

CLAI Consultation on Climate Justice

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5 September 2015

Climate justice now! Changes in climate can only be addressed properly and in a fair and sustainable way that really makes a difference if there exists a proper dynamic between the care for the environment and provision for social justice.

Neither in the global North nor in the global South is it possible to choose one of these perspectives only. Neither in the North nor in the South can the challenges for the globe and humanity be seen primarily from only one of these perspectives.

As a global fellowship, present in the North and South, East and West, the WCC has as one of its first responsibilities and privileges to really speak to these issues from the standpoint of ordinary people who suffer from climate change or from unfair ways it is addressed. Those who have contributed least to climate change may have the highest cost to pay, losing their livelihoods, access to food, water, security for their children. This is probably the greatest threat to basic human rights in the decades to come.

Exactly a year ago, at an interfaith summit organized by the World Council of Churches in New York around the UN SG summit in September, one of the signatories of the statement, Rev. Tafue Lusama, general secretary of the Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu, said: "Climate change for us is a matter of life or death."

He speaks on behalf of his people. But actually, he speaks on behalf of all of us. Climate change reminds us of what we already believed in our different religions, looking at the world as "creation," making us accountable for how we steward it. We are together in this blue planet as one humanity. Our actions have a positive or negative impact on the basic conditions for life of others - of all.

The example of Tuvalu, a small country we may have not heard of before, should not be seen as an "exotic" and far away reality. To be one humanity, to act as one, to effectively express our togetherness, we need to be sensitive to what the most vulnerable communities are experiencing. That is the test of what it means to be one humanity.

Climate change is indeed already affecting communities in many vulnerable countries in the world. During my visits to WCC member churches in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, as well as in countries close to the Arctic, and this last week in various countries in Latin America, I have realized that for many communities climate change is a terrible threat and a present reality.

They are suffering some of its consequences: the increase in frequency and intensity of tropical storms, the change in rainfall patterns, droughts and floods, and changing temperatures, the rise of sea level and salinization of fresh water, which have direct impact on their livelihoods, safety, rights and sovereignty.

In our Christian understanding, shared by other religions, climate change, environmental destruction, depletion of natural resources, are basic issues of justice and of our faith in God creating all of us to live together.

As the 2014 interfaith climate statement reads: "We recognize that these effects disproportionately affect the lives, livelihoods and rights of poorer, marginalized and therefore most vulnerable populations, including indigenous peoples. When those who have done the least to cause climate change are the ones hardest hit, it becomes an issue of injustice. Equitable solutions are urgently needed."

Human rights should be strongly emphasized at the international legal treaty that needs to be adopted in Paris at COP21. And they should also be strengthened in national legal frameworks to build more just societies.

The scientific consensus on human-induced climate change has been clearly expressed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report. We know enough. Now it is a matter of what we do.

This moral call has been expressed by various religious leaders over the decades. Pope Francis delivered an Encyclical, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, which reaffirms what the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and other ecumenical leaders have said for decades.

Pope Francis more recently called Catholics to celebrate a World Day of Prayer for Creation on September 1, a practice the WCC has encouraged for years.

In the World Council of Churches we have been addressing specifically climate change since the late 1980s, linking it to environment, economic justice and peace issues, because climate change has, of course, environmental, political and economic dimensions.

It also has ethical and spiritual dimensions. We cannot have an isolated and narrow understanding of climate change. We need to address the climate crisis from all these perspectives at the same time in order to be able to handle this as one humanity.

If we know, as we do, that our action has an impact on the environment, we must also believe that our action can have a positive effect. Acknowledging the climate crisis should not paralyze us but push us to change. We who live in rich countries need to change our lifestyle patterns. Those in vulnerable countries should have the

means to build resilience and to adapt. We know individual change is not enough. The change should be at the community and national levels.

But even at the latter, “we share the conviction that the threats of climate change cannot be curbed effectively by a single State alone but only by the enhanced co-operation of the community of States, based on principles of mutual trust, fairness and equity, precaution, intergenerational justice and common but differentiated responsibilities and capabilities” (Interfaith climate summit statement, 2014).

Thus, the international legal framework is of utmost importance. But as Pope Francis recalled in the encyclical, steps taken through the process of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change have not been sufficient to respond effectively to the victims of climate change. When we are less than three months from the beginning of COP21 in Paris, we are still very far from an agreement that is:

- ambitious enough to keep temperature from rising well below 2° Celsius;
- fair enough to distribute the burden in an equitable way; and
- legally binding enough to guarantee that effective national climate policies to curb emissions are well funded and fully implemented,” as faith leaders expressed in New York.

As a fellowship of churches, we listen to and echo the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth due to climate change. Furthermore, as communities of faith we believe things can change.

When we are able to share the experiences of vulnerable communities, we are astonished by their solidarity, their resilience and their joy. They show us how we all are dependent on our wholeness and togetherness. Let us as one humanity defend the rights of the most vulnerable. Let us as one humanity struggle for peace with the earth and for climate justice.

The last WCC Assembly, held in Busan, Republic of Korea, in 2013, called Christians and people of good will to join a pilgrimage of justice and peace. Climate justice and peace with the earth are core components of this pilgrimage.

This year Christians and people of other faiths are pilgriming, especially in Europe and Africa, for climate justice.

I hope this seminar here in Colombia will be a stimulus to all of you, to Colombian churches, to CLAI, to join the pilgrimage of justice and peace. As human beings we are all pilgrims in our lives, searching for meaning, for change, for hope. Our faith convictions express and nurture the hope for the future, for the next generations, for one earth and for one humanity.