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Press Release

SAFCEI Responds to Pope's Encyclical

The Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) endorses the Pope's call for systemic change, for an acknowledgement that we are one earth, and that human societies should stand together in calling for solutions to heal the earth, not endanger it.

SAFCEI, which is comprised of all the major faith groups in southern Africa, expresses support and enthusiasm for Pope Francis' Encyclical, which explains how human life is grounded in three fundamental relationships: one with God, one with our neighbours, and one with the Earth, and that the relationship with the Earth has been ignored by Christian theology.

SAFCEI chairperson, Ms Tahiri Matthee of the Baha'i faith, responds: "We are all interconnected, and every action we take either positive or negative has some impact on our Earth."

The Encyclical describes the ecological crisis, referring to the Earth that has been treated as simply material, to be abused and used for humanity's greed. It describes how humanity has been encouraged to exploit creation with contempt. This attitude has been caused by the misinterpretation of the Christian doctrine. Human greed that blinds men and women to seeing the basic truth, that the happiness of an individual depends on their relationship to the Earth.

The ecological crisis is described as Ecological sin against God, our neighbour, and also future generations. We humans are inexorably threatening and destroying Earth's life support system.

Part of the reason we have reached this crisis is the current economic system which worships money, says SAFCEI's Patron, Geoff Davies, the Green Bishop. It drives ever-increasing greed and consumption. It is a system that sees no value in living diversity but rather seeks to exploit God's gifts to the point of destruction, converting the genuine wealth of the planet into the artificiality of money. This systemic problem, with climate change as one of the obvious symptoms, cannot be fixed with the same self-centred or self-serving attitudes of fear and greed, claims Davies.

"Climate change is the most significant challenge we, as humans, have ever faced," claims Davies. "We must act now!"

Africa, the cradle of humankind, stands to be the worst affected. We are destroying our birth-place. Africa can lead the way in building a climate-resilient society. SAFCEI is calling on world leaders to steer away from arrogant profiteering in Africa, and to rather provide financial support that humbly acknowledges an ecological debt and seeks to partner with Africa, and other affected areas of the world, to repair and restore the balance of nature and human dignity.

SAFCEI also calls on SADC member states to roll out increasing amounts of renewable energy. "We have the best solar resources in the world," says Liz McDaid, energy and climate change consultant to SAFCEI and various other NGOs. "Let us use these God-given gifts to heal the world. Let Africa lead!" she challenges.

This month in South Africa, as we focus on the youth, the Pope reminds us of the need for equity, including inter-generational equity. The Encyclical speaks to how humans have been destroying our planet in order to satisfy our greed, *and that we may well be leaving debris, desolation and filth to coming generations.*

The captains of industry, especially the fossil industry, will be retired or dead by the time Earth experiences the worse ravages of climate change. It is the youth, as well as those as yet unborn who will enter a ravaged world not of their making. "What legacy are we passing on to them?" probes McDaid. "Pope Francis reminds us that God's vision for the Earth is one of harmony, justice, love and respect for all creatures," she points out. *"We have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor"*.

For South Africa, SAFCEI calls on our leaders to act with dignity and to stay true to the values of those great leaders who have gone before, Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo ... Father Huddleston, Bishop Denis Hurley, Mahatma Gandhi, and other revered leaders both religious and political... to be accountable to the people, not to squander the resources that belong to all.

We need statesmen and women who will reject false climate solutions such as nuclear, fracking and carbon markets, who rather stand for climate resilient, flexible solutions that work with nature, in all her diversity.

The Encyclical refers to possible risks to the environment, including the effects of nuclear energy use: *"the forms of corruption which conceal the actual environment impacts of a given project, in exchange for favours, usually produce specious agreements which fail to inform adequately and to allow for full debate."*

On the subject of South Africa's nuclear proposals, according to Muslim leader Imam Dr. A Rashied Omar, "the pursuit of nuclear power is now threatening our democracy, and faith communities and their partners in civil society need to challenge the government to be more transparent and accountable". SAFCEI seeks to work with those who can stand up for climate justice. We call on all people of faith to stand with us.

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