

## THE EARTH DOES NOT BELONG TO US – WE BELONG TO THE EARTH

### **An Ethics Statement from the World Council of Churches to the 9<sup>th</sup> Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP9) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Milan, Italy, December 12, 2003**

Climate Change negotiations have focused primarily on politics and economics. The World Council of Churches (WCC) considers the degradation of the environment to be primarily a matter of justice and spirituality regarding our relationship to the Creator, the Earth and the whole human community.

The highly industrialized nations extract the Earth's resources and pollute the global commons far beyond their per capita entitlement. The WCC has recently called for solidarity with victims of climate change. Inevitably, more and more people, especially in the South, will suffer from the impact of changing climatic conditions. It is on their behalf that we call once more for ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. Substantial reductions of emissions are in our eyes a spiritual and moral call. Increasing numbers of victims call for action.

The World Council of Churches maintains that the Kyoto Protocol must be ratified and governments must begin a new round of negotiations whose targets are based on the stabilization objective of the Climate Change Convention and a fair distribution of rights and responsibilities such as those proposed in the contraction and convergence scheme.<sup>1</sup>

From an ethical perspective, the following guidelines can express this solidarity with victims of climate change:

1. A rights based approach – The UN Declaration on Human Rights demands respect and protection of the right to life. Human-induced climate change threatens life.
2. Ecological debt – highly-industrialised nations are historically responsible for the majority of emissions leading to climate change that will disproportionately impact the most vulnerable in poorer nations and future generations.
3. Indigenous communities and carbon sinks – marginalized and vulnerable Indigenous communities will be among the most affected by climate change but in fact contribute to the stabilization of GHG emissions through their sustainable lifestyles and low energy use. They have sustained forest ecosystems as their habitats which are now being commercialized as carbon sinks assessed for credits to be traded. We have much to learn from their values which underlie sustainable living.
4. Public transport – motorized transport and the infrastructure supporting private cars are among the largest sources of emissions. Global and national policy frameworks must promote public transportation without reducing peoples' mobility.
5. Sustainability technologies – the current environmental crisis is a culmination of technological processes based on plundering natural resources. We need a

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<sup>1</sup> *Solidarity with Victims of Climate Change* (WCC) available from Dr. David G. Hallman, WCC Climate Change Programme Coordinator, Suite 300, 3250 Bloor St.W., Toronto, Canada M8X 2Y4 [dhallman@sympatico.ca](mailto:dhallman@sympatico.ca)

reorientation from such extractive technologies toward more sustainable ones such as renewable energy sources.

Inter-faith and inter-cultural solidarity can contribute to the global rehabilitation of the environment. The World Council of Churches has been deeply moved by the engagement of faith communities in Milan during COP9. The WCC endorses the interfaith perspective reflected by the faith communities in Milan that the Earth does not belong to us but that we belong to the Earth.

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Appendix to WCC Statement:

**World Conference on Religion and Peace  
RELIGIONS FOR PEACE – MILAN  
Message on the Occasion of the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the  
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change  
December 2, 2003  
Milan**

On the occasion of the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP9), we, men and women of different religions, join our voice to those who try to discuss and resolve the grave and urgent problems of climate change as a consequence of an idea of non-sustainable development.

The world, which may be seen either as created by God or as a reality which does not have a Creator, is in any case not a product of human beings but rather it constitutes a value for which human beings are responsible. We are called to promote a vision of life which puts at the centre attention to the existence of all life instead of the satisfying of individual desires.

It is important to learn the way out of ego-centrism, to rediscover and to appreciate the choice to “be in the world” instead of “having the world”. In the reality of this world, all things are inter-related, and every person is able to exist only within this inter-relationship, sharing both the beauty and vulnerability of life.

The way to put forward a programme which gives value in a balanced way to natural resources and is able to be effectively in solidarity with all women and men of the planet, passes through consciousness, that ecology does not grow and develop only outside of one’s inner self.

To take care of the future of the planet grows out of the willingness of changing lifestyles, through in particular within us the development of a sense of justice and a behaviour of respect which is a base of peace.

In Milan, in one of the most polluted areas of Europe, together with the communities and religions of which we are a part, we are engaged to follow life-styles and develop in solidarity models within the possibilities and the limits of the natural environment.

*Signed by representatives of Buddhist, Christian, Islamic and Jewish communities of faith in Milan.*