

THE REAL CHALLENGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE AN APPEAL TO CHURCHES

The 7th General Assembly of the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) met in Triuggio near Milano, invited by the Federation of Protestant Churches of Italy, from September 24th to 28th 2008. The theme of the assembly was “The real challenge of climate change”, building upon the role ECEN had in the 3rd Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu in September 2007 and the recommendations adopted there, in particular that churches observe Creation Time.

THE SCIENCE

Global warming is a reality. It is impossible to explain climate change only from natural forces. 20 to 30 percent of plants and animal species run an increased risk of extinction. Climate change is already causing unavoidable consequences. Those who are suffering most are poor people in the south and not those who profit from greenhouse gas emissions, mostly in the rich countries of the north.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that the industrial countries in the north have to reduce their CO₂-emissions by between 80 and 95 percent by the middle of this century to keep warming below a global average of 2°C. But even this goal is in danger if we do not start immediately. **The time to act is now!**

THEOLOGICAL BASIS

The concerns of the environmental movement provide many opportunities for a witness to our Christian faith, to the message of life and hope that the Saviour who so loved the world became part of it in order to save it.

From a Christian perspective acting against climate change makes sense as a sign – a sign that Christ the Word of God comes into the world to give life and not death, and our appointed task is to preach this good news to *all creation*.

The roots of human destruction of the environment are to be sought not just in actions, but in our most deep-seated attitudes. It is not enough for humans to keep alive by consuming the world around them; they need a *relationship* with the world that is not purely utilitarian and market-based.

The term 'environmental crisis' is not strictly accurate. The present crisis is not really outside us (a crisis in our physical surroundings), but it is a crisis within us, a crisis in the way we think, feel and act.

NETWORKS AND DIALOGUES

Let us build new networks and enter into new dialogues. Let us build bridges between 'religious' and 'secular', as in our ecumenical network we are already breaking down the barriers between denominations. Let us find common ground with scientists, enriching one another with our different insights into the wonder of creation, and keeping each other from the dangers of anthropocentrism and arrogance. Let us work with politicians and

governments, the leaders in this task of reshaping society, bravely offering prophetic criticism and affirmation.

CHURCH'S CONTRIBUTIONS

It is imperative that Churches accept the challenge to come together to overcome the threat of water shortages, decreased harvests, natural disasters, diseases, migration and many other projected effects of climate changes. We encourage Church leaders to develop their own comprehensive road-map, with timescales and clear goals, to help ameliorate global warming.

- It is vital that education inspires the urgently needed shift, in dominant consumer societies, to simpler life styles and to macro changes in politics and economics. Ecology and climate change needs to be included in all ministerial training.
- Many significant projects are already going on in the Churches. We recommend Churches to link to each other and to other faith communities. We recommend further that they continue to save energy, use energy efficiently and go for renewables. We challenge every church to promote new eco-management programs within their congregations before 2010. We encourage them to invest into spiritual development, education and cultural needs instead of material things.
- In their congregational life Churches must be role models of a new type of mobility in which we move from the paradigm of speed of cars, planes and ships to cleaner and less risky modes of transportation.
- It is essential that our Churches address water issues as an expression of the Gospel's call to care about the planet for now and for the future. In particular they should make lifestyle changes to protect water resources, in particular reducing our personal demands and use of fresh water, campaigning for justice for those whose water is most threatened by climate change, and taking steps to recycle and re-use water from our buildings and land.
- We invite churches to enjoy the diversity and beauty of creation and take responsibility for it. We recommend to every congregation and community to start practical or awareness-raising projects on biodiversity. Nature conservation organisations have a lot of experience and are willing to assist. The concern for the protection of biodiversity is also a contribution to the debate conducted within the decade to overcome violence.
- We invite churches to monitor governments, EU and UN discussions and decisions on climate change and related issues. Churches in the EU should address governments and political representatives in the European Parliament in the next few months as important decisions will be taken. EU commitments must not be achieved through offsetting emissions: significant cuts of greenhouse gas emissions have to be achieved through efforts here and now.

COMMITMENT

The new society we have to build must be based on a spiritual conversion; a *metanoia*. Let us confess to God and to Creation: *We have sinned against you; forgive us, and give us strength*

to begin anew.

Let us be witnesses of hope at a time when many people despair, preaching the good news that God who so loved the world became part of it in order to save it.