

Faith communities demand climate justice

Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change for COP 25 Madrid, 2019

The urgency to act now for climate justice

We live in a time of severe climate crisis. For decades science has provided increasing evidence of how the earth is affected by human induced climate change. The response from those in power has been inadequate and slow. Action has been delayed even as the voice of warning has become stronger. Civil movements and municipalities around the world are now declaring a state of Climate Emergency, emphasizing the urgency with which we need to address the crisis and the radical transformative actions it requires. From our different faith traditions we are deeply concerned about the inaction on climate protection and outraged over the injustice that short term extraction and CO2 emissions create. Activities in our economic, political and social systems are driving rising global temperatures, ocean acidification, soil degradation, chemical pollution and species extinction at rates unprecedented in our human history. To date, our rate of greenhouse gas emissions will lead to a +4.8°C global temperature rise by 2100, threatening the survival of all those we love and the eco-systems on which we now, and future generations will, depend.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has concluded that with urgent and unprecedented climate action we still have the chance to stabilize global surface temperatures to 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels. This would save millions of people from suffering and loss of life, hundreds of thousands of species from extinction, and would allow the survival of many sensitive eco-systems. Every day of delay brings us all closer to failure.

Paris Agreement – parties have to deliver!

The Paris Agreement has been a milestone on the way to fight and address the adverse impacts of climate change. This legally binding framework must be implemented with concrete actions and requires strong will and policy to succeed. However, today we are deeply concerned about the lack of willingness to curb emissions fast enough to keep temperatures from rising over 1.5 /2 C as called for in the Paris Agreement. Short term political wins and short term economic gains are deeply challenging the spirit of cooperation that made the Paris Agreement come to life, and obstruct its effective implementation. The failure of nearly all governments to embrace sufficient climate action needed to stabilize temperatures to a 1.5 C limit is a failure of humanity to act.

Act now – no excuses for inaction.

We speak at a time when the knowledge, renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies, sustainable farming methods and consumption patterns exist for rapid transformation of those activities driving climate change. Yet, instead of sufficient action, we see a growing number of leaders in

governments and businesses, particularly in the fossil fuel and industrial agriculture sectors, laying the groundwork for future support of various forms of climate engineering. These 'technical fixes' remain unproven at scale, present a profound moral hazard, and will create a host of unintended consequences leading to additional social and environmental damage. Some of these approaches may address symptoms of climate change and offer limited benefits to vulnerable nations, but they would fail to address the root political, cultural and economic causes of the climate crisis and would do nothing to reduce the air pollution generated by burning fossil fuels which kills millions of people annually.

We must not allow dreams about a collection of unproven technological solutions to replace more common sense approaches. For example, nature-based solutions are essential to addressing the climate crisis, particularly the protection, restoration and sustainable management of the world's tropical forests.

Youth demands intergenerational justice

We still have the chance to avoid profound suffering now and in the future. Today youth all over the world are demanding Climate Justice. We as people of faith want to add our voices, saying as we have for years now, that the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth are completely interconnected.

Just economic transitions

Climate change illustrates a global injustice that must be solved with a just transition. A minor percentage of the inhabitants of the Earth contribute the major part of CO₂ emissions. The climate crisis is systemic, and reveals that economic systems that need the exploitation of the earth beyond its limits also exploit people and create inequality. Workers depending on a fossil economy and other polluting industries must be involved in the transition and not be left behind.

Injustices generated by economic or political structures worsened by the environmental crisis are more difficult to overcome. As faith leaders, we make this a moral call to conscience. We hold our political leaders responsible for the protection of their current and future citizens from avoidable suffering that our inaction will create.

Climate Justice must include Social Justice

The country that was going to host the COP25, Chile, lived the consequences of its extractivist and neoliberal model over the last few weeks when its people rose up for more dignity. The repression used by the government in reaction show how human rights and the rights of nature are intrinsically connected. We are all part of the earth and respect for our integrity is at the heart of the struggle for a socio-economic system that honours life. In this sense the climate crisis is also a cultural and spiritual crisis.

We promote a systemic, cultural and spiritual change that may be translated into economic and political transformations in the ways we live, produce and consume. It is essential that our lifestyles and government policies develop respecting the limits of the planet. This calls us to defend the most vulnerable in our world. In our different faith traditions we find orientations that speak about the importance to abstain in favour of the less fortunate. Fasting for the others' rights to a good life.

Our common home Mother Earth is under threat – our faith demands us to speak and act.

As people of faith we share the understanding that life is a gift to us and we should share it and be responsible in our actions. Climate crisis is for real in faith communities all over the world. Faith communities are often the first to respond to climate related catastrophes. But our different faiths tradition urge us to speak out and respond to the injustice climate change We are called to treat our common home, mother Earth, in a way that does not risk the future. Faith communities all over the world underpin our values and our understanding of what a good life should be. Too often the importance of our values, spirituality and faith traditions are ignored by those trying to solve the climate crisis. Faith traditions from all over the world can be the pivotal force in coming to terms with the situation we are in now.

The voices of transformation that need to be heard

In the transformations we need, the voices of excluded groups, such as women, people of colour, indigenous peoples and youth are especially important. Indigenous peoples are among those who are in the forefront in the fight against climate change. Indigenous peoples often have in their diverse and nurtured traditions an understanding of the interconnectedness between all life on Earth, and long term perspectives involving the wisdom of ancestors and caring for the generations to come. They offer a gift that is needed for sustainable and just climate action.

No time to wait – we have hope.

We have no time to wait. As faith communities we seek to offer a positive and empowering voice of hope over fear, of compassion over indifference, and urgent and fair action as a moral obligation. We encourage personal and political responsibility, immediate and just climate action, sufficient climate finance, and a positive transformation of societal structures as well as a change in mindset.

We have faith and hope that as humanity we can come together to address the severe climate crisis and open windows to a better future.