



PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM  
DE IUSTITIA ET PACE

*Caritas Internationalis*  
20th General Assembly  
Domus Mariae, Rome

14 May 2015

### **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*, where he cites “the advances being made in so many fields”, which “improve people’s welfare in areas such as health care, education and communications.” Yet daily life for much of humanity is perilous. Diseases and other factors cause “fear and desperation ... lack of respect for others and violence are on the rise, and inequality is increasingly evident. ... 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.”<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, in 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 side. We find starkly rising disparities – vast numbers of people excluded and discarded, their dignity trampled upon.

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. In fact, the world now 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>2</sup> Your international campaign “One Human Family: Food for All” seeks to address this crucial challenge.

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

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>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, §52: 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.

<sup>2</sup> FAO, *Food wastage footprint, Impacts on natural resources. Summary report*, 2013, p. 6.

<sup>3</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

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 scale that defies comprehension.

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. Through your work as Caritas Internationalis, many of you know 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**

How can we do better? We clearly need a fundamental change of course, to protect the earth and its people.

The essential principle is that we are made in the image and likeness of God, and thus possess an innate dignity that can never be denied, degraded, or denigrated. Every single person is a brother or a sister, so all relationships should be based on respect, reconciliation, and solidarity.

Also essential is 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.

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 reciprocal relationship between humanity and the created world. All individuals and communities have a sacred duty to draw prudently, respectfully and gratefully from the goodness of the earth, and to balance present use with 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. The earth is both a legacy from our parents and a loan from our children, so we must

---

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.

protect and care for it with great tenderness and with a keen sense of inter-generational solidarity.

But we are out of balance: “The earth languishes for the sins of man” warned the prophet Isaiah.<sup>4</sup> It is blatantly clear that we have “tilled too much” and “kept too little”. Our relationship with the Creator, with our neighbours, and with the environment has become fundamentally “unkept”. We must 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>5</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>6</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 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**

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>7</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 modest proposals.

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Isaiah, ch. 24.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pas.va/content/dam/accademia/pdf/protect/bankimoon.pdf>

<sup>6</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.

<sup>7</sup> <http://americamagazine.org/issue/call-virtue>

This is an all-embracing moral imperative: to protect<sup>8</sup> and care both for creation, our garden home, and for the human person who dwells therein. When selfishness and individualism dominate, sustainable development will not come about. Progress towards sustainability requires a fundamental openness to relationship, 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.

As the ones who have benefitted most from fossil fuels, they 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. 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.

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>9</sup> The opposition arises where vested interests wish to maintain their wealth and leave all sacrifices to others.

We need, therefore, to cultivate these timely values and virtues –*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**

The Church is an "expert in humanity" that reads the "signs of the times" at key moments in history. At this key moment, the Church must speak forcefully on the great challenges of our time – the challenges of sustainable development and of human flourishing within a natural

---

<sup>8</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>

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

environment that is at ever greater risk. This is why Pope Francis will issue an encyclical on the environment: not to enter into scientific and financial debates, but to remind the world that our choices are ultimately moral in nature.

This September, the Pope will address the United Nations on the sustainable development goals. Fifty years earlier, Blessed Pope Paul VI spoke to the same General Assembly. He issued an “appeal to the moral conscience of man ... in an age marked by such great human progress. For the danger comes neither from progress nor from science ... [but] 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.”

Let all people of good will respond with their moral conscience. May all adopt the primary virtues of *stewardship* and *solidarity*. Without stewardship, the Earth will be less and less habitable. Without solidarity, greed and rivalry will wreak ever greater havoc. But stewardship and solidarity will generate greater *sustainability* and greater *security*. Then all can hope to inhabit a hospitable planet with a nurturing home for every man, woman, and child in every country and in every generation.

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