

# Religions for Climate Justice

International Interfaith  
Statements 2008-2014

# **Religions for Climate Justice**

**International Interfaith  
Statements 2008-2014**

Globethics.net Texts

Series Editor: Christoph Stückelberger. Founder and Executive Director of Globethics.net and Professor of Ethics, University of Basel.

www.globethics.net. Contact: stueckelberger@globethics.net.

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## PREFACE

The UN Climate Summit 2014 called by the UN Secretary General took place on 23 September in New York, USA. Immediately before the Summit, the *Interfaith Summit on Climate Change* is being held from 21 to 22 September 2014 in the same town. More than thirty religious and spiritual leaders from across the world will gather in support of a just climate treaty and of the new measures taken by nations, regions and cultures that will be necessary to support the treaty and protect the most vulnerable human and non-human beings. A declaration on “Climate, Faith and Hope”, the draft of which is included among the texts (chapter 9), will be adopted.

Religious and faith communities on all continents have been committed to life and climate justice for many years. This common threat to humanity lead to clear interfaith calls to politicians to act more courageously. Christian churches and other religions have been actively engaged in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and at the annual Conference of Parties (COP) negotiations since the late 1980’s.

In this publication, nine international and interfaith statements issued from 2008 to September 2014 are brought together in one volume. They are mainly statements addressed to the annual COPs. May they inspire and encourage believers from all faiths, as well as politicians and professionals from all sectors of society and on all continents. Let us stand up against resignation and fatalism. Let us act together for human and non-human life on this planet, inspired and encouraged by faith and hope.

Geneva, 1 September 2014

*Prof. Dr. Christoph Stückelberger*  
*Executive Director and Founder Globethics.net*



**THE UPPSALA INTERFAITH  
CLIMATE MANIFESTO  
(2008)**

*Religious leaders and teachers from the whole world agreed in Uppsala, Sweden, in 2008 on the following manifesto, as a call in preparation of the Copenhagen Agreement of COP 15 on 18 December 2009. Buddhists, Hindu, Daoists, Sikh, Jewish, Christians, Muslims and First Nations representatives signed the manifesto.*

As religious leaders and teachers from the whole world, gathered in Uppsala 2008, we call for effective leadership and action in view of the global threat to the climate. From religious traditions, with different approaches to religious life, we come together at this time in human history to assure the world of what we have in common. We all share the responsibility of being conscious caretakers of our home, planet Earth. We have reflected on the concerns of scientists and political leaders regarding the alarming climate crisis. We share their concerns.

The world religions are a source of empowerment for change in lifestyles and patterns of consumption. Religious faith remains a powerful force for good among a considerable number of the human family. We undertake this mission in a spirit of responsibility and faith.

## **From wonder to change**

With a sense of wonder we look at life on planet Earth. It is a miracle and a gift! Clear nights with the sky full of stars fill us with awe. It reminds us of our role in the universe. We have many reasons to be humble. Meditating on the sea shore, in the desert or in the forest allows us to feel one with the universe, yet we are so small. Faith traditions with diverse cultures and backgrounds converge to express wonder and awe at the gift of life. In the history of the Earth, the climate has always varied. However, we are very concerned about the huge human impact on the Earth's very complex and sensitive climate system. Today humanity constitutes a major force which changes the preconditions of life and welfare for most creatures on the planet. We know enough to realize that we need to act now in the interest of future generations. The situation is critical. Glaziers and the permafrost are melting. Devastating drought and flooding strike people and ecosystems, especially in the South.

Can planet Earth be healed? We are convinced that the answer is yes. Major transformations in understanding human life, lifestyles and work modes, economy, trade and technology are needed. Ethics and values are intrinsic to the development of new institutional structures and architectures of politics and finance. In the religious realm long-sightedness has always been important. More than ever before the world now needs extraordinary, long-sighted political leadership.

## **Our appeals to the Copenhagen process**

For the Earth, salvation is about more than new technology and green economy. Salvation is about the inner life of human beings. Life without hope is detrimental to human existence. The peoples of this beautiful precious planet need to dialogue about what it means to live together, with global empathy in a global village. Religions can contribute to this in a decisive way.

As people from world religions, we urge governments and international organisations to prepare and agree upon a comprehensive climate strategy for the Copenhagen Agreement. This strategy must be ambitious enough to keep climate change below 2° Celsius, and to distribute the burden in an equitable way in accordance with the principles of common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities. Greenhouse Development Rights offers one concrete model of such burden sharing. We urge all actors concerned to find politically acceptable tools to realize this.

The Copenhagen Agreement must counteract misuse of land, of forests, and of farmland, using creative incentives for landowners, users and indigenous communities to manage growing forests as carbon sinks.

### **We ask the global political leadership for ...**

- Rapid and large emission cuts in the rich world. Developed countries, especially those in Europe and North America, must lead the way. In the developed countries emissions should be reduced by at least 40 per cent by 2020 and 90 per cent by 2050 against 1990 levels.
- Binding cuts for the rich world on top of their domestic obligations. According to the principles of responsibility and capability countries should pay for international cuts in addition to their own domestic initiatives. These payments should be obligatory, rather than voluntary.
- Measurable, verifiable and reportable mitigation actions by developing countries, especially countries with fast growing economies.
- Massive transfers and sharing of important technology. All countries must encourage and facilitate the sharing of technology that is intrinsically important to reducing emissions. Developing countries must have viable and technologically responsible opportunities to provide for their populations.

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- Economic incentives for developing countries to foster cleaner development on a national scale.
- Adaptation to climate change. According to the same principles of responsibility and capability, countries must ensure that poor and vulnerable communities are empowered and supported. Adaptation to climate change must not fail for want of money or other resources.

### **Humility, responsibility – and hope!**

We urge political and religious leaders to bear responsibility for the future of our planet and the living conditions and habitat preservation of new generations, assured in this of support and cooperation from the faith traditions of the world. The climate crisis is a fundamental spiritual question for the survival of humanity on planet Earth. At the same time, we know that the world has never before been more capable of creating sustainable development. Humanity possesses the knowledge and technology. Popular commitment to doing what can and must be done is growing.

We are challenged to review the values, philosophies, beliefs and moral concepts which have shaped and driven our behaviours and informed our dysfunctional relationship with our natural environment.

We commit ourselves to taking and sharing responsibility for providing moral leadership within our various faith traditions and for others who so desire. We call upon all who have influence over the shaping of both intellect and spirit, to commit themselves to a profound reorientation of humanity's self-understanding and of the world, whereby we acknowledge our estrangement and henceforth strive to live in harmony with Nature and one another.

We offer the gift of our various faiths as a source of empowerment for developing sustainable) lifestyles and patterns of consumption. We

undertake this mission in a spirit of humility, responsibility, faith and urgency.

Now is the time to mobilise people and nations.

**As people of different faiths, we make these commitments:**

- To inform and inspire people in our own religious and cultural contexts to take responsibility for and to implement effective measures
- To challenge political and business leaders where we live and work to develop comprehensive strategies and action
- To focus on the struggle against global warming and draw upon our innermost religious convictions about the meaning of life. This commitment is a deeply spiritual question concerning justice, peace and hopes for a future in love and solidarity with all human beings and the whole of creation.

As religious leaders and teachers, we want to counteract a culture of fear with a culture of hope. We want to face the climate challenge with defiant optimism to highlight the core principles of all major sacred traditions of the world: justice, solidarity and compassion. We want to encourage the best science and political leadership. We commit our communities to fostering a spirit of joy and hope in relation to the greatest gift given to us all – the gift of life!

*Signatures:*

*Ms Charanjit AjitSingh, Sikh, Great Britain; Father Dr John T. Brinkman, M.M., Christian, Japan; The Revd Dr John Chryssavgis, Christian, USA; Prof. Larbi Djeradi, Muslim, Algeria; Dr Xiaoxin He, Daoist, China; The Very Revd Leonid Kishkovsky, Christian, USA; Prof. J. N. K. Mugambi, Christian, Kenya; Prof. Rosemary Radford Ruether, Christian, USA; The Rt Revd Thomas Samuel, Christian, India; The Ven. Bhikku Khy Sovanratana, Buddhist, Cambodia; Prof. Parichart Su-*

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*wanbubbha, Buddhist, Thailand; The Revd Sally Bingham, Christian, USA; The Rt Revd and Rt Hon Richard Chartres, Christian, Great Britain; Dr Mawil Izzie Dien, Muslim, Great Britain; Sheikha Amina al-Jerrahi, Muslim, Mexico; The Revd Tore Johnsen, Saami/Christian, Norway; Ms Bernie T. Keldermans, Christian, Republic of Palau; Prof. Oren R. Lyons, Turtle Clan, Onondaga Nation, Six Nations; The Rt Revd Sofie Petersen, Christian, Greenland; Mr M. Abdus Sabur, Muslim, Thailand; Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp, Jewish, The Netherlands; Prof. Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, Jewish, USA; The Ven. Bhiksuni Chuehman Shih, Buddhist, Taiwan; Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Jewish, USA; Prof. Xiaogan Liu, Daoist, Hong Kong; The Most Revd Anders Wejryd, Christian, Sweden*

## **INTERFAITH DECLARATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE (2009)**

*The declaration was formulated for the COP 15 Conference in Copenhagen 2009 by a team of individuals from four continents in cooperation with the Energy and Environment Foundation in the USA. It can be signed online ([www.interfaithdeclaration.org](http://www.interfaithdeclaration.org)) and is translated into 21 languages.*

The nurturing and respect for Life is a central doctrine of all faiths on Earth. Yet today we are endangering life on Earth with unacceptably high and rising levels of greenhouse gas emissions. These gases are destabilizing the global climate system, heating the Earth, acidifying the oceans, and putting both humanity and all living creatures at unacceptable risk.

The extraordinary delicacy of Nature's balance is becoming increasingly apparent, even as human actions inflict ever larger, more dangerous and potentially irreversible changes on the indivisible web of atmosphere, earth, ocean and life that is creation. Today our faiths stand united in their call to care for the Earth, and to protect the poor and the suffering. Strong action on climate change is imperative by the principles and traditions of our faiths and the collective compassion, wisdom and leadership of humanity.

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We recognize the science of climate change, and we call for global leaders to adopt strong, binding, science-based targets for the reduction of greenhouse gases in order to avert the worst dangers of a climate crisis. We urge the nations of Earth to ensure that those who will suffer under climate-induced changes such as more severe storms, floods, droughts and rising seas, be aided to adapt, survive and equitably prosper.

We recognize that climate change is not merely an economic or technical problem, but rather at its core is a moral, spiritual and cultural one. We therefore pledge to join together to teach and guide the people who follow the call of our faiths. We must all learn to live together within the shared limits of our planet.

We recognize that just as climate change presents us with great challenges, so too it offers great opportunities. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions can stimulate economies sustainably, protect our planet, lift up the poor, and unite to a common cause people threatened by a common danger. Assisting vulnerable communities and species to survive and adapt to climate change fulfils our calling to wisdom, mercy, and the highest of human moral and ethical values.

We commit ourselves to action – to changing our habits, our choices, and the way we see the world – to learning and teaching our families, friends, and faiths – to conserving the limited resources of our home, planet Earth, and preserving the climate conditions upon which life depends.

In this spirit, we call upon our leaders, those of our faiths, and all people of Earth to accept the reality of the common danger we face, the imperative and responsibility for immediate and decisive action, and the opportunity to change.

## A CALL FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE (2009)

*Ethicists called for an ethically grounded agreement at COP 15 in Copenhagen 2009. The call was the result of the international online workgroup on Climate Justice of the global ethics foundation Globethics.net, based in Geneva, Switzerland.*

The meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP 15) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Copenhagen, December 7 – 18 is a crucial opportunity to respond to the challenges of climate change at the highest political level. The international community at COP 15 should agree, according to the Bali Action Plan, on an agreement for the period after the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol which expires in 2012.

From a climate justice perspective, a group of ethicists from various secular and religious convictions, from all over the world, convened by Globethics.net, taking into account the present stage of the negotiations, urge negotiators at COP 15 in Copenhagen to:

**Respond to the cries of suffering people and the earth.** Climate change is a global challenge and its effects are being experienced already in some regions of the world and will be more dramatic in the coming years. The present climate change crisis should be seen in relationship to the economic crisis. The current development and consumption patterns must change to stop the negative effects of climate change on human beings and ecosystems. A paradigm shift, in outlook and atti-

tude, is needed to adequately and effectively respond to the cries of suffering people and the earth.

**Defend the lives and rights of the most vulnerable.** The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report clearly showed how vulnerable regions and groups are and will be more affected by climate change. The low islands in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa, and poor and indigenous peoples are the most at risk. Decisions in Copenhagen must facilitate initiatives by people and institutions in these regions to cope with rapid climate change.

**Make a fair agreement.** The agreement to be reached in Copenhagen should take into account the common but differentiated responsibilities of nations as established already in the UNFCCC. Industrialized countries, because of their historic and current emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> and other Greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions, must take the lead on deep and sustained cuts in emissions. Considerable financial resources and technology transfer must be made available to developing countries to enable them to adapt to climate change in a sustainable manner. The cultural dimension of climate A call for climate justice change should not be overlooked. Strengthening the resilience of vulnerable populations would be an effective adaptation measure.

**Approve an ambitious deal.** We cannot afford to wait any longer. The scale of emission reductions must be sufficient to stabilize atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations at 350ppm, to prevent dangerous interference with the climate system. To do so, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of industrialized countries should be reduced 40% by 2020 (compared to 1990 levels). While ambitious, this significant reduction goal is urgently needed to avoid irreversible climate change and make possible social and economic sustainability.

**Reach a binding agreement.** Being aware of the dynamics of the international community and learning from the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol implementation, it is essential that the international community

reach a binding agreement in Copenhagen. The outcomes of COP15 must ensure a robust second commitment period of the Kyoto protocol. Despite its limitations, an amendment to the Kyoto Protocol is the option most likely to deliver on this goal.

**Look for alternatives.** The climate change crisis poses challenges to which all people should respond. In the North and in the South, in the East and in the West, states, communities and individuals are already implementing alternative development strategies, lifestyles and energy paths. The search for a sustainable planet must be encouraged and strongly supported by the negotiators in Copenhagen.

**Give hope.** People all over the world are expecting a hopeful outcome from Copenhagen. Beyond self-praising discourses and political compromise, practical steps, based on the imperatives above, are needed from COP 15 delegates to respond to the expectations of people all over the world.



## **WHERE ARE THE CHURCHES IN CANCUN? (2010)**

*COP 16 took place in Cancun 2010. The delegations of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) signed this statement.*

After the failure of COP15 in Copenhagen in reaching a fair, ambitious and binding deal to effectively address the climate change crisis, many in the churches and the civil society at large have asked: why should we go to COP16 in Cancun? What for? Is it worth going?

Churches have been actively engaged in the UNFCCC negotiations since the late 80's in a process that led to the adoption of the UNFCCC in Rio in 1992. When the Convention was ratified and parties started to meet yearly in COPs, the WCC has had a delegation participating at all COPs.

The core of churches' engagement is to remind the negotiators that beyond the technical aspects of mitigation, adaptation, technology transfer and funding, there is an ethical responsibility which ought not to be overlooked.

In various ways churches have emphasized the various aspects of the climate change crisis: ecological, social, economic, cultural and political. These aspects should be addressed in a holistic way taking account of their interrelationship. On the basis of biblical teachings and theologi-

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cal convictions the churches have especially reiterated the ethical and spiritual implications of the challenge of climate change.

The UNFCCC already affirms some ethical considerations in the Principles stated in the UNFCCC. Article 3 of the Framework Convention reminds all parties what should guide the international community when responding to climate change challenges. In the turmoil of technical negotiations, unfortunately, these principles are often overlooked or ignored.

Principle 1 refers to the following critical points: a) the concern for present and future generations; b) equity as a basis for climate measures; c) the “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities” and d) the role of lead developed countries should have in combating climate change. Principle 2 focuses special attention to the needs and circumstances of developing countries and vulnerable communities. These deserve particular consideration. The “Precautionary Principle” is addressed in Principle 3, stressing the importance of anticipating, preventing or minimizing the causes and mitigating the effects of climate change. Interestingly, the principle already responds to climate sceptics, affirming that “the lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing such measures”. The right to development, specifically sustainable development, is addressed in Principle 4, while links between climate change and economics are highlighted in Principle 5, reminding how intertwined they are.

In the churches' perspective, justice must be the basic criterion of applied ethics in all decisions concerning the measures to cope with climate change. Although climate change is a global issue affecting all peoples and nations, those who are and will increasingly be affected by negative climate change consequences are the vulnerable communities who have contributed the least to global emissions. These include women and children, indigenous peoples, poorest communities, people with disabilities and inhabitants of coastal low lying areas. Vulnerable communities and states are also much more dependent on natural resources

for their subsistence and do not have the means to mitigate emissions and to adapt to climate change. Their survival is at risk, and justice requires that Nations most responsible historically for the adverse ecological conditions should take the greatest responsibility towards the adaptation of these vulnerable communities and nations. The churches have echoed this principle of justice in statements to earlier COPs, and repeat it here at COP 16 in Cancun.

The call for eco-justice and the recognition of ecological debt are part of the church's witness for the care of Creation. The formulation of demands to repair and repay the climate debt to the poorest, the most vulnerable, future generations and the Earth itself has become the prophetic stance of the churches as it confronts the most serious of ecological crises, the ethical and moral crisis of climate change.

Climate justice should undergird the present negotiations. Churches, through lobby work, side events and statements to the plenary, recall once again this forgotten dimension.

The holistic approach to climate change that churches proclaim also includes the spiritual dimension which must not be overlooked or ignored in the deliberations over political and economic interests. The hosting of ecumenical or interfaith celebrations during the COPs, as well as other explicit expressions like demonstrations and messages from local congregations and communities, stress the particular contribution that faith based groups and organizations can and must bring to the debate. It is our hope that the ethical and spiritual considerations will be taken seriously in the follow-up deliberations after COP 16.

There is, therefore, a moral obligation for the churches and faith communities to participate in the negotiations of the international community in Cancun and in the future. Their contribution is twofold: to urge the world to act for a more just and equitable world and the same time, rooted in their spiritual teachings, convey a message of hope to the whole world.

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### *Signatures*

*LWF and WCC delegations to COP16 in Cancun include the following: Lic Elias Crisostomo Abramides (Ecumenical Patriarchate, Argentina); Lic Abraham Colque (ISEAT – Bolivia); Rev Freddy De Alwis (CCA – Thailand); Rev Henrik Grape (CoS – Sweden); Joy Kennedy (UCC – Canada); David Le Page (SAFCEI – South Africa); Lic Juan Luis Loza (FUMEC – Mexico); Prof Dr Jesse Mugambi (Anglican Church of Kenya); Sister Patricia Nagle, IHM (USA); Lic Sergio Rios Carrillo (LWF – Nicaragua); Prof Dr Barbara Rossing (LWF – USA); M. Abdus Sabur (AMAN – Thailand); Rev Bill and Rev Carol Somplatsky-Jarman (PCUSA); Dr Larisa Skuratovskaya (Academy of Medical Sciences – Russia) and Dr Guillermo Kerber (WCC staff - Uruguay/Switzerland).*

**CALL FOR ACTION  
BY GENEVA INTERFAITH FORUM  
ON CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENT  
AND HUMAN RIGHTS  
(2011)**

*The call was presented at COP 17 in Durban, South Africa, in 2011 and signed by over 30 organisations with different religious background. The focus is on the call to ensure that actions taken on climate change take into account human rights.*

The Geneva Interfaith Forum on Climate Change, Environment and Human Rights is an informal group of faith-based NGOs that gathered to reaffirm the responsibility of each faith and spiritual tradition to care for the environment and play a role in addressing climate change and its impact on the human rights of the world's population.

Climate change is and will continue to cause disasters affecting every aspect of human life and nature. Peoples that have a strong and direct link to nature and those that are extremely dependent on their environment are particularly vulnerable such as people living on small islands. Climate change also severely limits the development opportunities of poor countries, which lack the resources and technology to realize human rights progressively in a sustainable manner. The adverse impacts of climate change will, however, affect the whole world.

Thus, it is imperative that the international community and all sectors of civil society urgently mobilize to tackle the hurdles that obstruct

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adequate and equitable international action on climate change. It becomes vital to act to bring about the changes needed to generate rapid solutions to the consequences of climate change; the cost of delaying further responsible decision making will disrupt the social, economic, political and cultural life of peoples and nation states.

More coordinated action building is urgently needed based on what has already been done. In this context it is important to recall that:

a) The UN Human Rights Council expressed with resolution A/HRC/RES/7/23 that “climate change poses an immediate and far reaching threat to people and communities around the world and has implications for the full enjoyment of human rights” and recognised that “climate change is a global problem requiring a global solution” and that “the effect of climate change will be felt most acutely by those segments of the population who are already in a vulnerable situation”. Furthermore this resolution requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to conduct a detailed analytical study of the relationship between climate change and human rights.

b) The resolution A/HRC/RES/10/4 decided that a panel discussion is to be held at its eleventh session on the relationship between climate change and human rights and,

c) The resolution A/HRC/RES/13/17 called for a Social Forum session that was held 4-6 October 2010 on the adverse effects of climate change on the full enjoyment of human rights that contributed positively to the debate.

It is our expectation that the Human Rights Council ensures a follow-up of the actions taken in relation to climate change and human rights through the establishment of a new special procedure. The man-

date should in particular entail a study on the responsibilities of States in the area of climate change, adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer and funding; research on the effect of climate change decision making on human rights, the reality of displaced peoples within national boundaries and internationally and suggest measures to be taken for the management of such situations.

As we prepare for the UNFCCC COP 17 in Durban, South Africa, during 2011, the Geneva Interfaith Forum on Climate Change, Environment and Human Rights would like to join forces with the NGOs and Civil Society movements that are already working to ensure that future action taken on climate change takes into account human rights.

We urge NGOs, Civil Society movements and government officials to engage in discussions with the aim to consider possible steps and concrete actions to be taken during the upcoming Human Rights Council sessions and other relevant forums.

*Signatures:*

*Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU); Centre Catholique International de Genève (CCIG); World Council of Churches (WCC); Indigenous Peoples Ancestral Spiritual Council (CEAPI).*

*With the support of*

*Coordenadoria Ecumênica de Serviço, Brazil (CESE– Ecumenical Coordination of Service); Eldoret-gender based and Development Network (EldoGADNet), Kenya; Globethics.net; Franciscans International; Lutheran World Federation; North South XXI; United Evangelical Mission, Germany; Mouvement International d’Apostolat des Milieux Sociaux Indépendants (MIAMSI); Zonta; International-Lawyers.org; Al Hakim Foundation; Worldwide Organization for Women - WOW; World Young Women's Christian Association - World YWCA; International Federation of Women Lawyers – FIDA; Conseil International des Femmes – International Council of Women; Arab Lawyers Union; Union of Arab Jurists; General Arab Women’s Federation; Geneva Inter-*

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*national Center for Justice; Return to the Earth; Rencontre Africaine de Défense pour le Droit de l'Homme – RADDHO; Centre Commerce International pour le Développement – CCID; Association Apprentissage sans Frontières; Universal Esperanto Association – UEA; Espace Afrique International; Planetary Association for Clean Energy; OCAPROCE International; International Educational Development; International Sustainable Energy Organization; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom – WILPF; Women's World Summit Foundation – WWSF; CETIM; Ius Primi Viri; Pax Christi International; International Federation of Business and Professional Women (IFBPW); National Ethical Service.*

# CLIMATE JUSTICE FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN AFRICA (2011)

*African faith leaders met at UNEP in Nairobi, Kenya, on 7 and 8 June 2011 to discuss climate change and how it should be addressed at COP 17 in South Africa.*

You must treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It is loaned to you by your children.

*Kikuyu proverb*

## **1. Introduction**

Africa is a continent of the faithful. We gathered as African faith leaders at UNEP in Nairobi, Kenya on 7th and 8th June 2011, to discuss climate change and how it will be addressed at COP17.

Scientific reports indicate that climate change may well be the greatest threat that humanity has ever faced, with, on current targets, probable increased global warming of 2.5<sup>0</sup>C to 4<sup>0</sup>C by 2100 – widely agreed to be disastrous. Yet progress in international negotiations has not matched the scale of the crisis. There appears to be a deadlock between competing political and economic interests from various power blocs. We believe that to break this deadlock, new perspectives are required.

Firstly, economic and political processes have to be based on ecological principles, and not vice versa. There can be no infinite economic or population growth on a finite planet.

Secondly, there is a profound need for a renewed moral vision for the future of humanity and indeed of all life. We debase human beings by seeing them only as economic instruments, and debase the sanctity of life by commodifying it.

We must realise that well-being cannot be equated with material wealth. The quality of life is not dependent on the quantity of material things or growth measured by GDP. Instead, our standard of living depends on our standard of loving and sharing. We cannot sustain a world dominated by profit-seeking, rampant consumerism and gross inequalities, and an atmosphere of competition where the powerful take advantage of the weak without caring for the well-being of every form of life. Development cannot be sustained if the affluent project themselves as examples to be copied by everyone else, and if the poor model their lifestyles on such examples.

These insights draw from the rich moral and spiritual traditions on our continent and elsewhere in the world. Despite the historical violence and disorganisation that Africa has suffered and inflicted on itself, these insights have been transmitted to us by our ancestors who believed in the harmony of vital forces, between human beings and the rest of creation.

In our African spiritual heritage and our diverse faith traditions, trees, flowers, water, soil and animals have always been essential companions of human beings, without which life and being are inconceivable. We express this in different ways through our understanding of the world as God's own beloved creation, and our sense of place and vocation within it.

Our ways of thinking and feeling deeply influence the world around us. As we find compassion, peace and harmony within ourselves, we will begin to treat the Earth with respect, resist disorder and live in

peace with each other, including embracing a binding climate treaty. We pray that compassion will guide these negotiations.

## **2. Our commitments as faith leaders**

Our African people and nations have to overcome the temptation of seeing ourselves as victims, who have no role and responsibility to play in reversing the current situation – we are part of the solution.

As African faith leaders, our responsibilities will be to:

- Set a good example for our faith communities by examining our personal needs and reducing unsustainable consumption.
- Lead local communities to understand the threat of climate change and the need to build economies and societies based on a revitalised moral vision.
- Draw on our spiritual resources to foster crucial ecological virtues such as wisdom, justice, courage and temperance, and to confront vices such as greed in our own midst.
- Acknowledge that climate change has greatly affected already vulnerable people (such as women, children, the elderly, the poor and the disabled), that it worsens existing inequalities and that this places an obligation on faith groups to stand in solidarity with the victims of climate change disasters, showing care, compassion and love.
- Plant indigenous trees and promote ecological restoration.

## **3. Our message to all world leaders**

As citizens, we are asked to put our trust in representatives at COP17 to decide upon our common future. We have no doubt that the Durban COP must decide on a treaty – and second commitment period for the

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Kyoto Protocol – that is fair, ambitious and legally binding, to ensure the survival of coming generations.

We therefore call on you to:

- Commit to the principle of inter-generational equity, the rights of our children for generations to come, and to the rights of Mother Earth as outlined in the Cochabamba declaration.
- Refute the myth that action to cut emissions is too expensive, when it is far cheaper than the long-term costs of inaction.
- Acknowledge that investments in sustainability are a better guarantor of peace than military spending.
- Abandon Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as an indicator of prosperity in favour of indicators that include human wellbeing, equality and the external environmental costs of human economies.
- Set clear final targets for phasing out the use of all fossil fuels, and deep interim reductions in carbon emissions that support the target of no more than one degree of global warming.
- Ensure that there is sufficient climate finance for adaptation in Africa, additional to existing development aid and that it is governed inclusively and equitably under the United Nations.
- Channel sufficient and predictable climate finance and technology from the historic polluting nations, in recognition of their ecological debt, to enable Africa to leapfrog into an age of clean energy technology.
- Close the gap between wealthy countries' pledges to cut warming emissions and what science and equity require.
- Assign for wealthy countries emission quotas that are consistent with the full measure of their historical responsibility.

#### **4. Our message to Africa's political leaders**

We further urge African political leaders, as many of you are members of our faith communities, to take these particular measures:

- To regain a united voice and abandon expedient allegiances with blocs that are scrambling to appropriate Africa's natural resources.
- Recognise in all policy statements that our long-term social and economic interests require the stability of our biophysical environment today.
- Prioritise measures and adopt policies to resolve environmental degradation in our nations.
- Acknowledge and pre-empt the violence at all levels that climate change and environmental degradation is already fuelling on the continent.
- Adopt and enact land policies that ensure equity and justice for all.
- Resist the approval of transactions with exploitative corporations that would cause serious environmental damage.
- Promote indigenous tree planting and protection of existing forests, lakes and rivers.
- Build much greater capacity within long-standing teams of climate negotiators.
- Greatly improve communications within and between African governments, and consultation with civil society, including faith communities, on issues of climate change.

## **5. Conclusion**

Every human generation is faced by particular challenges and opportunities. If we do not secure a stable climate for the sake of future generations, we will be held accountable by them and judged by history.

On this very critical issue of climate change, we must not fail. Every lost moment increases an irreversible threat to life on Earth.



**WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES  
GENERAL SECRETARY  
MESSAGE FOR RIO +20  
(2012)**

*The World Council of Churches (WCC) represents 345 member churches from 110 countries and 500 million Christians. Its General Secretary addressed this message to the UN conference Rio+20 in Rio de Janeiro 2012. The WCC has been active on Climate Justice since the late 1980s.*

To our fellow human beings gathered to carry out our common responsibility for our common future,

“We write with a sense of urgency. The earth is in peril. Our only home is in plain jeopardy. For the very first time in the history of creation, certain life support systems of the planet are being destroyed by human actions”. These could be words for today, but were part of the letter to the churches written by participants of a WCC meeting in Baixada Fluminense during the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED or Earth Summit) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. We, as people of faith in God, still believe and hope in the future.

Unfortunately, the situation has not improved in these last twenty years. On the contrary, scientific reports have shown that we are in an even more dangerous situation. Our children are asking why we have not been able to achieve more in these 20 years. And WCC member churches from various regions have consistently reported that vulnerable

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communities are already experiencing the negative effects of climate change and environmental degradation while poverty and inequity continue to be a major challenge. We are accountable to our Creator for what we have done and what we have not done for the one creation.

The Earth Summit in 1992 was a sign of hope for the future. From it, we received the so called Rio Conventions (on Biodiversity, Desertification and Climate Change), the Earth Charter and the Rio Declaration, which offered a framework to respond to the challenges posed to the environment. But the international community has not been able to implement effective responses, the failure of the climate negotiations in reaching a new binding agreement being a clear example. However, the Rio principles continue to be valid today and need to be explicitly reaffirmed when the world faces new challenges.

As the international community gathers at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD2012 or Rio+20), governments have the opportunity to recommit to past agreements and agree on a roadmap for the sustainable future we want [1]. Let us together believe that we can make changes for a better world, step-by-step. I am well aware that Rio+20 by itself will not change the world; but, it can and should be a catalyst for concrete initiatives to overcome the short term perspectives that have been predominant in recent international negotiations. The outcome from Rio+20 should therefore comprise a set of clear targets and timetables for a sustainable future which must include accountability and reporting measures.

Last year the WCC's International Ecumenical Peace Convocation held in Kingston, Jamaica, addressed violence in its various manifestations. The Ecumenical Call for Just Peace clearly states that "human beings are to respect and protect creation. But greed at many levels, self-centeredness and a belief in unlimited growth have brought exploitation and destruction on the earth and its creatures. The cries of the poor and vulnerable echo in the groans of the earth. Excessive con-

sumption of fossil fuels and other limited resources is doing violence to people and the planet. Climate change as a consequence of human lifestyles poses a global threat to just peace. Global warming, the rise of sea levels and the increasing frequency and intensity of droughts and floods affect especially the most vulnerable populations in the world.” Being aware how poverty, ecological crisis and violence are intertwined, justice and peace criteria should permeate the contents of a green economy, one of the main themes at UNCSD2012, which should be based in principles such as sustainability, dignity, equity, sufficiency, inclusion and resilience, dismantling and abandoning a “greed economy” to move into a sharing economy for the survival of all, rich and poor, and taking our responsibility for future generations. The present situation does not allow us to irresponsibly continue with business as usual. We must find a just peace with the earth and one another.

WCC delegates at Rio+20 will be involved in various activities both at the venue of the official UNCSD2012 and at the Peoples Summit. Together as people of many faiths, we are united in our concern and prayer for the future of our planet. The Religions for Rights cluster will raise various concerns and alternatives from an interfaith perspective. I urge government representatives to listen to the calls coming from communities, civil society at large and from us who represent people of faith and hope for change and let us hear you respond to our contributions and expectations of you.

The theme for the next WCC 10th Assembly to be held next year in Busan, Republic of Korea, is “God of life, lead us to justice and peace”. It is this God of life who encouraged ecumenical participants at the Earth Summit in 1992 to proclaim: “There is hope (2Cor 4:7-12). Our God is a God of life and the power of the Holy Spirit permeates all creation”.

We do have hope. Even in spite of hopeless circumstances (Rom 4:18), we believe God renews the whole creation through the Spirit

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(Psalm 104:30) so that life prevails. May the same Spirit inspire delegates at Rio+20 so that they can deliver a most needed, significant outcome to address the threats humanity and the earth are facing.

In solidarity and hope,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit

World Council of Churches, General Secretary

**WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES  
10<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY STATEMENT  
ON CLIMATE JUSTICE  
(2013)**

*Adopted by the World Council of Churches (WCC) at their 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Busan, Korea, in November 2013 as part of the Report of the Public Issues Committee.*

“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the water”.  
*(Psalm 24)*

“...cease to do evil and learn to do right; pursue justice and champion the oppressed. Give the orphan his rights, plead the widow’s case”.  
*(Isaiah 1:16b-17)*

Climate change is today one of the most challenging global threats affecting especially the most vulnerable. The World Council of Churches (WCC) was among the first to warn about the dangers of climate change. Now after 20 years of advocacy, churches have helped bring ecological justice into the international debate on climate.

The WCC governing bodies have developed policy on climate change. Furthermore, the WCC has also presented statements to the high level segment of the Conference of Parties (COPs) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In recent years churches and specialized ministries have increased their advocacy efforts. Together with Christian churches, interfaith initiatives have also shown how faith communities have reached consensus in addressing the climate change crisis.

Despite being a most crucial issue, climate change has lost priority on the public and political agendas. While there are some encouraging signs, nonetheless climate change negotiations at the international level have not realized the stated goals.

In September 2013, the first part of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report was delivered confirming the gravity of climate change and the consequences it already has, among them the rise of sea level, the melting of glaciers and polar ice, the further increase of the strength and frequency of floods, tropical storms and droughts. The report also evidenced the growing consensus in the scientific community on the human causes of climate change.

The effects of climate change are being experienced already now. Churches in countries like Tuvalu, Kiribati, Bangladesh, the Philippines as well as the United Nations (UN) and other international organizations are already addressing the tragedies associated with climate displaced people.

Victims of climate change are the new face of the poor, the widow and the stranger that are especially loved and cared for by God (Deut. 10:17-18). When creation is threatened in this way, churches are called to speak out and act as an expression of their commitment to life, justice and peace.

The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea, 30 October – 8 November 2013, therefore:

- A. Reiterates the concerns of the churches over climate change and its adverse effects on the whole of creation and especially on vulnerable communities in many parts of the world;
- B. Encourages member churches to support the role of the WCC in enabling an ecumenical pilgrimage for justice and peace to strengthen links between churches and communities in various parts of the world working together to care for creation and eco-justice; and
- C. Calls upon churches and ecumenical organizations to insist that the respective governments look beyond national interests in order to be responsible towards God's creation and our common future, and urge them to safeguard and promote the basic human rights of those who are threatened by the effects of climate change and particularly those church representatives present at COP19 in Warsaw, Poland, to urge the Polish COP presidency to increase the ambitions of the Warsaw outputs; and
- D. Welcomes the climate change plan of the White House and calls upon the President of the United States to reject the building of the Keystone Pipeline in the United States of America.



**CLIMATE, FAITH AND HOPE:  
FAITH TRADITIONS TOGETHER  
FOR A COMMON FUTURE  
(2014)**

*Thirty leaders from various faith and religious traditions gathered at the Interfaith Summit on Climate Change in New York, during the Climate Week on 21-22 September 2014, just before the UN Climate Summit, signed the statement and handed it to the UN General Secretariat (italics by editors).*

*As representatives from different faith and religious traditions, we stand together to express deep concern for the consequences of climate change on the earth and its people, all entrusted, as our faiths reveal, to our common care. Climate change is indeed a threat to life, a precious gift we have received and that we need to care for.*

*We acknowledge the overwhelming scientific evidence that climate change is human-induced and that, without global and inclusive action towards mitigation and unless fully addressing its fundamental causes, its impacts will continue to grow in intensity and frequency. At the same time, we are ready to dialogue with those who remain skeptical.*

*In our communities and thanks to the media, we see the manifestations of climate change everywhere. From our brothers and sisters around the world, we hear about its effects on people and nature. 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*

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climate change are the ones hardest hit, it becomes an issue of injustice. Equitable solutions are urgently needed.

*We recognize that climate change stands today as a major obstacle to the eradication of poverty.* Severe weather events exacerbate hunger, cause economic insecurity, force displacement and prevent sustainable development. The climate crisis is about the survival of humanity on planet earth, and action must reflect these facts with urgency.

*Therefore, as faith leaders, we commit ourselves* to the promotion of disaster risk reduction, adaptation, low carbon development, climate change education, curbing our own consumption patterns and reducing our use of fossil fuels. Based on our spiritual beliefs and our hope for the future, we commit to stimulating consciences and encouraging our peers and communities to consider such measures with urgency.

*We share the conviction* that the threats of climate change cannot be curbed effectively by a single State alone but only by the enhanced cooperation of the community of States, based on principles of mutual trust, fairness and equity, precaution, intergenerational justice and common but differentiated responsibilities and capabilities. We urge the rich to support the poor and the vulnerable significantly and everywhere, especially in Least Developed Countries, Small Island States and Sub-Saharan Africa. Significant support would include generous financial resources, capacity building, technology transfer and other forms of cooperation.

*We encourage Heads of State and Ministers attending the Climate Summit* to announce pledges for the Green Climate Fund, including commitments to increase them thereafter, to establish new partnerships for climate resilience and low carbon development, and to assure access to renewable energies for all people.

*As people of faith,* we call on all governments to express their commitment to limit global warming well below 2° Celsius. We emphasize that all States share the responsibility to formulate and implement Low Car-

bon Development Strategies leading to de-carbonization and the complete phase-out of fossil fuels by mid-century.

*Consequently we encourage world political and economic leaders to exercise their leadership during the Climate Summit by announcing joint actions such as important short-term emission cuts, phasing out fossil fuel subsidies, coal caps or coal divestment, forest protection, increased energy efficiency in construction and transportation, and other concrete steps. We further call on all governments to identify medium and long-term adaptation needs and to develop strategies to address them based on country-driven, gender-sensitive and participatory approaches to better manage residual loss and damage due to adverse climate impacts.*

*Ultimately we request all States to work constructively towards a far-reaching global climate agreement in Paris in 2015, building on transparency, adequacy and accountability.*

*The new agreement must be:*

- 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 religious representatives and citizens in your countries, we hereby commit ourselves to address the climate change threat. We continue to count on your leadership, and we encourage and expect you to make the right decisions. When difficult decisions need to be taken for the sustainability of the earth and its people, we are ready to stand with you. We pray for you and for all humanity in caring for the earth.*

New York, 21 September 2014

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# Religions for Climate Justice

International Interfaith Statements 2008-2014

Religions and Faith communities on all continents are engaged for life and Climate Justice since many years. The common threat of humanity leads to clear interfaith calls to politicians to act more courageously. Christian Churches and other religions have been actively engaged in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the yearly Conference of Parties (COP) negotiations since the late 80's. In this publication, nine international and interfaith statements from 2008 to September 2014 are collected, among others for the UN Climate Summit and the preconference "Religions for the Earth" in September 2014 in New York.

May the statements inspire and encourage believers from all faith as well as politicians and professionals from all sectors of society and on all continents. Let us stand up against resignation and fatalism. Let us act together for human and non-human life on this planet, inspired and encouraged by faith and hope.