

Cretan Declaration of the WCC Eco School 2023 for Europe and North America

Preamble

We, the collective members of 2023 Eco School of the World Council of Churches (WCC), represent youth/young adults from nine countries across Europe and North America, gathered at the Conference and Research Centre of the Orthodox Academy of Crete (OAC) in Kolympari, Crete, Greece, during 11-18 November 2023. We are students, pastors, deacons, volunteers, and workers from the United Methodist Church, United Church of Canada, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, Lutheran Church of Baden, Protestant Church in Switzerland, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, The Czechoslovak Hussite Church, Evangelical Church in Berlin, Brandenburg and Silesian Upper Lusatia, Greek Orthodox Church, among others. . After a week of discussions and deliberations on various ecological issues, we firmly stand together, calling our institutions of power, (faith) communities, and friends to stand up for climate justice, water justice, food justice, health justice, and the intersectional issues embedded in each of these areas of focus.

Affirmation of our Faith

“The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it” (Genesis 2:15.)

Therefore, we affirm that our God is One, the Father the Creator of all, Son the Saviour of humankind, begotten by the Father, and the Holy Spirit the life-giving lord who proceeds from the Father, One, True and Holy. Our God is the creator of all, everything seen and unseen. He created humankind in God’s image, and bestowed upon us the grace of stewardship for our fellow beings, to be in fellowship and sustainable coexistence with all creation.

Across time, nature has been the vessel that revealed God to humankind; the burning bush spoke to Moses, the glory of the Lord dwelled in the clouds leading humankind from captivity to freedom and safer spaces, and Christ the Saviour was born in a manger among cattle and sheep. At the wedding of Cana, water blushed at its master, providing humanity with sweet wine. The Lord gathered with His disciples around a supper, sharing and caring for one another with the meal of life. We are His handiwork, and He did handiwork on wood as a carpenter, and later, when he was crucified and died on the wooden Cross, creation shook, wept, and trembled. Then, He defeated the powers of injustice and rose on the third day from the captivity of death. The women who reached his empty tomb proclaimed with joy the good news of the resurrection, reminding us that there is hope even in the darkest of hours.

Today as we live in dark days of climate injustice, food poverty, and inadequate access to water and health supports, we need the hope of resurrection in order to strive as a family of God’s children by supporting and complementing each other in our vulnerabilities. So, let us proclaim to treat our fellow creations with the utmost respect and dignity. Let us thank God and our fellow creatures for sustaining us through time by providing us with food, water, shelter, and other necessary things for survival.

Realisation

We recognize that justice for climate, food, water and health is intersectional, and complex. We are aware that to seek justice for one of these issues is to seek justice for all of them. We understand the road to justice is filled with challenges. However, we are not fearful. We are prepared to resist the current system and paradigm, driven by the economic order that enables and empowers the industries of our world to damage our climate, food, water, and health.

We are aware that the top 10% of carbon emitters are responsible for nearly half of global emissions, while the bottom 10% are responsible for 0.02%. The richest 125 people in the world and their investments emit the equivalent amount to the nation of France. We realize the cost of climate change solutions. But the cost of ignoring our environmental well-being and climate change is much higher.

We recognize that food insecurity is just as relevant today as ever. For the first time in decades, hunger is on the rise. On our current trajectory, we could see malnutrition and hunger affect 20% of the population by 2050. We recognize and affirm the WCC - Ecumenical Advocacy's Alliance Food for Life Campaign's Ten Commandments for Food. Food is a human right and we affirm the right to healthy, nutritious, and sustainable food for all.

We affirm the human right to water, acknowledging that accessible and safe water is not available in many parts of the world. 90% of our freshwater is consumed by agriculture and industry, all the while 1.9 billion people have no access to clean drinking water. We also understand that the concerns of access to water are growing. By 2025, 2/3 of the world will be under water stress. Furthermore, we affirm the 10 Principles of Water Justice from the Ecumenical Water Network. We affirm the need for more Blue Communities and the methods of achieving them.

We realize, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the need for health justice and open health systems. Proper health education from multiple sectors is needed to encourage the best biological, psychological, and social health. These three health areas are inseparable and we can only begin the process of healing when we understand the need to work on them all. There is also a need for a holistic approach to health that incorporates climate concerns, such as the WHO's One Health model. The intersection of health with climate, food, and water is prevalent in the growth of waterborne illnesses, zoonotic diseases, and malnutrition. Healing ourselves and healing the planet are interconnected. We must first begin to heal our planet in order to heal ourselves. Furthermore, the change within ourselves through Metanoia and Repentance will also bring the healing of nature and would bring eco-justice. When the heart is at peace and prayerful, then the human and natural environments are reconciled.

We also mourn the tragedy of greed and recognize that justice cannot be achieved without eradication of greed. Our greedy systems of power continue to enable and empower the agents of climate injustice, food injustice, water injustice, and health injustice. Therefore, we recognize the immediate need for a paradigm shift in order to truly bring justice and healing in all...

Most importantly, we grasp the notion of marginalization among us, especially the global south, as the centuries of imperialism and colonialism still show their destructive power. We, as representatives of the global north, are responsible for the injustices we name. We are also responsible for offering a solution. Our greed for

power has delivered us privilege and wellness on the backs of those we have oppressed and impoverished. The pursuit of justice begins by empowering the disenfranchised among us. Our society should not be judged by the growth of wealth, but by how we treat the outcast and marginalised people.

We recognize that individual change initiatives will never be enough and we must eliminate the systemic injustices which cause the most harm to the environment. The pursuit of justice must be accomplished by advocating alternative ways of development and by setting limits to growth and to profit with the destruction of greed and the fixation on profit. Our collective voices are strong enough to call for common action and change promoting an economy of life and justice.

During our visit to the Holy Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of Chrysopigi on Crete, we learnt that the paradigm of the Monasteries, in which the Monks/Nuns are living frugally by respecting the creation, based on a tradition of centuries, can offer answers to us today, regarding our environmental challenges. The relationship between us -as human beings- and our relationship with nature have to be reconsidered on a spiritual basis. The “Face-to-Face” approach that are reflected in the premises of the Orthodox Academy of Crete, can show us a different way to realize today's ecological questions, as inspired by St. Abba Macarius the Great (295-392 A.D): (*Migne, P.G. 34, 257. Cf. Proverbs of the Fathers, Abba Makarios 38, Athens 1961, p. 70.*)

Call to Action

In light of the above affirmation of our faith and realisation of our current context,

1. We denounce the institutions of power for enabling and empowering the agents of climate change. We denounce the industries for seeking power and profit over justice and wellbeing. Now, more than ever, we condemn our societal inaction and demand everyone to resist injustices in all forms. We call for their participation in the process of healing, reconciliation and justice.
 - a. We therefore call upon our local, regional, national, and international governments to enact policy change for climate, food, water, and health justice.
2. As representatives of the global north, we demand that our countries address these injustices, imposed primarily on the countries of the global south. We demand that our nations use our resources to provide relief to the nations suffering the most from climate injustice. The cancellation of debt, financial support for clean water and food production, and clean energy production is paramount to lifting up these nations. We also mourn the ways our governments have failed to live up to their promises. The inaction in creating the loss and damage fund approved at COP 27 is one example of the lip service provided by our nations. We must create adopt policies to which make a difference in our life. Consequently, it is necessary to practice the policies that we commit to. Words alone cannot heal our broken environment; therefore, it is crucial to put into application what we proclaim about global warming and climate change by sacrificing our own luxuries towards a sustainable planet.
3. We also demand the immediate action of the fossil fuel industries to end oil dependence and create just transition to green energies. We demand that they stop using their money to buy politicians and instead buy green technology for communities in need. We demand that they cease being primary contributors to climate change and begin being primary contributors to climate justice.

4. We appeal to churches, FBOs, universities and cities to become Blue Communities, by respecting human right to water, saying no to privatisation of water and saying no to bottled water. Further we demand for Public-Public-Partnership on water solutions for communities and countries. We ensure that government make drinking water available, accessible, affordable, safe and sufficient for the community. We reject the concept of water for profit, over water for life!
5. We also appeal to our communities of faith, church leaders, organizations, and individuals of good will to pursue justice. We call on them to create and sustain ecumenical and interfaith partnerships in this work and include young people at decision-making tables in the decision making processes. We appeal to our communities to provide justice to those both near and far to our centres of faith. We call for sharing of resources, building of gardens, provision of water, hosting of community meals, and other forms of local justice. We call for action and preparation for the ongoing phenomenon of climate migration and the creation of loss and damage funds to assist in the relief of damage from climate change.
6. We affirm the work of climate advocates, the WCC, Ecclesiastical institutions and affiliates, and call for them to ceaselessly strive to achieve justice. We call for the continued work of international advocacy days, knowing that we cannot bring about justice without speaking truth to power.
7. Finally, we the eco-ambassadors of the Eco-School 2023 call for a response from our institutions of power, our faith communities, and the WCC, to inform us on how they intend to make meaningful change for justice. We will not accept inaction, but instead only the justice defined by radical love for our neighbours and our neighbourhood.

Conclusion

To this end, may the God of life, give us - the Eco Ambassadors of the World Council of Churches, the strength and courage to be prophetic in our words and action in ushering a sustainable people and planet.