

Antilles Episcopal Conference

DECLARATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

June 8, 2015

1. We, the Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference, recognize the importance of a process of reflection with Catholics and all people of good will on matters that affect the common good. One such matter is climate change, regarded as ‘this century’s major challenge’ which has and will have serious effects in our region.¹
2. This Declaration is in anticipation of the Papal Encyclical on Ecology expected later this year. We want to encourage you to read and study the Holy Father's document in groups looking for concrete actions to become better stewards of creation.²
3. God has blessed humankind with this creation, which nourishes and sustains us. Everything we do, we do within the world that God has made and entrusted to us (Genesis 1:27-31). Pope Benedict XVI puts it this way: “*Nature expresses a design of love and truth. It is prior to us, and it has been given to us by God as the setting for our life...Nature is at our disposal not as “a heap of scattered refuse”, but as a gift of the Creator who has given it an inbuilt order, enabling man to draw from it the principles needed in order ‘to till it and keep it’ (Gen 2:15).*”³ The truth is that men and women are called to be stewards, stewards of God’s gift of creation, the primary sacrament of God’s love. To thankfully take responsibility for the integrity of creation is an important part of what it means to be made in God’s image. We constantly need to be reminded, and to proclaim to the world: ‘*The earth and its fullness belong to the Lord, the world and all that dwell in it*’ (Ps 24:1). We are all in the world not as owners but as tenants and stewards. The specifically Christian dimension of stewardship must include this responsibility for the integrity of creation, for our environment.
4. However, humankind has and is changing the created order, and climate change is the manifestation of human interaction with and disruption of a natural order. Human activity – primarily the way we use energy, conduct industry, farm the land, and use the

¹ AEC PASTORAL LETTER, “*Caring for the Earth – Our Responsibility: An Invitation to Reflection*”, March 10, 2005.

² Things that people can do include: Reducing Use of Fossil Fuels by - using energy efficient lighting, appliances and equipment at home and office, investing in renewable sources such as solar and wind, buying fuel efficient vehicles, limiting unnecessary travel. Manage Natural Resources by - using low-flow and other water saving devices, collecting rain water and household grey water for reuse, limiting unnecessary use of municipal water especially during drought, plant trees and protect forests. Manage waste by reducing, reusing and recycling. Finally, they should always find ways to help before and during a disaster event by sharing life saving information and helping after an event by volunteering.

³ Pope Benedict XVI’s Encyclical, “*Caritas in Veritate*, 29th June, 2009, No. 48.

trees – has changed the composition of the atmosphere, causing changes in the earth’s retention of solar energy. This simple change leads to profound and complex changes as weather patterns shift and the world we live in changes before us. Changes in temperature and rainfall negatively impact the productivity of agriculture, storms become more frequent, more devastating, such as Katrina, Ivan, Sandy and the devastating rains that struck the Eastern Caribbean in 2013.⁴ We have also been experiencing prolonged periods of drought. As the glaciers and permafrost melt and new vistas open to the poles, sea levels rise and reclaim land. The patterns of animal migration and diseases shift with surprising results. Corals die, and ecosystems change forever. The weather patterns become more extreme, hotter in some places and colder in the extremes of winter.

5. Everyone is affected but it is the poor who feel it the most. This is because the poor have the fewest resources with which to absorb these events and adjust. It is they who feel it when left homeless by a storm, or when crops fail, or when disease strikes. Following the Gospel option for the poor, we have consistently worked closely with the most vulnerable communities and the excluded and as such are closely attuned to how the problem of climate change is affecting them. Our message to political leaders and all people of good will is rooted in the experience and suffering of these poor communities.
6. The sad reality is that the ones who are affected most, the poor, **are the least responsible for this reality**. The few dozen small Island States across the world, for example, have neither the size nor developmental history to have been major contributors to current climate change. Yet these small Island States are the most easily devastated by rising seas and harsher storms. Already, some villages have disappeared by disasters, both stormy and those with slow, creeping onset. Our brothers and sisters who inhabit these places will be in peril, through no fault of their own.
7. We recognize that climate change represents a significant threat to the sustainability of Caribbean life as we know it. Our nations are already impacted by unusual heavy rainfall, warmer temperatures, prolonged periods of drought, rising sea levels and the prospect of more intense storm events. Though we concentrate on the Caribbean region we are mindful that we are part of a planet. The scientists have told us that nature has been damaged to an unprecedented degree. Pope John Paul II referred to the *‘ecological crisis as a moral problem’*. We recognize that much good has happened on Earth through the rightful and responsible intelligence, technology and industry of humankind under God’s love and care. And yet in recent decades many grave adversities such as climate change,

⁴ Extreme weather events such as the Christmas 2013 floods in St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Dominica caused extensive social upheaval and physical damage. Following a region-wide drought, the outbreak of the mosquito borne disease Chikungunya reached epidemic proportions in 2014. These occurrences bring to focus the need for more regional environmental awareness and climate action.

with its devastating impact on nature itself, on food security, health and migration, led to a great number of suffering people worldwide.

8. On World Environment Day 2013 Pope Francis speaking at a General Audience in St. Peter's Square focused on the issue of the environment, he said: *"We are experiencing a moment of crisis; we see it in the environment, but mostly we see it in man. The human being is at stake: here is the urgency of human ecology! And the danger is serious because the cause of the problem is not superficial, but profound: it's not just a matter of economics, but of ethics and anthropology. The Church has stressed this several times; and many say: yes, that is right, it's true but the system continues as before, because what dominate are the dynamics of an economy and a lack of financial ethics. So men and women are sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption: this is 'scrap culture', the culture of the disposable."*⁵
9. The Church's current action and reflection on Climate Change is to prepare you to understand the significance of the critical 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) scheduled to take place in December 2015, in Paris, France. We wish you to be a part of an international conversation and to join the efforts of the Holy Father and world leaders as they work towards signing the new and necessary universal climate agreement. We your bishops urge you to take action on the urgent and damaging situation of global climate change. This crisis is primarily a spiritual crisis with significant moral implications. Its implications will affect future generations. We owe it to ourselves and those who will come after us to ACT NOW. We have a responsibility to educate ourselves, to consciously choose to live responsibly to the environment and the common good. We note with appreciation that, in our times, States, Religions, Groups of Civil Society and individuals at all levels are recognizing more and more the natural as well as the ethical concerns of this matter. We wish to see concrete decisions taken at COP21 to overcome the climate challenge and to set us on new sustainable pathways.

10. **We the Bishops of the AEC call on all people**

To consider the spiritual and moral dimensions of climate change: Climate action must be motivated not only by technical and economic concerns but also in keeping with social justice and a common responsibility as indicated in Article 3 of the UNFCCC and consistent with our Catholic Social Teachings.

To adopt a fair and legally binding global agreement: The success of COP21 will mark a critical point in our global response to climate change. We must act now in

⁵ Pope Francis, Speaking at a General Audience in St. Peter's Square, June 5, 2013.

defense of the universal human rights to safeguard the planet for this generation and those still to come.

To limit the global temperature increase below 1.5 degrees Celsius: Every effort must be made to limit warming relative to pre-industrial levels, in order to protect frontline communities suffering from the impacts of climate change, especially high risk island and coastal communities such as ours in the Caribbean.

To promote sustainable energy for all: To build new models of development and lifestyles which are both climate compatible and bring people out of poverty. Central to this is the significant reduction in fossil fuel emissions and the promotion of renewable energy with sustainable access for all. This requires serious efforts at diversification of economies.

To fund the adaptation needs of the most vulnerable: The Paris 2015 agreement must deliver an adaptation approach that adequately responds to the immediate needs of the most vulnerable communities and developing countries. This should ensure that a significant amount of public funds go to meeting their climate change related adaptation needs and builds on local alternatives.

To support the mitigation of loss and damage: The adaptation needs of the most vulnerable are contingent on the success of mitigation measures taken. Those responsible for climate change also have responsibilities to commit to assist the most vulnerable in adapting and managing loss and damage and to share the necessary technology and knowhow.

To adopt roadmaps for climate financing: There must be clear guidelines on how countries, especially the poorest, least developed and most vulnerable nations, will meet the predictable additional finance commitments and establish robust and transparent accounting methodologies.

11. Our Commitment

We want to accompany the political process and seek dialogue to bring the voices of the poor and most vulnerable to the table of decision-makers; we are convinced that everyone has a capacity to contribute to overcome climate change and to choose sustainable lifestyles. We commit to climate action in our own communities through:-

- A process of education of all of our people on the causes and possible effects of climate change on our vulnerable communities.⁶

⁶ Further information can be found via - AEC resources on website, Global Catholic Climate Movement: <http://CatholicClimateMovement.global/>, Our Voices - faith based Climate

- To develop programmes to educate people on reducing our energy and water consumption and that allows us to care for our natural resources and sustainable lifestyles in general.
- Collaboration with Government, Corporations and Civil Society to put climate change on the national agenda.

We Bishops call on all Catholics and people of good will to engage on the road to a global climate agreement in Paris 2015 as a starting point for a new life in harmony with Creation respecting planetary boundaries.

SIGNATORIES TO THIS DECLARATION ARE THE ORDINARIES REPRESENTING THE FOLLOWING DIOCESES

- a) The Archdiocese of Nassau, Bahamas
- b) The Diocese of Hamilton, Bermuda
- c) The Archdiocese of Kingston, Jamaica
- d) The Diocese of Montego Bay, Jamaica
- e) The Diocese of Mandeville, Jamaica
- f) The Diocese of Belize City and Belmopan, Belize
- g) *Missio Sui Juris* – Cayman Islands
- h) The Archdiocese of Castries, St Lucia
- i) The Diocese of Roseau, Dominica
- j) The Diocese of St. George's-in-Grenada, Grenada
- k) The Diocese of St John's-Basseterre, Antigua and Barbuda
- l) The Archdiocese of St. Pierre and Fort-de-France, Martinique
- m) The Diocese of Basse-Terre Pointe-a-Pitre, Guadeloupe
- n) The Diocese of Cayenne, French Guiana
- o) The Archdiocese of Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
- p) The Diocese of Georgetown, Guyana
- q) The Diocese of Bridgetown, Barbados
- r) The Diocese of Kingstown, St. Vincent & the Grenadines
- s) The Diocese of Paramaribo, Suriname
- t) The Diocese of Willemstad, Curaçao