

# CLIMATE JUSTICE FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN AFRICA

*A message from African faith leaders to the 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), from 29 November to 9 December 2011 in Durban, 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 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> 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°C to 4°C by 2100<sup>i</sup> – 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.

### **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.

## **2. 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 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.

### 3. 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 fueling 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.

### 4. 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.

*8 June 2011:– This communique was compiled jointly by 130 faith leaders representing Muslim, Christian, Hindu, African traditional, Bahá'í and Buddhist communities from 30 countries across Africa.*

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<sup>i</sup> Joeri Rogel, Claudine Chen, Julia Nabel and others, "Analysis of the Copenhagen Accord pledges and its global climatic impacts— a snapshot of dissonant ambitions", *Environmental Research Letters* 5 (2010).