

CHURCH RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN ASIA; TOWARDS A NEW CREATION

FINAL STATEMENT

*Assumption University
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Introduction

Representing various Bishops' Conferences in Asia, their Episcopal Commissions for Justice, Peace, Human development and Caritas, and the Central Secretariat and Offices of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), we [55 participants from 16 Episcopal Conferences and 2 Associate Members – 14 Lay Persons, 4 Sisters, 14 Priests, 21 Bishops and 2 Cardinals] have come together to participate in a very significant seminar in Bangkok, 19-20 October 2011. Assisted by international experts, we sharpened our knowledge and shared our experiences on the theme: "Climate Change and its Impact on Asia - Challenges and the Response of the Church in Asia." We thank the German Catholic Bishops' Organization for Development Cooperation (MISEREOR) for making the seminar possible.

With the greatest concern for the peoples of Asia and for future generations, we have committed ourselves to help defend and promote the integrity of God's creation in Asia.

A. THE PASTORAL SITUATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Our continent of Asia is God's gift for all. It is incredibly rich in people, in ancient cultures, religious and philosophical traditions. It is here where Jesus our Lord was born, where he lived, proclaimed the Reign of God and went about doing good.

But tragically ours is a continent of massive poverty, where the few enjoy great progress and prosperity while the many suffer in abject deprivation. And it is the poor and the needy who suffer most from the consequences of climate change.

We are experiencing dramatic changes of season, extreme changes of weather, more frequently recurring and stronger typhoons, destructive flooding, drying up of whole areas, decrease in food production, the spread of climate-change related diseases. We have reports of glacial melting in the Himalayas, of threats to life because of floods in low-lying river basins, even the loss of small islands because of rising sea levels. All these will surely and drastically worsen the lives of the poor. Recurring emergency situations, displacement of populations, increasing number of environmental refugees, the widening scandalous gap between rich and poor, and

increasing conflicts regarding resource allocation can lead to grave social, political and economic instabilities.

The mode of production and the ideologies of development that industrial countries have implemented have substantively contributed, many experts say, to global warming and climate change. Yet tragically the mode of production that is a substantial reason for climate change is extended to Asia by the corruptive collusion between local and international developers. They pillage Asia's virgin forests and operate destructive extractive industries such as various forms of large-scale mining for the sake of short term economic gains while sacrificing the common good of all.

In this continent of contradictions, of richness and deprivation, our demand is for just human living conditions for all of the peoples of Asia and for the survival of species. It is likewise a demand for justice for generations not yet born. This requires the living of solidarity and a fundamental orientation to the common good.

B. FAITH-REFLECTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

As Church we are deeply concerned for victims and for those who cause their suffering, present and future, of the dire consequences of climate change. For from the optic of faith we see the moral and religious dimensions of this pastoral situation in Asia.

Creation, Sinfulness and Broken Harmony

We believe that at the beginning God created a world of harmony and beauty (Gen.1:1-31). But sinfulness in the form of human pride, selfishness and greed disrupted this harmony (see Gen. 3:1-7; 4:1-16; 6:5-8; 11:1-9). Relationships between humanity, the world, and God were broken. It was God's plan that at the fullness of time he would restore that pristine harmony and peace that had been there at the beginning.

Jesus, the Reign of God, Healing Brokenness Due to Sin

That appointed time finally came. God sent his Divine Son Jesus to be born of a humble virgin, named Mary (Lk. 2:1-7) It was his mission to heal all broken relationships that are the fruits of sin. He proclaimed the Reign of God (Mk. 1:15) and the wholeness and fullness of life that he came to give (Jn 10:10). The power of God's Reign showed itself in the new relationships and fellowship that Jesus established, with the outcasts of society, the poor and marginalized, the sick -- everyone who needed the compassion of God.

He reminded people of the original harmony and beauty of natural creation by explaining the Reign of God in terms of seeds, vineyards and trees, soil, birds of the sky, lilies of the field, fish, sheep and other animals, signs in the sky, darkness and light (e.g. Lk. 8:4-8; Mt. 13:31-32; Lk8:22-29; Mt. 13:24-30). In all these Jesus demonstrated His and his Father's love and providence for nature and humanity

The Cross, Reconciliation, Justice and Peace

The ultimate act of Jesus to fulfill God's plan was his Passion, Death and Resurrection, the definitive event of salvation and reconciliation by which He drew everything to himself. The glorious Cross is the power and the wisdom of God

achieving the reconciliation of total humanity and the whole of the cosmos with God. The extraordinary suffering and death of Jesus remind us of the words of Paul telling us of the groaning of creation while awaiting redemption and reconciliation in Jesus (Rom. 8:19-22).

Jesus and the New Creation

But God reveals to us even more in our Sacred Scriptures -- an even more stupendous and profound mystery. This Jesus who dies in powerlessness and ignominy is the eternal Word of God. From all eternity He is God (Jn. 1:1-2), the only begotten Son of God who in the appointed time was born in the flesh to dwell among us (Jn. 1:14). He is the divine and supreme sovereign of all, through whom and by whom every created being exists (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:15-19), to whom the whole cosmos is restored and by whose Spirit it is renewed. Seas and skies, rain and sunshine, seasons and climates belong to him.

By the Cross he has made all things new. A creation that was groaning in travail has become a new creation through His blood (2 Cor. 5:17-21). Jesus is our peace, the peace and harmony of the world. He has restored justice and reconciled all things to himself (Col. 1:20).

It is in this understanding of creation, redemption and human history illumined by our faith in Jesus the Lord and Savior that we discern the deeper dimensions of climate change, the sinfulness from which it originates, the religious and ethical dimensions that it involves and the grave threat that it poses to all humanity.

C. PASTORAL IMPERATIVES

Hence we believe that all the peoples of Asia, regardless of culture, religious or philosophical belief and economic status has the mission to defend and promote the integrity of creation. And we as Church stand for global climate justice today and for future generations with preferential option for the poor.

A fundamental task of the Church in Asia is to call for radical conversion, promote an alternative lifestyle, a new culture of respect for nature, of simplicity and sobriety, of hope and joy. Guided by her social teachings as principles and directives of action the Church has to promote technologies with much less gas emissions that damage the environment, promote organic and eco-friendly production, responsible consumption and recycling, thus contributing to intergenerational justice.

Urgent Appeals

In the light of the above we collectively:

Appeal to the FABC to establish an agency/desk on climate protection whose tasks would include:

- Doing theological reflection on the mystery and truth of God's creation, on our moral and ethical responsibility with regard to the environment;
- Promoting initiatives at the FABC level and assisting the initiatives of local churches for climate protection;

- Establishing practical and effective linkage with SECAM, CELAM, FCBCO, the US and Canadian Bishops' Conferences, and the CCEE as well as with UN conferences in order to address the global challenge of climate change.

Further we:

- Appeal to Bishops' Conferences in Asia to develop action plans or intensify programs against climate change;
- Appeal to the FABC to hold in 2013 a second seminar on climate change in order to evaluate the steps already taken by then as well as to define the FABC commitment for the future.
- Appeal to all local churches and to everyone to live a lifestyle that is in accord with the principle of faithful stewardship of God's creation such as in the use of transports, the design of church and religious buildings;

We make an urgent:

- Appeal to all who carry political responsibilities to hold climate protection as a core guiding principle in decision decision-making;
- Appeal to all who bear economic responsibilities and to all industrial countries to share with us in Asia the know-how of sustainable technologies for climate protection, mitigation and adaptation as a service for future generations;
- Appeal to all governments to decide in limiting global warming to 1.5 ° C;
- Appeal to all governments for a climate friendly model of development and for a binding enlargement of climate protection commitments on emerging countries;
- Appeal to all governments to lead the Kyoto Protocol to a second commitment period as of 2012 and thereby to preserve the only legally binding instrument of the UN for climate protection.
- Appeal to all industrial countries to acknowledge their historical responsibility for climate change and their obligation to protect the people affected by climate change;
- Appeal for a just, fair and transparent governance of the Green Climate Fund and its programs to ensure the decoupling of growth and development from carbon emissions in developing and fast growing economies;
- Appeal to decision makers at all levels to consider the eco-wisdom of local peoples and the right of people to participate actively.

Finally we propose to the FABC to suggest to the appropriate Church agency the holding of a Synod of Bishops on the theme of Creation and Climate Change. Such a Synod would demonstrate the effective concern that Pope Benedict XVI has declared: "The Church has a responsibility towards creation" (Caritas in Veritate, no. 51).

Conclusion

Our stance is one of courage and hope. Blessed Pope John Paul once famously said: “Look to the future with hope, and set out with renewed vigor to make this new millennium a time of solidarity and peace, of love for life and respect for God’s creation” (Bl. John Paul II, Pilgrimage to Malta, May 8, 2001).

In this task for the world our inspiration and driving force is the mystery and truth of Jesus in his mission of saving, liberating, healing, and reconciling a broken world. In discipleship of Jesus, this mission to restore all things in Christ is for us a gift and task. We cooperate with the Spirit of Jesus who “renews the face of the earth.”

May God the loving Creator bless our efforts for the integrity and renewal of his creation. May Mary the humble Virgin Mother who conceived Jesus the divine reconciler of all creation accompany us in living his gift and continuing his task.

For and on behalf of the seminar participants:

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Archbishop of Cotabato
Secretary General, FABC

Msgr. Josef Sayer
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