Vatican
EarthBeat



Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, June 25, in Rome (CNS/Paul Haring)



by Joshua J. McElwee

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Vatican City — July 5, 2018

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The Vatican's secretary of state warned July 5 that humanity is facing a "possible collapse" in the Earth's ability to sustain life, as part of a two-day conference hosted by the Catholic Church to urge global leaders to mitigate the devastating impacts of climate change.

In an address opening the "Saving Our Common Home" event, Cardinal Pietro Parolin said there is a "clear urgency" to the task and that people around the world, "as members of the common household, need to come together."

The Vatican's Dicastery for Integral Human Development is hosting the July 5-6 event among some 400 global faith leaders, scientists and politicians with hopes to influence separate meetings later this year of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the U.N. Climate Change Conference.

The conference is pegged to the third anniversary of the publication of Pope Francis' 2015 environmental encyclical "*Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*."

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> —Cardinal Peter Turkson
>
> —Cardinal Peter Turkson" target="_blank">Tweet this

Cardinal Peter Turkson, the head of the dicastery, opened the event by saying the planet is "on the brink of an unprecedented global catastrophe." He said effects of climate change, including warming temperatures and rising sea levels, "place a question mark on the very future of human existence."

"Is our world listening? Or do we find new ways of inviting our world to listen?" Turkson asked, before telling participants: "That will be part of the task of our gathering here."

The Vatican event, which Francis will address July 6, is being organized in three consecutive parts: examining the current state of global environmental concerns, discerning the best actions to take, and inspiring a "massive movement" to care for the Earth.

Each of the parts involves plenary sessions and small group meetings, leading to drafting of "action plans" for several upcoming world meetings, including the October annual sessions of International Monetary Fund (or IMF) and World Bank and the December session of the U.N. Climate Change Conference, known as COP24.

The meeting represents one of the strongest calls for action from the Vatican to world leaders since the publication of *Laudato Si*', which Francis has said he wrote with hopes of influencing the discussion that eventually led to the 2016 Paris Agreement, in which 195* countries committed themselves to acting to stop climate change.

One of the organizers for the conference said the Vatican recognizes that the global political environment has changed significantly since the 2015 publication of the encyclical, and that it now needs to push more concertedly for action.

"The political environment is tougher," said Fr. Augusto Zampini Davies, an Argentinian who directs development and faith issues at the Vatican dicastery. "But precisely because the environment is tougher ... we should work harder in collaboration with lots and lots of people."

"We need to convey all this good energy. ... We want to create a synergy that can bring an explosion," said Zampini. "The church wants to help the international community to have a good discussion and a good proposal for action at COP24."

Following Parolin and Turkson's talks July 5, the conference started off with brief presentations from five young people from different continents.

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Jade Hameister, a 17-year-old Australian who is the youngest person ever to ski both the North and South Poles and to cross the polar ice cap on Greenland, said that during her visit to the North Pole the sea ice was so thin in sections that there were areas of open water where there never had been before.

"I call on the United Nations Climate Change Conference ... to put aside our differences and to think and act as one species facing an extinction event of our own making," said Hameister. "For the first time in the history of our species, we have one common threat against which we must all act as one."

Macson Almeida, a young man from India, said he and other young Indians are looking to the future "with anxiety," knowing their country is likely to be among those most impacted by abnormal climactic events.

"I urgently appeal to those responsible to quicken the pace to climate negotiations," said Almeida. "Every year we spend negotiating, we are losing out on time."

Turkson said the Vatican is hosting the event with the help of a number of other organizations, including Global Climate Movement, Caritas Internationalis, The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, or CAFOD, and Global Solidarity Fund.

Among others scheduled to address the Vatican conference are Patricia Espinosa, executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; Naderev Saño, executive director of Greenpeace Southeast Asia; and Nicholas Stern, an economist and author of a landmark 2006 U.K. government report on the expected effect of climate change on the global economy.

Also set to speak are Myanmar Cardinal Charles Bo and John Zizioulas, the Eastern Orthodox metropolitan of Pergamon.

**This story has been updated to correct the number of countries that adopted the Paris Agreement.*

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