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DE IUSTITIA ET PACE

*Caritas Internationalis*  
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## **Human development in a changing environment**

Your Eminences, My Lord Archbishops and Bishops, Distinguished Delegates, my dear Brothers and Sisters, I greet you very warmly in the name of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. As you represent 165 national organizations linked with the Catholic Church, operating in the areas of development, humanitarian and social assistance, in about 200 countries and territories of the world, to address you is to address the Church evangelizing throughout the world. On behalf Justice and Peace working across the courtyard from *Caritas Internationalis*, we join you in praying for a blessed and successful Assembly.

### **A time of epochal change**

Today's topic of climate change and human development opens up some of the most far-reaching changes facing humanity today.

What are the key changes? At a granular level, they are too many and too diverse to even enumerate. But at the highest level, we can take a lead from the stirring Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis called *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which he wrote:

In our time humanity is experiencing a turning-point in its history, as we can see from the advances being made in so many fields. We can only praise the steps being taken to improve people's welfare in areas such as health care, education and communications. At the same time we have to remember that the majority of our contemporaries are barely living from day to day, with dire consequences. A number of diseases are spreading. The hearts of many people are gripped by fear and desperation, even in the so-called rich countries. The joy of living frequently fades, lack of respect for others and violence are on the rise, and inequality is increasingly evident. It is a struggle to live and, often, to live

with precious little dignity. This epochal change has been set in motion by the enormous qualitative, quantitative, rapid and cumulative advances occurring in the sciences and in technology, and by their instant application in different areas of nature and of life. We are in an age of knowledge and information, which has led to new and often anonymous kinds of power. (§52)

Although the problems we face are striking, even frightening, we do appreciate and affirm the great achievements of the last two centuries. Remarkable scientific, technological and economic progress has made it possible for significant numbers to enjoy lifespans, livelihoods and lifestyles that were unimaginable for our ancestors. The last few decades have witnessed hundreds of millions lifted out of extreme poverty along with accelerated travel, transportation and communications.

But this progress has its dark sides and unacceptable costs. Despite the generation of great wealth, we find starkly rising disparities – vast numbers of people excluded and discarded, their dignity trampled upon. As global society increasingly defines itself by consumerist and monetary values, the privileged in turn become increasingly numb to the cries of the poor.

At least three billion of the seven billion inhabitants of the planet are mired in poverty, a third of them in extreme poverty, while a privileged global elite of about one billion people control the bulk of the wealth and consumes the bulk of resources. Consider the consequences in one sector: food. Today the world produces more than enough food to feed its 7.3 billion inhabitants, but over 800 million (more than 11%) go hungry, while the FAO estimates that, each year, approximately one-third of all food produced for human consumption in the world is lost or wasted.<sup>1</sup> Your international campaign “One Human Family: Food for All” seeks to address this crucial challenge.

We are all aware of both the marvels of human advance and the huge deficiencies of our world: deficiencies of ever-growing poverty and inequality, of hunger in the midst of plenty. And, beyond all shame, many of our fellow men, women and children are treated as mere instruments of labour, of profit or of pleasure, especially through human trafficking and modern forms of slavery.

Pope Francis rightly deplores all this: the “throwaway culture”, the new forms of slavery, and the “globalization of indifference”. They are poisonous. They thwart human purpose, choke human potential, and affront human dignity.

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<sup>1</sup> FAO, *Food wastage footprint, Impacts on natural resources. Summary report*, 2013, p. 6.

Indifference, abusive treatment and the throwaway approach also apply to how we treat the natural world, the planet Earth, the garden that was given to us as our home.<sup>2</sup>

Human beings are part of nature. From conception to the moment of death, the life of every person is integrated with and sustained by the awesome panoply of natural processes. This calls for a reciprocal response on the part of humanity – to nourish and sustain the earth, the garden, that in turn nourishes and sustains us. Today, the ever-accelerating burning of fossil fuels that powers our economic engine is disrupting the earth's delicate ecological balance on almost-unfathomable scale.

In our recklessness, we are traversing some of the planet's most fundamental natural boundaries. And the lesson from the Garden of Eden still rings true today – pride, hubris, self-centredness always are perilous, indeed destructive. The very technology that has brought great reward is now poised to bring great ruin. Through your work as Caritas Internationalis, many of you know such ruined physical and social landscapes only too well.

Climate-related disasters are a reality both for poor countries and for those at the heart of the modern economy. Consider the devastating droughts from California to Syria to Africa. Consider the increasing prevalence of extreme weather events, which always hit the poor hardest. For example, a typhoon devastated the Philippines in 2013, killing about 6,000 people. In the Philippines, as is the case in many countries worldwide, people in such situations are simply too poor to protect themselves. They are at the mercy of nature's fury.

### **A better balance**

Let me turn now to solutions. We clearly need a fundamental change of course, to protect the earth and its people – which, in turn, will allow us to “dignify humanity”.

Everything stems from the essential principle that we are made in the image and likeness of God, and thus possessing an innate dignity that can never be denied, degraded, or denigrated. That means treating every single person as a brother or a sister – with a relationship based on respect, reconciliation, and solidarity.

It also means recognizing that everything that God has created is good, precious, and valuable – and that, in order to provide for our needs, God has given this planet as a gift to all of us. Thus, the correct response to receiving such a magnificent gift is surely one of gratitude, love and respect.

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<sup>2</sup> Nearly twenty years ago the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew stated in the strongest of terms: “It follows that, to commit a crime against the natural world, is a sin. For humans to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation... for humans to degrade the integrity of Earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the Earth of its natural forests, or destroying its wetlands... for humans to injure other humans with disease... for humans to contaminate the Earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life, with poisonous substances... these are sins.” Speech at the Environmental Symposium, Santa Barbara, U.S.A., 8.11.1997.

According to the Book of Genesis, God the Creator charged us *to till* the earth and *to keep* it (Gn 2:15). These balanced concepts of “tilling” and “keeping” imply a vital and reciprocal relationship between humanity and the created world. Every person and every community has a sacred duty to draw prudently, respectfully and gratefully from the goodness of the earth, and to care for it in a way that assures its continued fruitfulness for generations to come. Those who till and keep the land also have a great responsibility to share its fruits with others – especially the poor, the dispossessed, the stranger, and the forgotten. Scripture is unequivocal about this – the gift of the land is a gift for all. The global atmosphere, the oceans, the forests, and other natural resources are common goods of mankind. Like others, Pope Francis has asserted that the earth is not just a legacy from our parents, but also a loan from our children, so we must protect and care for it with great tenderness and with a keen sense of inter-generational solidarity. At the same time, the prophet Isaiah brilliantly links the environmental degradation with human behaviour: “The earth languishes for the sins of man.”<sup>3</sup>

To till and to keep does not prohibit humanity from making use of the earth’s gifts. But at the same time, the current economic-developmental model is out of balance. It is blatantly clear that we have “tilled too much” and “kept too little”. Our relationship with the Creator; with our neighbours, especially the poor; and with the environment has become fundamentally “unkept”. We must move away from this mode of behaviour, and instead become more protective, more “keeping”. As UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon put it: “We have a profound responsibility to the fragile web of life on this earth, and to this generation and those that will follow.”<sup>4</sup>

In practical terms, we need innovative and sustainable technological and economic solutions, as well as brave and determined political leadership exercised at various levels including the global one.<sup>5</sup> We need to shift away from an unthinking infatuation with GDP and a single-minded zeal for accumulation. We need to learn to work together toward sustainable development, in a framework that links economic prosperity with both social inclusion and protection of the natural world.

We need the community of nations to embrace this concept of “sustainable development”. In this great quest, 2015 is a defining year. Three major conferences – on financing development in Addis Ababa in July, on Sustainable Development Goals in New York in September, and on climate change in Paris at the end of November – must come to grips with the problems and agree on proportionate remedies.

### **A grounding in morality**

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Isaiah, ch. 24.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.pas.va/content/dam/accademia/pdf/protect/bankimoon.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> In a different but related context, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace reflected deeply on the global financial crisis, cf. *Towards reforming the international financial and monetary systems in the context of global public authority*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011.

Let me finally turn to moral foundations, guidelines and criteria. In a current article, the American macroeconomist Jeffrey Sachs traces the origins of “the paradox of the poverty of the spirit in the rising sea of affluence.” The approach of Pope Francis, he says, holds out great hope because “He is not speaking the language of duties and responsibilities but of human meaning. He is ... saying that dignity is found not only through individual rights and free markets but from within, by each person pursuing the virtues of charity, justice and compassion in solidarity with the common good. This, after all, is the message of hope that brought the multitudes to hear Jesus preach.”<sup>6</sup>

Without moral conversion and change of hearts, even good regulations, policies, and targets in the world are unlikely to prove effective. Without this ethical foundation, humanity will lack the courage, the moral substance, to carry out even the most sensible policy proposals.

This is an all-embracing moral imperative: to protect<sup>7</sup> and care both for creation, our garden home, and for the human person who dwells therein – and to take action to achieve this. If the dominant, pervasive ethos is one of selfishness and individualism, sustainable development will not come about. Progress towards sustainability, in fact, requires a fundamental openness to relationship or, in other words, to justice and responsibility, opening up new avenues of solidarity.

Citizens of wealthier countries must stand shoulder to shoulder with the poor, both at home and overseas. They have a special obligation to help their brothers and sisters in developing countries to cope with climate change by mitigating its effects and by assisting with adaptation. We know that climate change can be devastating for health, especially among the world's poorest people. Healthcare is foundational to integral human development and human flourishing.

A simple analogy might help to clarify the challenge of solidarity. Imagine ten people walking in a vast desert. Two of the ten people have already drunk half of the group’s combined supply of water. The other eight are growing weak from thirst. And there is no more water in sight. In such a desperate situation, the two who have drunk their fill have a moral duty to scout ahead to find an oasis. When they find it, they have a moral duty to guide the rest of the group there and to make sure that no life is lost.

As this suggests, the wealthiest countries, the ones which have benefitted most from fossil fuels, are morally obligated to push forward and find solutions to climate-related change and so protect the environment and human life. They are obliged both to reduce their own carbon emissions and to help protect poorer countries from the disasters caused or exacerbated by the excesses of industrialization.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://americamagazine.org/issue/call-virtue>

<sup>7</sup> At his inaugural Mass as Pontiff on March 19, 2013, Pope Francis evoked the figure of Saint Joseph (whose feast day it was) as protector of his family and as inspiration for the manifold obligations of protection required of all in today’s world; <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-homily-for-inaugural-mass-of-petrine-ministry>

This moral obligation extends to all – political leaders, corporate leaders, civil society, and ordinary people too. Corporations and financial investors must learn to put long-term sustainability over short-term profit, and to recognize that the financial bottom line is secondary to, and at the service of, the common good. And every single person of good will is summoned by an inner call to embrace the personal virtues that ground sustainable development. The most important of these is an enfolding charity that radiates outwards from the self to others, from those alive today to those not yet born. In the striking words of Ban Ki-moon: “We are the first generation that can end poverty, and the last generation that can avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Future generations will judge us harshly if we fail to uphold our moral and historical responsibilities”. We must not be thrown off course by false dichotomies; “Let the world know that there is no divide whatsoever between religion and science on the issue of climate change”.<sup>8</sup> The opposition arises where vested interests wish to maintain their wealth and leave all sacrifice to others.

We need, therefore, to cultivate a new set of values and virtues – including *conservation* of the environment, *compassion* for the excluded, *courage* to take bold decisions, and a *commitment* to work together in common purpose for the global common good. We need a full conversion of hearts and minds, habits and lifestyles, structures and institutions.

## **Conclusion**

Let me end by looking back and looking ahead. The Church is not an expert on science, technology, or economics. We rely on good and competent people in every field for that. But the Church is an "expert in humanity" – on the true calling of the human person to act with justice and charity. It is for this reason that the Church reads the "signs of the times" at key moments in history.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Church expressed deep concern for injustices that arose from industrialization, with a vast chasm emerging between the privileged few and the struggling masses.

In the latter half of the last century, she turned her attention to the thorny challenge of global development, and to the grave threat posed by the accumulation of nuclear weapons during the Cold War.

Now the Church must speak forcefully on the great challenges of our time – the challenges of sustainable development and of human flourishing within a natural environment that is at ever greater risk.

This September, Pope Francis will address the United Nations on the sustainable development goals. Fifty years earlier, Blessed Pope Paul VI spoke to the same General Assembly about

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

problems that were different from those of the present day. However, the overall orientation of the Church remains consistent.

Blessed Paul VI concluded his address with these words: "The edifice you are building does not rest on purely material and terrestrial foundations, for in that case it would be a house built on sand. It rests most of all upon consciences. Yes, the time has come for 'conversion,' for personal transformation, for interior renewal."

This Pontiff went on to say: "The appeal to the moral conscience of man has never before been as necessary as it is today, in an age marked by such great human progress. For the danger comes neither from progress nor from science; if these are used well they can, on the contrary, help to solve a great number of the serious problems besetting mankind. The real danger comes from man, who has at his disposal ever more powerful instruments that are as well fitted to bring about ruin as they are to achieve lofty conquests."

In the light of Blessed Paul VI's stirring appeal "to the moral conscience of man," let us adopt the primary virtues of *stewardship* and *solidarity*. Without stewardship, the Earth will be less and less habitable. Without solidarity, greed will wreak ever greater havoc. But with stewardship and solidarity, we are sure to generate greater *sustainability* and greater *security*. We can ever more realistically count on a hospitable planet that provides a nurturing home for every man, woman, and child in every country and in every generation.

To get there, we need that same conversion, that same personal transformation, that same renewal that Blessed Paul VI talked about a half century ago and that Pope Francis encourages so insistently.

May God bless and help the Church, all believers, all people of good will, to join together in taking up the challenges.

Thank you very much.

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson

President, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace