

Inaction is a crime towards humanity and nature *A call from the Synod for the Amazon for urgent climate action*

Rome, October 2019

We are here united at the [Synod of Bishops “Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for Integral Ecology”](#). We hear the cry of the people living from and with the Amazon territories and the cry of the forest itself.

The suffering of people and Creation in the Amazon region are the consequences of an imperial way of life. The economy repeatedly externalises the consequences of its production to others: through an extractivist economy that we are so dependent on, for agriculture, for transportation and energy, to satisfy our insatiable consumption and production which is now destroying our planet and threatening the lives of those who try to protect the earth. What we see in the Amazon is like a laboratory for the whole planet.

“Climate change represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity today.” (LS 25)

The Amazon on the brink

The peoples from Amazonia are witnessing the signs: They are experiencing droughts, heat, and other significant changes in the Amazon as the steady erosion of tree cover – of which 20% are destroyed already – weakens the role of the rainforest in generating enough clouds to re-feed the forests of the Amazon and far beyond Amazonia with rain. The amazon forest is in growing danger of degrading into a savannah.

To the peoples from Amazonia, the science is real: Global warming and deforestation are mutually exacerbating phenomena. As the forest’s capacity to absorb carbon diminishes, the consequences are being felt in the planet’s climate, and inversely, global warming is accelerating the “savannisation” process.

We are at a crossroads

If humankind fails to mitigate Climate Change, tipping points like the one in the Amazon¹ may reach a point of no return, and potentially send the Earth into a spiral of runaway climate change modifying the face of our common home.

Last year’s IPCC Special Report on 1.5°C² was clear about the choices humanity currently faces: the most vulnerable communities on earth will continue to suffer from the effects at an increasing rate. Time is running out. To reach net zero by 2050 worldwide, we only have a few years left to radically reduce our current CO2 emissions.

As the IPCC scenarios have shown, there is no lack of [ideas](#) – just, sustainable and well-researched – for governments to implement an ecological transition. Many communities have a wealth of expertise and experience in innovative models of food and energy production proven

¹ And many others like the melting of the Greenland Ice Sheet or the bleaching of all coral reefs.

² <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>.

to work at scale, such as agroecology and democratic renewable energy systems. This is not about knowledge; it is about implementation.

Nature-Based Solutions can contribute significantly to staying within 1.5°C³ rise in average global temperatures by avoiding emissions from deforestation, forest degradation and losses of wetland ecosystems, restoring degraded land and scaling up agroecological food systems and guaranteeing land rights and territories to local and Indigenous Peoples.

There is no reason to resort to speculative, potentially catastrophic experimentation with geo-engineering. And we have serious concerns on other false ‘solutions’: “There is a growing awareness that scientific and technological progress cannot be equated with the progress of humanity and history, a growing sense that the way to a better future lies elsewhere” (LS113).

Government, Business and Society have been delaying action for too long, while the vulnerable suffer and our planet literally burns before our eyes. They deserve an answer and response to their calls, as we only have one planet to live on.

Inaction is a crime towards humanity and nature

With this statement, we reaffirm the statement of the Church leaders of the continental groupings of episcopal conferences from last year⁴, to finalize the Paris Rulebook, and we express our deep concerns about the poor state of commitment and implementation since then. Current Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) barely represent a third of the emissions reduction needed to limit global warming to 1.5°C and instead allow for over 3.5°C of warming.

We are worried to hear that some countries are not negotiating in the spirit of the Paris Agreement but continue to act in self- interest by opening loopholes under the Carbon Trading Rules, without accepting social and environmental safeguards.⁵

We are disappointed with the lack of honesty and transparency as governments keep reaffirming their commitment under the Paris Agreement while their policies speak to the contrary. And we are saddened that the most vulnerable communities and future generations will once again pay the price of our inaction, with very little funding to adapt, and still no mechanism on the horizon to compensate for losses and damages caused by climate change.

We need Climate Action

We will not be able to alleviate poverty and guarantee human dignity for all without recognizing the interconnection between ourselves and nature, with nature being our source of life. Likewise, we will not tackle climate change without addressing the social, economic and

³ <https://www.cidse.org/the-climate-urgency-setting-sail-for-a-new-paradigm/>.

⁴ <https://www.cidse.org/church-worldwide-calls-for-ambitious-and-urgent-climate-action/>.

⁵ Brazil, India and others would like to keep the emission reduction certificates from the Clean Development Mechanisms which comes to an end under the Paris Agreement because it failed due to weak rules in accounting emissions and human rights violations. Most of the emission reductions achieved would have occurred without the extra money from emissions trading. Brazil wants to sell emissions reduction credits (one ton of CO₂ reductions is equivalent to one emission reduction certificate) under the new Sustainable Development Mechanism to other countries while counting the achieved emission reductions towards its own climate target. One ton of emission reduction would then be counted into the emission reduction efforts of Brazil and of the buyer country: double counting.

political factors that drive our current development pathway, putting us at odds with the stability of the planet on which we depend.

Humankind already has a great historical debt toward the indigenous peoples and through our inaction, this debt is growing and touching upon hundreds of millions of people around the world who may lose their homes, cultures, and way of life due to the devastating effects of climate change.

As we listen to the voices of the Amazon, we can sense the same urgency that we are hearing from the courageous voices of the youth climate movement. We commit to support their movement around the globe, to ask the political leaders to engage in radically changing our way of life to save our Common Home, for the Amazon, and other critical biomes around the world, in the Congo Basin, in Asia, and Oceania.

We are convinced that this synodal process, which began by listening to the voices of Amazonia, will contribute to build a Church engaged in the care for creation, standing with environmental and human rights' defenders, committed against violence and exploitation. The Church itself is committed to this ecological transition towards a more sustainable way of life.

Our faith needs to be stronger than our fear of change.

SIGNATORIES

- Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu (Democratic Republic of Congo)
- Cardinal Pedro Ricardo Barreto Jimeno (Peru)
- Cardinal Oswald Gracias (India)
- Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich (Luxembourg)
- Cardinal Cláudio Aury Affonso Hummes (Brazil)
- Cardinal John Ribat (Papua New Guinea)
- Cardinal Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga (Honduras)
- Archbishop Héctor Miguel Cabrejos Vidarte (Peru)