in human and environmental development. In the long run, climate change alters weather patterns, which has a profound effect on agriculture, forests, fishing and stockbreeding, and also deprives large numbers of people of their access to food.

This food insecurity causes growing instability and exposes violations of basic human rights, such as the right to food, life, health and development. Almost one billion people do not have access to sufficient food to live well, and climate change is threatening to have further negative impacts on food production and on all aspects of food security.¹⁸ Such a growing instability threatens to nullify the development progress made in recent years, such as increased access to

¹⁴ <http://www.ilo.org/indigenous/Conventions/no169/lang-en/index.htm>

¹⁵ *Renewing the earth*, A Pastoral Statement of the United States Catholic Conference, 14 November 1991 at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/renewing-the-earth.cfm>; COMECE, *A Christian view on climate change*, quoted above; also, document of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Aparecida, Brazil, in May 2007, CELAM, Bogotá, 2007; New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference, *Statement on environmental issues*, 1 September 2006, at: <http://www.catholic.org.nz/nzcbc/fix-view-article.cfm?ctype=BSART&loadref=83&id=62>; Australian Bishops' Conference, 2005, *Climate change: Our responsibility to sustain God's earth* (available upon request) and 2009, *Statement of the Catholic Bishops on the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark* at https://www.catholic.org.au/commission-documents/doc_download/937-abc-statement-on-copenhagen-climate-conference

¹⁶ See Caritas Internationalis, *What climate change means for feeding the planet*, Ibid, pp 17–18.

¹⁷ Charter of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, Lima, 15 May 2008.

¹⁸ IPCC WGII AR5 of 28 October 2014, Chapter 7, at http://ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5/images/uploads/WGIAR5-Chap7_FGDall.pdf

basic services such as healthcare, education and transport, as well as access to decent employment. The poorest people, especially women, children and the physically impaired in rural areas, who have contributed least to global warming, are also those most affected by climate change. They are the least equipped to withstand the negative effects of climate change, and they have no say or representation in political decision-making.¹⁹ According to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 40 per cent of the poorest people suffer the greatest impacts.²⁰

Climate change is also a threat to global prosperity in the medium term, with the costs of inaction projected to increase as long as necessary action is postponed.²¹ The most recent estimates put the annual cost at 1.2 billion USD (1.6 per cent of GDP), with projections that the figure is set to double by 2030 if insufficient action is taken. Impacts are being felt throughout the world.²² In particular, the Pan-Amazonian region faces numerous and complex challenges. It is a biome where life is expressed in all its diversity, as a gift of God for all. And yet, its devastation continues apace: large-scale extractive investments, extensive monocultures and climate change threaten its environment and undermine human dignity and peoples' right to self-determination, offending the face of Christ incarnate in the members of the indigenous, coastal, rural and urban communities and those of African descent.²³

3. Our analysis: the development model is the main cause

While the causes of these precarious living conditions are many and complex, we wish to emphasise some overarching causes which we have observed through our own experience, expert analysis in various fields and our faith perspective.

The **conventional economic growth model** that is **based primarily on fossil energy consumption** is obviously unsustainable, for both the North and the South.²⁴ Within the energy sector, CO₂ represents about three quarters of the anthropogenic GHG emissions for Annex I²⁵ countries, and 60 per cent of global emissions overall.^{26 27}

¹⁹ CELAM, Statement on the 'international financial crisis, climate change and its impact on the poor', p 2 (in Spanish).

²⁰ <http://www.pass.va/content/scienze-sociali/en/events/2014-18/sustainable/statement.html>

²¹ *Stern Review on the economics of climate change*, 2006 & Nicholas Stern, 'Fostering growth and poverty reduction in a world of immense risk', Address to IMF, April 2013.

²² Climate Vulnerability Monitor, *A guide to the cold calculus of a hot planet*, 2nd Edition, <http://daraint.org/climate-vulnerability-monitor/climate-vulnerability-monitor-2012/>

²³ *Pan-Amazônia: fuente de la vida en el corazón de la Iglesia*, Foundational Declaration of the Red Eclesial Pan-Amazonica – REPAM, Brasilia, 12 September 2014.

²⁴ *Cambio climático y justicia*, Symposium on Climate Change as a challenge for Latin America, Asia, Africa and Oceania, Rome, 1-2 October 2010, par.4. Again, it is important not to overlook the impact of alternative energy sources such as **biofuels** on poor and vulnerable communities.

²⁵ 'Annex I' Parties to the UNFCCC include the industrialised countries that were members of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) in 1992, plus countries with economies in transition, including the Russian Federation, the Baltic States, and several Central and Eastern European States.

²⁶ Please note that the percentage varies greatly by country. Source:

<http://www.iea.org/publications/freepublications/publication/co2emissionsfromfuelcombustionhighlights2013.pdf>

²⁷ According to another study, the consumption of oil, gas and coal contributes to 65% of the emissions that cause climate change: <http://www.ecofys.com/files/files/asn-ecofys-2013-world-ghg-emissions-flow-chart-2010.pdf> In 2012, the energy sector amounted for 57.9% of GHG emissions in Europe, excluding the transport sector:

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php?title=File:Greenhouse_gas_emissions_by_source_sector_1990_and_2010.png&filetimestamp=20130123130433

Frequently, 'nature conservation is subordinated to economic development, entailing harm to biodiversity, depletion of water reserves and other natural resources, as well as air pollution and climate change (...) Latin America (...) is affected by global warming and climate change, which are primarily caused by the unsustainable lifestyle of industrialised countries.'²⁸

Our current production model is based on consumerism and a rapid increase in economic benefits, which has led to a serious ecological imbalance: excessive consumption of non-renewable raw materials; noise, visual and air pollution; disappearance of species; and climate change. This style of development is the 'breeding ground' of the current crisis.²⁹

Environmental degradation is also linked directly to poverty and social exclusion: poverty and 'ecological destitution'³⁰ are inseparable. Ecological harmony cannot exist in a world characterised by unjust social structures; likewise, extreme social inequality cannot co-exist with environmental sustainability. At its root, the ecological crisis is not just an economic and environmental issue, but also a 'moral problem'.³¹

Taking the Catholic Social Teaching as our foundation, we promote:

- a **sacramental view of the universe**, which makes human accountable for the fate of the earth;
- a **consistent respect for human life**, which extends to respect for all creation;
- a worldview affirming the ethical significance of global interdependence and the **common good**;
- an **ethics of solidarity** promoting cooperation and a just structure of sharing in the world community;
- an understanding of the **universal purpose of created things**, which requires equitable use of the earth's resources;
- an **option for the poor**, which gives passion to the quest for an equitable and sustainable world;
- a conception of **authentic development**, which offers a direction for progress that respects human dignity and the limits of material growth.³²

This is the Catholic Social Teaching we wish to apply to environmental policy to achieve real solutions to the ecological problems we are facing today.

4. Urgency and opportunities: 2015 is the year of action

The uncertainty and insecurity caused by global warming, environmental pollution, dwindling energy resources, food insecurity, loss of biodiversity and the higher frequency of humanitarian disasters have revived widespread concern for the environment. This concern has spread

²⁸ Aparecida Document, 66.

²⁹ CELAM, Final statement of the seminar on the international financial crisis, climate change and its impact on the poor, Lima, 3-7 May 2009, p. 2 (in Spanish).

³⁰ 1988 Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of the Philippines on the ecological crisis in *Justice écologique 2011-2016*, 'Reflexion 1', Development and Peace, at www.devp.org

³¹ Pope John Paul II, Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace on 1 January 1990, chapter II, at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace_en.html December 8, 1989, Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

³² *Renewing the Earth*, Ibid, Section 3.

beyond expert groups and become a challenge for the whole of society. People, communities and societies are more and more conscious of the impacts of environmental degradation on their own lives. **The world has opened its eyes to the reality of climate change:** not only scientists, economists and politicians, but citizens too now reflect, discuss and make proposals on this theme.

The response to climate change must engage the whole of humanity: everyone has an indispensable role to play. In addition to scientific, technical and economic arguments, **solutions must embrace ethical and moral concerns.** An approach considering the impact of climate change on a wide range of **human rights**, including the **universal right to adequate food**, must be adopted.

Tackling climate change – by reducing emissions sharply and helping the poorest communities adapt sustainably to the effects they are already experiencing – is a long-term undertaking. However, the urgency of the situation calls for an equally **urgent response from all of us.** Science is telling us that global warming must start to decline before 2020 if we wish to avoid ‘extreme’ warming.³³ Two very important events will take place in 2015, which could shape our programme of action.

In December 2015, in Paris, the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC will have to adopt a new legal agreement on how to keep global warming within a 2°C temperature rise. With this in mind, in September 2014 the UN Secretary General convened a Climate Change Summit in New York to ignite political will among the leaders gathered – from States, civil society and the private sector. Meanwhile, the process of agreeing on new Sustainable Development Goals, as part of a new international agenda on sustainable development, will culminate in September 2015.

These two processes are vital for the future of our planet and should be seen as interrelated and synergic. As explained, slowing down climate change and fighting poverty and hunger are mutually reinforcing strategies. Action to tackle climate change makes an indispensable contribution towards eradicating hunger, malnutrition and poverty,³⁴ which is a priority goal of the new Sustainable Development Agenda from 2015 onwards.

If we rise to this ecological challenge, the important political choices to be made in the coming months represent a real opportunity for global decision-makers to set the poor and care of creation at the heart of our globalised systems.

It is an opportunity that must be seized, now.

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³³ Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP), *Reflections on progress made at the fifth part of the second session*, ADP.2015.5. Informal Note, 7 July 2014.

³⁴ COMECE, *A Christian view on climate change*, p 9.