



# World Council of Churches

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## General Secretariat

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Geneva, December 19, 2019

To:  
WCC member churches  
WCC central committee members

*“God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good.”—Gen 1:31*

Dear sisters and brothers in the fellowship of Christ’s church,

I write to you today out of urgent and earnest concern for our world and the advancing peril represented by climate change. Our faith in the creator, our love for creation, and our discipleship in the company of Jesus are all being put to the test by this crisis.

In fact, our futures, the well-being of our common home, and the very existence of our species are at risk. The call to our churches and ourselves could not be clearer; and our unity, solidarity, and determination have never been more needed by the world.

Four years after the historic climate accord reached in Paris, we see that nations are failing to keep pace with their commitments, that the dangers and damage of climate change are even worse than we feared, and that the time remaining for us to halt climate damage is less than we hoped.

In this context, I write to urge your creative action, your advocacy, and your prayer before prayer becomes our only recourse. It is almost too late, but we can still make a difference if we act now!

*What have we learned?* In the UN climate talks at the Conference of Parties (COP 25) in Madrid during the first two weeks of December, we learned that 200 nations have failed to respond sufficiently to the growing urgency of the climate crisis. The outcomes were disappointing, with no increased ambitions to address to scale the adaptation, mitigation, and finance that are needed.

We have learned, too, from scientists and policy makers that the gap is widening between the steps taken by governments in response to the climate emergency, on the one hand, and the compelling scientific evidence and moral obligation to act, on the other. The current rate of accelerated global warming is bringing the world closer to an irreversible tipping point. What we do over the next ten years to slow down global warming will determine the very future of our shared and only home—our *oikos*, the planet earth— for thousands of years to come. As the theme of COP 25 announced “time for action is now,” scientific evidence suggests that it may not be too late to avoid or limit some of the worst effects of climate change if we act collectively with responsibility, to save the planet earth for ourselves, our fellow-creatures, and the generations to come.

We also learned in Madrid from the prophetic calls from youth, from Indigenous Peoples, and from climate victims to protect the earth. We listened to the strong voices of young people, including in the “Fridays for Future” actions, in response to the climate crisis. Indigenous Peoples, who are on the frontline of climate impacts, espoused alternative lifestyles and ways of living

gently with the planet, raising their voices in defence of land, forests, and waters. Their prophetic calls were ignored. Rather, many leaders vilified them, and some of their leaders were publicly taunted and humiliated. We know better: Creation is a gift of God for us to care for and to share. The world is accountable to young people and the vulnerable people in the world, and it is morally inadmissible to look the other way.

*What are we to do?* I remind you of the recent, all-too-salient statement of our executive committee on what is needed from us:

The time for debate and disputation of established scientific facts is long over. The time for action is swiftly passing. We will all be held to account for our inaction and our disastrous stewardship of this precious and unique planet. The climate emergency is the result of our ecological sins. It is time for *metanoia* for all. We must now search our hearts and our most fundamental faith principles for a new ecological transformation, and for divine guidance for our next steps to build resilience in the face of this unprecedented millennial challenge.

As churches in fellowship, let us redouble our efforts to make a meaningful contribution in our own contexts to averting the most catastrophic consequences of further inaction and negative actions by governments. Let us join in confronting this global crisis through concerted advocacy for climate change mitigation and adaptation, zero fossil fuel use, and a “just transition.”

As ecclesial actors in the public sphere, let us press relentlessly for public officials and governments and business to keep faith with the people and their future. Let us advocate with our national governments to pursue the goals for addressing climate losses and damages, in mobilizing sufficient and additional finances, and in radically reducing emissions to keep global warming to 1.5 C.

Leaders in business and government, we need you to step up to your role to serve in an accountable manner. Particularly leaders of wealthy nations, who have historically been responsible for the carbon emission, as well as the new and emerging carbon emitters, need to pave the way to provide financial support in solidarity with the vulnerable communities around the world facing the loss and damage due to climate change. Countries that produce fossil fuel must develop plans for downscaling this pillar of their economy and proactively change their focus to global sustainability and renewable energy, as many in the business world already do.

Nations and international agencies, we also need you to step outside your transient comfort zones, to transform policies, take responsibility, and act against the unbridled consumption pattern that is destroying our planet. Sea level rise, greenhouse gases, hurricanes, cyclones, and droughts cannot be stopped at national borders. Destruction of forests, wiping out of ecosystems, and dispossession and displacement of Indigenous Peoples—these sap the very life out of our one living planet.

As individual Christians in local communities, let us pray for our planet and each other, critically interrogating our own lifestyles and economies to discern what is most needed in our families, communities, and local contexts and then committing with others to addressing them head-on.

As people of faith and goodwill, let us unite across religious traditions and divides to nurture and protect creation for all living creatures today and for generations to come.

In Jesus' incarnation, celebrated during this Christmas season, "when angels bend to touch the earth," we rejoice in God's resounding yes to earthly life and human flourishing. Neither our faith nor our situation allows us to tone down our aspirations for resolute action to counter climate change or to lose hope. Faith in the God of life, indomitable hope in God's promise of a new earth, and love moving us to creative commitment are our greatest contributions as Christians and Christian churches to securing the lives and futures of the whole human family. Let us rise to this greatest challenge, uniting to protect creation and God's creatures today and for coming generations.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Olav Fykse Tveit". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit  
General Secretary

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/executive-committee/bossey-november-2019/statement-on-the-climate-change-emergency>

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/interfaith-dialogue-prior-to-cop25-calls-for-unity-action-to-confront-climate-crisis>