News
EarthBeat

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A herdsman walks past the carcass of a cow in Kargi, Kenya, Oct. 9. Kenyan bishops are expr

A herdsman walks past the carcass of a cow in Kargi, Kenya, Oct. 9. Kenyan bishops are expressing concern about the drought and are calling for government and faith leaders to work together to promote conservation. (CNS photo/Baz Ratner, Reuters)

Catholic bishops in Kenya called for a decisive and urgent response to the country's drought while expressing distress that it was affecting millions of people in more than 12 arid and semi-arid counties.

The drought, which has resulted from failed rains in two seasons, has left families without enough food and water. It also has snuffed out pasture for livestock, ending a lifeline for herder communities, especially in the northern and northeastern parts of the country.

"We note with concern that there has been a very slow response to the drought situation. ... We appeal to the government to respond swiftly and (in a) coordinated manner ... by providing both short- and long-term assistance and solutions to the

affected population," Archbishop Martin Kivuva Musonde, chairman of Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, told journalists at a news conference in Nairobi Nov. 11.

In September, the government and aid agencies estimated that 2.1 million people in 10 counties were affected by the drought. The numbers were expected to rise to 2.4 million by this month, relief agencies reported. Experts warn that the drought will continue in the coming months, following a delay in the October-December short rains.

Kivuva said it was unfortunate that 58 years after independence, the country was unable to find solutions to the perennial drought.

"It cannot be business as usual when Kenyans continue to starve and even die from drought, which can be easily managed through establishment of sound mitigation structures," said the archbishop. He also appealed to people to donate food and other forms of assistance.

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According to the archbishop, Kenya's frequent droughts are a result of climate change and environmental degradation. The church fears that the country's development model, which has created a culture of environmental destruction and depletion of natural resources, is part of the problem.

Over the years, the church in Kenya has engaged in environmental conservation campaigns with the national government, and the bishops urged county governments take up this campaign and partner with faith-based organizations.

At the same time, the bishops are inviting citizens to join in tree planting for environmental conservation. They also encouraged the government to facilitate access to affordable alternative energy to reduce or end the use of charcoal.

"If we all act to conserve the environment, the current effects of climate change that we are witnessing today in the form of perennial droughts, floods, food insecurity, water-borne diseases and respiratory infections will be reduced to manageable levels," Kivuva said.