



World Earth Day 2020

IBVM and CJ network call on the United Nations and leaders to address climate change on the 50th anniversary of International Earth Day

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Institute of the Blessed Virgin
Mary – Loreto Generalate

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Climate change presents the biggest challenge to the future of humanity and the life support systems that make our planet habitable. During this uncertain time of pandemic, especially, the entire world faces the situation of climate crisis and, to an extent, comes a step closer towards mass extinction.

This year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of World Earth Day and the Earth Day organizers chose climate action as the theme for this jubilee year. Climate change lies at the heart of environmental degradation and the profound change our planet is experiencing.

There are no borders in relation to a climate emergency and multilateral cooperation is required if we are to reverse the damage. In 2015, the UN member states signed the Paris Agreement on Climate Change to protect our earth for future generations. They promised their citizens and committed to:

- Reducing the amount of harmful greenhouse gas produced and increase renewable energy - wind, solar and wave power
- Keep global temperature increase “well below” 2C (3.6F) and to try to limit it to 1.5C
- Review progress made on the agreement every five years
- Spend, by 2020, \$100 billion dollars a year in climate finance to help poorer countries with a commitment to further finance in the future.

Unfortunately, the excitement engendered at the time has been followed by a gradual decrease in the political commitment of governments to implement the agreed actions. Each annual Conference of Parties (COP) meeting from 2016 to 2019 has led to greater disconnect between the slow United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 1992 (UNFCCC) process and the action demanded by concerned people around the world.

The Religious Sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM) and the Congregation of Jesus (CJ) work in collaboration at the United Nations to promote a more humane, just and sustainable world. We are an NGO associated with the Department of Global Communications and ECOSOC at the UN. This paper is a result of the work of the Sisters and their associates on the ground in seven countries in the field of education particularly of women and girls, health care, spiritual and social welfare and community development.

Water and Biodiversity

Fresh water is crucial to human society – not just for drinking, but also for farming, washing and many other activities. It is becoming increasingly scarce due to climate change with a number of countries already suffering from lack of water.

In Australia, a prolonged period of drought lasting from about 1-7 years had a serious impact on biodiversity. Low water and over-heated water resulted in repeated mass fish kills, migratory birds did not appear in their usual nesting places and there was a rapid decline in water and estuary birdlife. Native animals were forced to move from their natural habitats and many did not breed.

This drought was the preamble to the worst and most destructive fire season in the world’s history with 18 million hectares of land burnt, including forest, the natural habitat of animals and thousands of homes. At the same time, fires also burnt millions of hectares of forest in the Amazon and in parts of the United States. Billions of animals were lost, not to mention hundreds of millions of bats, insects and frogs. The

disappearance of frogs and bees meant there were fewer pollinators and the impact on food crops, orchards and animal breeding was enormous.

Australia is one of the few mega diverse countries in the world, with 70% of the world's biodiversity and conservatively has a quarter of a million species. Loss of species due to climate change, habitat destruction and farming practices were already threatening many unique species but post the fires some of our most iconic animals, such as the koala, are in danger of extinction. **We call on the UN and member countries** to recognise the interconnectedness of climate, water, biodiversity and the positive future of the planet.

In December 2019 water storage levels across Australia had fallen to 48%, crops were failing and animals were being sold off. There were regional towns, for the first time in their existence, running out of drinking water. The lack of water caused rivers and lakes to dry up, massive fish kills occurred, frogs, aquatic animals and insects disappeared. **We call on the United Nations** to increase its efforts to bring industrialists and farmers together to discuss, plan and take action on that most fundamental of human needs – water.

But the issue is also affecting other countries such as Peru where longer and warmer temperatures result in glaciers melting much faster than expected, leading to water shortage. In India, toxic industrial waste, untreated sewage and household garbage discharged into the rivers like Ganga and Yamuna have caused major water pollution leading to illness as people use contaminated water for drinking, washing and farming.

The closing of factories, due to the lockdown to stop the spread of COVID-19, has, inadvertently, improved the water quality of rivers in a number of countries including India. The UN and member states could use this situation as a catalyst to improve the discharge of waste into the river systems. **We call upon the United Nations** to evaluate and learn from the devastating effects of the Coronavirus and the relevance of its effect on Climate Change for the future.

We call on the UN and member states to collaborate and plan ahead for water needs and invest in research and development of water-saving technologies needed to address water scarcity. Wealthier countries need to assist developing countries in building engineered water redistribution, including building storage reservoirs, water harvesting and efficient pipelines. They also need to consider the use of water recycling plants in the reuse and recycling of water and desalination plants to convert saline water to freshwater.

We call on the member states to scale up their financial commitments, critical for dealing with loss and damage, adaptation and transition to carbon neutrality. And to commit at least 50% of international climate finance to adaptation initiatives, including technology, to address the needs of vulnerable people and countries.

Health

Climate change has directly contributed to the rise of tropical diseases like malaria, cholera, and dengue. This is because rising temperatures favour the breeding and thriving of mosquitoes, which are vectors of such diseases. These diseases are often fatal without proper medical attention and pose a serious problem to public health.

We face a climate crisis with irregular weather patterns across the world worsening and hampering the lives of millions of people. This makes agricultural land susceptible to insect attacks, droughts, floods, and a host of other problems. It causes unprecedented damage to the nation's funds as catastrophic events, such as floods and droughts, wreak havoc leading to the loss of both property and lives. It also results in widespread agricultural damage, as is the case in India where millions of farmers are bereft of their income,

and the nation, of its food. This affects food production and causes malnutrition, nutritional deficiencies, and an increase risk of non-communicable diseases. The resulting increase in food prices, makes this basic need difficult for those in poverty to access. This is a global challenge as it occurs in other countries.

Climate change leads to bad air quality, negative effects on food and water, and extreme weather conditions. All these will have an adverse effect on human health in many ways. In India the air quality is a serious issue, with India's cities among the top cities in the world with the worst air quality.

The health effects of climate change include increased respiratory and cardiovascular disease, injuries and premature deaths related to disasters from extreme weather events, heat-related and mental health illnesses. The impacts on health largely depend on geographical location, level of income, race and age. The World Health Organization estimates 80 percent of the health effects of climate change impact children under five years of age.

Health professionals have a tremendous opportunity to protect their patients from the impacts of climate change by working to create sustainable, climate smart hospitals and health systems. Choosing to bring forth a cleaner and greener economy improves air quality, leading to immediate health benefits for all people in communities.

We call on the United Nation member states to implement the Paris agreement effectively. Member states must adhere to solutions that are coordinated at an international level and formulate national adaptation plans for responding to climate change. These include several such measures that reduce carbon emissions and utilize renewable energy resources. It is imperative to move towards lesser carbon consumption by imposing restrictions on pollution causing industries through strict legislative enactments.

We call on the United Nations to urge member states to invest in renewable energies. Countries that are rich in non-renewable energies need to redirect investment to renewable energy technologies and invest in skills transfer programs and training for those employed in non-renewable energy industries. Just transition principles must be included in all aspects of transition from planning to legislative, regulatory and advisory processes.

With the rising temperatures and unpredictable weather caused by climate change, many are at risk of losing their lives due to heatstroke, and such related disorders. Those particularly susceptible are manual workers and labourers, farmers, athletes, maintenance workers, etc. who have to spend hours out in the sun. They face harsh weather elements like fierce winds and sandstorms.

We call on the United Nations, through the International Labour Organization, to clamp down on unsafe working conditions. We call upon Member States to realize the gravity of climate change and its detrimental effect on the workforce, and ask them to revise policies allowing people to work in such conditions.

In Kenya, as in other countries, waste is dumped where many poor people live. This is becoming a critical health hazard. **We call on the United Nations** to provide guidance and assistance to countries in setting up systems to dispose of all types of waste.

Women and Children, Gender Equality

Women are much involved in advocacy, recycling, reuse and reducing of materials and are the best custodians safeguarding our environment against the adverse effects of climate change. A very high percentage of our woman have little or no employment. They could be trained in Waste Management that could be a great income generating project. **We call on the United Nations** to work towards empowering

women and girls, especially those involved in environmental conservation in their communities, as they constitute a higher percentage of the population.

We call on member states to boost gender-responsive climate action, including gender-just climate resilience measures; to ensure the safety of women and girls and protect and uphold their dignity as well as promoting treatment equal to their male counterparts. To bring about structural change we call on governments to institutionalize equality measures to the greatest extent possible.

As the impact of climate change intensifies, it is the children and young people of today who will face the worst effects. Children and youth need to be at the centre of climate change strategies and response plans.

We call on the United Nations to fund and set up a global dedicated virtually interactive online youth oriented knowledge sharing platform. Here young adults from different countries can share their challenges, seek or suggest remedies, voice their opinions and share insights on issues impacted by climate change ranging from health, air quality, safe drinking water, food and agriculture, environment and others that matter to them. It could also provide an opportunity for the young people to offer solutions and suggestions on ways and means to curtail the impact of climate change.

We urge the United Nations to direct member states to train and empower the youth to monitor air quality and use the data they collect to call on their governments to take necessary actions.

General:

We call on the United Nations to:

1. Lead with a united voice and keep before the member states and the human family the serious consequences of lack of effective action, collaboration and solidarity in the face of the climate crisis.
2. Put in place measures to ensure that the UK Government prepares adequately for COP 26 in order to combat Climate Change. This will include a clear and thorough assessment of the UK's fulfilment of its targets and promises, the measures in place to continue to work towards Carbon Emissions, practical measures to include all sectors of society at the meeting in Glasgow and to be clear and transparent in all negotiations regarding this meeting.

We call on our governments to:

1. Work with the United Nations to achieve strong global multilateral action to reduce emissions to 1.5C and to commit to submitting ambitious, revised, enhanced, national climate plans (NDCs) in 2020.
2. Learn from and collaborate with Indigenous people regarding their ancient traditions on caring for creation and to protect Indigenous rights including their land rights. Indigenous communities require information on new proposed legislations that impacts their lands, waters and air to properly participate in the processes of reviewing, changing or implementing the legislation. Information must be provided in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner while acknowledging that many Indigenous communities face multiple disadvantages and require support to participate in environmental advocacy initiatives to steward their lands, waters and air.
3. Encourage and collaborate with stakeholders in the tourism industry to measure the environmental impact of tourism in their country and develop guidelines for a more sustainable tourism model. There are numerous innovative initiatives where tourism industries have work in partnership with communities in the development of eco-tourism that supports local owned

accommodation, hospitality and food supply sources. For example in Kerala, India the local government linked the hospitality industry with the local community and local farmers resulting in the reduction of food waste, regeneration of mangroves, community based tourism including homestays.

4. Ban the production, distribution and sale of all non-essential single-use plastics and all single-use plastics that are not easily recyclable or have additives that make them non-recyclable, including thermoset plastics.

We have the responsibility to act as a trustee of the rich natural wealth for the future generation. The issue is not merely about climate change it is about climate justice. It calls for a collective human action and a comprehensive response.

We need climate action now. In the same way that the global community had to work together to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, a coordinated global response is also required if we are to save our Earth, the only planet we have. It is urgent that our leaders act responsibly on behalf of the global human community, especially to those who are most vulnerable and the future generations.