

Cardinal Turkson addresses UN on Climate Change

The United Nations hosted a high-level meeting on climate change in New York in June, and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon opened the event by saying Governments must accelerate their efforts to reach a universal climate agreement in France next December.

*The President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Peter Turkson, conveyed the greetings and encouragement of Pope Francis, and drew attention to the new Papal encyclical on ecology, *Laudato Si'*.*

“Your Excellencies President of the United Nations General Assembly and Secretary-General of the United Nations, distinguished Moderators and Speakers, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my great honour to convey Pope Francis’ greeting of affection and encouragement to this extraordinary gathering and to the nations and people whom you represent. May today’s “forthright and honest debate” (*Laudato si'* 16) bear fruit in the important decisions which await the world community.

The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro proclaimed that “human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development”[1] (167). Over two decades later, Pope Francis’s Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* insists that the plight of “the poor and the fragility of the planet” are intimately related, and so encourages the world’s governments to embrace integral ecology as the necessary approach to such development, inclusive of all and protective of the earth.

Through its Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the United Nations has availed itself of the best scientific research available. We need to allow such scientific conclusions to “touch us deeply” (15) so that we see and hear how the poor suffer and how the earth is being mistreated.

Allow me to state the argument as the Holy Father presents it in *Laudato si'*:

“Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. Sadly, there is widespread indifference to such suffering, which is even now taking place throughout our world. Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of

that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded” (25).

“The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all...” (23) But “If present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us” (24). Prudence and precaution must prevail (186) and humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption (23).

In *Laudato si'*, the Holy Father gives many examples, at different levels, of what can be done to “to reverse the trend of global warming” (168, 175) and “to reduce some of the negative impacts of climate change” (26).

Facing us all – as leaders and representatives of the world’s nations, as adults today and in the name of our children and their children – is the “urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced” (26). “The use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas – needs to be progressively replaced without delay” with intelligent and widespread access to and use of renewable sources of energy, facilitating this energy transition (165).

Overcoming poverty and reducing environmental degradation will require the human community seriously to review the dominant model of development, production, commerce and consumption. Yet the single biggest challenge is not scientific or even technological, but rather within our minds and hearts. “The same mindset which stands in the way of making radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty. A more responsible overall approach is needed to deal with both problems: the reduction of pollution and the development of poorer countries and regions.” (175)

Such a courageous review and reform will take place only if we heed “the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress” (16). The political dimension needs to re-establish democratic control over the economy and finance, that is, over the basic choices made by human societies. This, Ladies and Gentlemen, is the path we are on, the one which leads to Paris and beyond.

Thank you very much.