

## **Comments of the Holy See Delegation**

### **At Round-Table Entitled Climate Change, Adaptation, Mitigation and Sustainable Development**

**Milan, 10 December 2003**

Climate Change stands at the crossroads of environmental, scientific, technological, ethical, political and economic concerns for the human family. As such, UNFCCC implementation directly impacts the future sustainable development patterns of all States and of all peoples. Climate is the overriding context for the consideration of many other social and economic problems that the world faces today.

The Holy See Delegation would like to address some of the ethical issues related to measures that have been or will be adopted regarding climate change. While there has been very little discussion on this topic at Cop 9, it is after all precisely the ethical dimension which is to be found at the core of our actions.

Both scientifically and politically, it has been recognized that human activity is a significant factor in climate change. Further, human actions can play a crucial role in mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. The consequent ethical responsibilities are not limited only to single acts of individuals, but apply equally at the level of technical, economic and social structures and at the government level. There is, therefore, an ethical obligation incumbent on all individuals and societies, particularly certain sectors of society, to assure that all activity is oriented towards the common good, especially toward the poor.

One of the primary principles which must govern responses to climate change is the consideration that there is an order in the universe which must be respected. This principle not only sets limits to human activity but it directs it towards a careful and respectful use of the environment. When and if this respect for order in the universe is ignored or consciously violated, an imbalance is provoked that has inevitable consequences for all. Any limitations encountered need not be seen as obstacles but as opportunities to promote integral human

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development. These challenges give rise to the enhancement of research and technical capacity building.

True mitigation and adaptation can be realized only when human beings are placed at the center of concerns for sustainable development. The human person occupies a distinctive place within creation. Only by heightening the centrality of the human person, not by denying it, by stressing the responsibility of the human person for creation, not by ignoring it, are we better able to promote and preserve a healthy climate for all, especially the most vulnerable. Clear choices are then required based on justice, cooperation and solidarity among nations, all exposed to the common concern.

Complementary to this is the inalienable dignity of each and every human person. While the human person is part of the ecosystem, the person is distinct. We alone are free to make choices, even sacrifices, to plan for the future - for future generations - and to take steps to implement them. We, therefore, bear the responsibility for the choices that we make today and must assure that the common patrimony of humanity is improved and not destroyed.

In this regard, mitigation and adaptation efforts, in an ethical context, point toward a potential for new and sound sustainable development policies to be carried out in solidarity with our brothers and sisters throughout the world.