

**Caring for Our Common Home**  
**The Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si***  
**Special Event in Geneva on the**  
**Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si* by His Holiness Pope Francis**

This Special Event was held on 15 January 2016, for the diplomatic community, non-governmental organizations, members of the local parishes and other faith communities in Geneva and surrounding Swiss and French areas. The objective was to facilitate a deeper reflection and discussion on the Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si: Care for Our Common Home* by Pope Francis, especially with regard to its potential for influencing governments and other key stakeholders to implement action-oriented policies and activities at global, national and local levels. The conclusions and decisions reached at the COP 21 Meeting in Paris, as well as the potential environmental impact of the Sustainable Development Goals, were examined. The discussion also focused on effective methods to motivate individuals, families, and local communities to change behaviours that are destructive to the environment and harmful to their interaction with each other and with nature, so that the human family could assume more responsible stewardship over “our common home”.

**08.45 – 09.00: Welcome**

**09.00 – 09.10: Call to Order and Introduction by the co-Organizers**

The moderator of the event, Mr. Jorge Dias Ferreira, Main Representative to the United Nations, New Humanity which also serves as Coordinating NGO of the Forum of Catholic-Inspired NGOs in Geneva, welcomed the 350 participants at the event, and called the meeting to order.

H.E. Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer, of the Holy See to the United Nations and Related Organizations in Geneva, added his own welcome to the participants. He noted that the main reason was to benefit from the insights of His Eminence Cardinal Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace of the Holy See, who also was deeply engaged in assisting Pope Francis in the preparation of the Encyclical Letter. The title of the document is *Laudato Si'*, which are the introductory words of a prayer by St. Francis, called *The Canticle of Creatures*. He pointed out that the concept paper which had been disseminated before the event presented several aspects of the document which focuses on our “Common Home”. He affirmed that Pope’s letter urges us to maintain a common objective – making this planet a more habitable and beautiful place for everyone.

**09.10 – 09.20: Opening Remarks**

**Mr. Michael Møller, Director-General, United Nations Office at Geneva**

Mr. Møller stated that he would like to open his comments by taking the opportunity to thank Archbishop Tomasi for his tenure in the Geneva diplomatic

community; it is planned that the archbishop will retire soon, and Mr. Møller offered words of gratitude for Monsignor Tomasi's work here in Geneva. "He has been an extraordinary colleague and has given us moral and intellectual leadership for which I much thanks should be expressed."

Mr. Møller stated his pleasure in opening this important event here in Geneva – it is important to hold this in Geneva, a close-knit community caring for all people, where we have great commitment to our Common Home. Last year ended with COP 21 – also we had the SDGs, the Conference on Finance and Development, Sendai, and other milestone events that occurred in 2015. We need collaboration of people of all faiths – *Laudato Si'* helps us to reach that goal.

The vast majority of people have come to accept the scientific facts of climate change. Realizing the impact of our actions helps us to realize our responsibility. Mr. Møller urged the participants to learn from our often unfulfilled New Year Resolutions. Quick and effective action post-Paris agreement is necessary.

What steps do we need to take? Accountability and Flexibility - a new global stock-taking mechanism is needed to evaluate the action on promises made by governments. Moreover, States are able to make even stronger commitments at any time. Collaboration with Parliaments and local governments will be necessary.

The Encyclical Letter contains a number of actions on what needs to be done. Ending the "throwaway culture" is an important and necessary action.

#### **09.20 – 09.40: Keynote Speaker**

**H.E. Peter Kodwo Appiah Card. Turkson, President, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Caring for Our Common Home – content and methodology of the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'***

The *Canticle of the Creatures* calls to mind that the earth, our common home, is indeed like a sister with whom we share our home and like a mother who embraces us. St. Francis is the example *par excellence* of concern for the poor and care for creation, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace. Talking about justice between the different generations invites us to ask what kind of world we want for our children and for future generations. This leads us to ask ourselves about the meaning of existence and its purpose in this world – what need does our world have even of us. If we do not ask these basic questions, says Pope Francis, it no longer is enough simply to say that we care for our future generations. Pope Francis invites us to listen to the cries of the earth and of the poor of the earth. Listening to them, Pope Francis invites us to an ecological conversion. Such a change of heart means to change direction by taking on the duty and responsibility of taking on the task of caring for our common home.

Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, who is quoted by Pope Francis in the Encyclical Letter, clearly states that actions that destroy our earth and the people in

it, are indeed sins. In spite of the enormous threat presented by environmental degradation, Pope Francis remains hopeful of changing trends to reverse course. The Pope affirms that men and women are capable of intervening positively in this world, so all is not lost. Hopefully, COP 21 has enabled us to make a new start. The Holy Father introduces the concept of integral ecology – the Pope asks why women and men are concerned about the environment but are not concerned about the people on this planet. This is a fundamental opportunity to examine the relationships with God, nature, and with each other. Nature cannot be considered something separate from us who live in it – we need to study nature, the economy, the behaviours of those of us who live in society.

It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions that lead to action. We need to look at the one complex crisis that is both social and environmental. We need to address the situation of people and to address needs of nature. We need hopefulness that lead to actions, which can restore nature and the humans who live in it. We need to address the intimate connection between nature and the fragility of the poor who live in nature. We need outright and honest dialogue among all sectors of society. We need to look at a new lifestyle and to develop a new way to pursue progress of society.

The Cardinal briefly outlined the six chapters of the Encyclical Letter:

1. What is happening to our common home?

We need to dare to transform what is happening in nature and transform it into our personal suffering. We have many climate change “deniers” – the debate is still ongoing. We have to recognize that human activity is one of the factors producing climate change.

2. Review of Christian thought and Tradition towards an understanding of the nature and our living in nature.

3. Some consider this as the center of the encyclical since it focuses on the human roots of the crisis. One thought is that everything can be fixed by technology. Other roots of the crisis include modern anthropocentrism and relativism. We need more human, more integral, thought and action.

4. Integration of concern for human life and concern for the environment.

5. This chapter addresses what we, can and be ready to, do. Dialogue is essential – all must come together and express their concerns for human life – dialogue must go on – relationship between politics and economy and relationship between religion and science.

6. Based on the conviction that change is impossible without motivation and expectations – this chapter offers the premise that the way to change can be found in the Christian spiritual tradition. The challenges of true commitment and real action are found in conversion. We inhabit a common home. Every action in that home includes a profound dimension. All are needed to make the necessary changes. Solidarity is what is needed to advance the events of COP 21. But, on way forward the solidarity is needed to make progress in implementing COP 21. For Pope Francis,

this encyclical is not merely focused on climate change – he calls this a social encyclical.

Cardinal Turkson thanked Archbishop Tomasi and all the participants for taking time to reflect on *Laudato Si'*. In conclusion, he asserted, “We received the earth as a Garden. We must not pass it on as a wilderness.”

Archbishop Tomasi thanked the Cardinal for his insights and for taking the time to come to Geneva to share this wisdom with the participants. He pointed out that, as the Cardinal reported, the encyclical is not just on the environment – it is on the human person who is living in the environment and, through this letter, Pope Francis shares his belief that it is possible to make the necessary changes in the way we live in this environment.

#### **09.45 – 11.00: Laudato Si': A Call to Action**

**Moderator: H.E. Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Ecuador to the United Nations**

The Ambassador opened this discussion by pointed out that this panel would reflect on *Laudato Si'* and the inspiration it provides to guide action. At the next to last session of COP 21, there was a loud and enthusiastic celebration, but this occurred before the final version of the document was available for States to evaluate its potential impact. This issue is an ethical one – both for governments and for all. The current system is unjust – only a few countries benefit because they have access to the patent system. We need a real transformation of developing economies. Equity is a concept that was given little attention during the COP 21 negotiations, but the encyclical addresses this – developed countries must pay for changes by reducing consumption and by enabling poor countries to address needs. The encyclical mentioned the need for universal solidarity. We need a model a democratic and sustainable system of development. The Encyclical mentions that we are only the residents not the creators of nature.

#### **1) The Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' as a resource for the protection and promotion of Human Rights. SPEAKER: H.E. Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Related Organizations in Geneva**

The Nuncio began his remarks by reminding the participants that the Encyclical has received a great deal of attention and has resonated globally, even during COP 21. It seems important to recall the meaning of the word “environment” used by Pope Francis, that is, relationship between nature and the society, which lives in it. Nature cannot be considered something different from nature and those of us who live in it. Nature includes society, economy, and the way we relate to each other. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions within natural systems and social systems. We are faced not with two crises, but with one complex crisis, and thus we need to seek an integral solution.

The impact of the environmental crisis on the enjoyment of human rights is understood quite well. The “throw away culture” – human beings are affected by this culture – causes lack of access to clean water, clean air, and even on the right to life itself. Pope Francis does not see the solution as being found only in the field of technology and science – the basic problem goes deeper – the way humanity has taken up technology in a one-dimensional paradigm. The idea of unlimited growth is very attractive to economists and financiers, but it a false notion. It is incorrect to assume that sources of energy are unlimited and can be renewed quickly. Such a paradigm results in the domination of technology over the human person. But how is it that technocratic dominance has ruled modern man, who has become a “slave” in the technocratic cycle. Pope Francis speaks of a false anthropology – thus the intrinsic dignity of the world is compromised and people find themselves acting against each other. Thus, the Holy Father says that we must reflect on the way we relate to the world and with each other. A misguided anthropocentrism leads to a misguided lifestyle - it leads to one person taking advantage of the other.

We need an approach that facilitates the proper understanding of the dignity of the human person – a theological understanding about the goodness and dignity of the person and of the way we relate to each other. Pope Francis speaks of the environment as a phenomenon that never stands apart – but always remains in relation to the Creator and to each other. This is integral ecology – leading to promoting the common good, subsidiarity and solidarity.

The Holy Father insists that the crisis is the result of bad ethical decisions, negative and selfish behaviours. We need connectedness and caring for each other. Placing the human person at the center of all ethical decisions rather than only technical or political decision-making alone.

## **2) The Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si* as a resource for the promotion of decent work for all, especially for the most marginalized.**

**SPEAKER: Mr. Raymond Torres, Director of the Research Department, International Labour Organization**

The speaker noted that the International Labour Organization (ILO) offers a diagnosis similar to that made in *Laudato Si*. It expresses concern about the “disconnect” between market forces and the needs of people. It should be possible for new technology to strengthen access to development; it should be possible to gather more support through the networks. As reflected in the encyclical, there is a certain skepticism, however, with regard to new technology and equitable access.

We now see more youth unemployment and jobs that do not allow young people to advance in a career that allows them to grow in job security and in pay. Instead of more security, we see more insecurity: 200 million people in the world find themselves unemployed or in situations of more insecure work. Working conditions are not consistent with decent work opportunities. There is more instability in employment relationships even for enterprises themselves. People are

facing difficult situations in which they have to accept insecurity in work relationships. There is more and more risk in the “social contract” itself. In the past, the social contract allowed people to believe that policy makers took decisions with the interests of the future generation in mind. Recent research has indicated that this is no longer the case. To the contrary, we have forced migration, social tensions, breakdown in functioning of social systems.

The views reflected both in the encyclical and by the ILO also agree on the root causes of the situation:

1. The idea that technology is treated as something exogenous – that humans have to adjust to changes in technology: the encyclical suggests that public investment could promote access to use of new technology; incentives for technology and science to help positive changes in society – but it is more profitable to make profit out of transactions in currency markets than in solving the food crisis. There are not the same incentives to promote access to education as to pursue additional development of technology.
2. Another “disconnect” – the idea that the problems can be treated separately: the encyclical sees the problems as being jointly caused but many institutions still are dealing with them separately.
3. Basically, governments and countries are left to their own devices – even though these problems are being understood as global – e.g., the Greek government as left to deal on its own with a problem that transcended Greece.

The encyclical letter provides some guiding principles for action which coincide with some ILO recommendations. It speaks of integral ecology as an overarching principle. SDG 8 proposes decent work – but now we need to look at follow-up – we need look at progress in all areas of development – not just of economic development. The ILO has taken the initiative on social protection floors throughout the world, but much depends on the availability of resources – this corresponds closely to integral ecology principle. The issue of inequality – ILO has much thought on the future of work project and this will lead to the International Labour Conference of 2019. The ILO would like to pursue additional discussion with the Holy See interlocutors on these issues.

### **3) The Encyclical Letter *Laudato Sì* as a resource for identifying equitable solutions to the current migration flows.**

**SPEAKER: H.E. Amb. William Lacy Swing, Director General, International Organization of Migration**

The environmental challenges identified by the Pope in this encyclical letter are closely related to the phenomenon of migration. The links between environment and migration have never been stronger. The Pope sees a strong link between the gospel and the poor, including migrants. We currently are facing “a gathering

storm” – long-term – of issues related to destruction of environment. We now can legitimately refer to climate migrants and climate migration. We are living in an era of unprecedented human mobility. Climate change is one additional root cause of the fact that this is an era of the greatest forced migration since Second World War.

We are in a new era - IOM as created a division for migration environment and climate change – tens of millions of persons will be displaced as a result of climate change. We must reduce the need for future disaster response by adapting our mitigation strategies.

We are facing the threat of “the perfect storm”. Climate change feeds into a perfect storm of unprecedented movement – all the driving forces are there. We have 75% of world’s poverty in the developing world and 75% of economic growth in the developed world. Pope Francis speaks of a throwaway culture, of environmental degradation.

The speaker expressed this concern: in order to bring the whole human family together, we need a conversation that includes everyone. Urgent action is needed. Large scale migration is inevitable, owing to the root causes of climate change – we need sensible, humane, fair migration policies and procedures. We have to develop an evidence base on cross-border disaster displacement. We have to protect much better and improve management of disaster-related mobility.

Migration is as old as humankind. Migration will remain, and we need to manage it fairly. In regulating migration, we must keep the focus on the people themselves and on their families. We can support those who will need to move, as a result of climate change, but to move with dignity.

### *Discussion:*

Permanent Mission of Libya – we need to eradicate the disease of corruption – economic and social corruption – and our planet will be the victim. We cannot ignore the noble message of Pope Francis – but we have to say that religious leaders should not be so silent as we watch the corruption take place. Religious leaders have to stop giving checks of forgiveness to those who are promoting corruption.

Permanent Mission of Romania – this event is the first effort to look at implementation of the Paris Agreement. Also the Paris Agreement is the first document that mentioned the relationship between human rights and climate change.

Other discussions: Another major problem is the issue of money – we have to talk about usury – negative use of capital – global corruption - Pope Francis mentioned this in the encyclical – question how can we protect the common good to protect the most poor people?

### *Responses from panelists:*

Mr. Torres – Corruption is an essential cause of grave difficulty – we need a much more coordinated approach – it is major cause of inequality. The question of money is crucial – three pillars – money, work, and land – how do we invest more in decent work – so that more equitable access to decent work and land could be more accessible.

Mr. Swing – the greatest challenge is to implement what was signed in Paris. Another aspect of corruption is the phenomenon of human smuggling which was major cause of deaths of 3700 lives lost in Mediterranean last year and of 5000 lives worldwide.

Archbishop Tomasi – we need to examine more carefully the phenomenon of corruption, for example, in extractive industries, which allows an impact on entire regions and on entire societies. The encyclical mentions some specific human rights, such as right to clean water, since it is essential for enjoyment of the right to life at the center of all human rights.

### **11.30 – 12.45: Analyzing the Content and Impact of the Encyclical Letter Moderator: H.E. Ms. Regina Maria Cordeiro Dunlop, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations**

The questions posed by Pope Francis include: Why are we here? What is the meaning of our common home? What do we want for future generations? – These inspire our reflections today but also inspired the discussions in Paris COP 21.

Degradation of the environment is a “sin against creation” – this message of the encyclical is conveyed not only to Catholics and Christians but to all people. It offers both a religious and secular message addressed to every human being.

The document advocates that the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from human, family, social and economic challenges. The issues are complex in nature and require solutions that are adequate to address the root causes, such as the strengthening of collective action. These are consistent with positions taken by the Brazilian government. The adoption of the Paris agreement was the latest step in the consolidation that started with first agreement reached in Climate Change Conference held in Rio de Janeiro.

**1) Popular education on climate change through the lens of Laudato Si’ – Video by CAFOD (Caritas of England and Wales)**

**2) The scientific and evidence base reflected in Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’ and what can the world expect post-COP21?**



**SPEAKER: Prof. Dr. Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, Professor of Climatology and Environmental Sciences, Université Catholique de Louvain; Chairperson, Energy & Climate Working Group of the Belgian Federal Council for Sustainable Development**

Why the IPCC (Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change)? – This was established by World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) in 1988:

- to provide policy-makers with an objective source of information

Key message from IPCC AR 5

- human influence on climate system is clear
- irreversible impacts for people and ecosystems by continued emissions of greenhouse gases
- many opportunities to integrate adaptation to slow the destruction

Since 1950, there has been continuous evidence of increase in global temperature – e.g., melting of glaciers, sea level increase. Concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> has increased to levels unprecedented in at least the last 800,000 years – Carbon cycle – unperturbed fluxes. Only the scenario that maintains global surface temperature increase above the pre-industrial level of less than 2 degrees per annum will slow down the degradation process.

Global temperature is rising and results in health implications, increase in precipitation, sea level rise- flooding, Potential impacts: Food and water shortages, increased displacement, increased poverty, increased flooding. Limiting climate change will require substantial and sustained reductions of greenhouse gas emissions. The window for action is rapidly closing.

Mitigation measures should include:

- more efficient use of energy;
- greater use of low-carbon and no-carbon energy;
- improved action on carbon sinks.

Substantial reductions in emissions will require large changes in investment patterns. Humanity must make choices that will create different actions (and affect prospects for effective adaptation) “Only together ... can we resolve these problems.”

For a full set of the presentation slides, link to: [www.climate.be/vanyp](http://www.climate.be/vanyp)

### **3) Caring for Our Common Home – an ecumenical and interreligious concern.**

**SPEAKER: Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, Secretary General, World Council of Churches**

The encyclical speaks of an intimate family relationship between us as human beings and our common home on planet earth. The World Council of Churches (WCC) has received the encyclical with great pleasure. The WCC has discussed these

topics during the last 4 decades and thus welcomes the opportunity to continue the discussion in the light of this encyclical. The encyclical has been addressed not only to other Christians but to all people – opening a wider horizon – has an ecumenical and interreligious appeal. It has been warmly received by Christian churches, but also there have been common documents of Jewish and of Muslim leaders.

There is a better understanding of the crisis, which previously worsened by a misunderstood concept of development. We need also to look at the right to hope – we know that things can change – humanity still has the potential to work together to protect our common home. There are reasons to hope – we saw many signs before and during the Paris event. The participants in COP 21 handed over 1.7 million signatures; many of these petition were signed and carried by young people. WCC has decided not to make any more investments in fossil fuels. WCC is nurturing hope, not only as psychological or spiritual encouragement, also is promoting action. Our basic human rights are all threatened by the degradation of environment. We have a right to hope – access to a reasonably good future – but this is also based in our faith in God who desires fullness of life in all humanity. We need to talk about hope as we critique ourselves – are our practices inside the churches bringing hope or not – what is our sin? What can we change and what is still possible to change – these two points are strongly made in *Laudato Si'*. WCC sees the Paris Agreement as a sign of hope – but with impatience concerning what is now happening with the environment. No document has united Christians and peoples of different faiths more than *Laudato Si'*.

One sector, however, has not been so vocal about this – the finance and business sectors have more tools to make this happen – they need to use these tools as a means of assuring our future. Why don't we involve them more in contributing to these efforts? Hopefully, some of us who go to Davos next week will be able to share these issues with the investment and business people. This new situation cannot be faced by a bigger gap between the rich and the poor. The technological, political tools are at home – we have reasons to hope! As a Christian, I say *Laudato Si'* (praise be to God!).

#### **4) The engagement of Catholic-Inspired NGOs.**

**SPEAKER: Br. Moy Hitchen, cfc, Advisor, Edmund Rice International**

“The Climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all.” (*Laudato Si'*, n. 23)

The invitation: debate, discuss, dialogue - which do we want – dialogue calls for deeper sharing. The first invitation is to dialogue with the heart and soul of moving closer to people because it is so important to the human race. The human person is strengthened by relationship between God , all creatures, nature

Brother Hitchen summarized the structure with easily understood terms:

1. What's happening
2. The Gospel
3. Our fault
4. We are all connected
5. Let's talk
6. Partnering – Dialogue

He identified five important dialogues:

- nation and nation
- national and local
- decision-makers and stakeholders
- politicians and economists
- religion and sciences.

The speaker then outlined the following programme that

- building partnerships
  - o welcoming the community of life
  - o reading the Gospel
  - o implementing the 17 SDGs (Strategic Development Goals)
  - o addressing Climate Change
- possibilities for earth advocacy
  - o defend earth rights and criminalize ecocide
  - o international environmental law
  - o Work towards an Earth Charter
  - o Implement 17 SDGs
  - o Develop corporate responsibility
  - o Defend human rights impacted by environmental damage
  - o Protect the environment through UN mechanisms
  - o Live sustainably
    - The Big Seven: land and wildlife, people skills, energy, transport, goods and services, water, waste

***Discussion by the panelists:***

Brother Hitchen insisted that there is no “general” right to any kind of development - only the right to “sustainable development”, because some forms of “development” have caused environmental degradation. We have need for courage and imagination to make real changes in the ecology.

Rev. Dr. Fykse Tveit called for the beginning of a new era of cooperation in this field, among Christian churches and others; WCC is merging programmes into a new one: Ecology and Economy. Education is more than what we tell our children – it is also what our children are telling us. *Laudato Si'* helps to make us aware of what is really important. There is no turning back by ignoring these issues.

Prof. van Ypersele affirmed that a key message in the IPCC report is that it is possible to lessen impact and address issues of environmental degradation. What has been missing so far is the will to take action – we need courage. To link different questions is perhaps one of the areas in which UN system can advance the discussions – improve the partnership among agencies, etc. On 22 April 2016, the Paris Agreement will be opened for signature at UN headquarters in New York. We need more “shall” than “should” in the document – but, on the other hand, the accord was developed by 195 countries – this means that many countries can put pressure on the few which may not take action.

#### **12.45 – 13.00: Concluding Remarks**

#### **H.E. Mr. Jorge Lomonaco, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations**

This was a wonderful way to start a year – with substance and relevance – taking care of our home and of humanity as well. The encyclical is a vastly comprehensive document – covering a wide range of issues but also linking all of them.

Dr. Jeffrey Sachs called this encyclical a great and timely gift to humanity. Through *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis has spoken to all of us about the ethical responsibilities that we have. Never before has an encyclical been so anticipated. The messages are most important but also there was intelligent timing – in the lead-up to Paris. The problems are a result of our behaviour – we are responsible for the damage that has been done – we have a common responsibility to protect the earth. The Encyclical forces us to think – to re-evaluate our political stance and personal choices – but even more importantly, we are given the imperative to act.

We were reminded that this encyclical is not only about climate change – it is a social encyclical and there are social consequences of climate change. We are mandated to communicate – we should feel the need to act, even though the Paris Accord is missing this specific mandate. We need to put human dignity at the center of all our discussions and this dimension unfortunately was lost in Paris. We need to work together on our Common Home and we have a right to hope. Humans are capable of correcting our actions – we have done this in the past and we can do it again for the sake of our common home.