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A boy is pictured in a file photo standing in front of wind turbines at the Ashegoda Wind Farm

A boy is pictured in a file photo standing in front of wind turbines at the Ashegoda Wind Farm, near Mekele in Ethiopia's Tigray region. Congolese Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu said the climate crisis is holding back African development. (CNS photo/Kumerra Gemechu, Reuters)

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NAIROBI, Kenya — October 19, 2022
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Congolese Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu urged developed nations to lead the way in addressing the current global climate crisis, describing it as "a tragic and striking example of structural sin" driven by indifference and greed.

Ambongo Besungu, archbishop of Kinshasa, spoke in an online news conference called at the end of African Climate Dialogues, a series of online sessions hosted by Catholic experts and members of civil society, ahead of the Nov. 6-18 U.N. Climate Change Conference (COP27) in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.

"We know that the Global North is largely responsible for the climate crisis and must contribute their fair share to address it," said the cardinal, who is the president of the Justice, Peace and Development Commission of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar. "This means leading the way in emissions reductions, providing funding for climate adaptation, loss and damage, and supporting countries in the Global South to achieve just levels of development."

The cardinal said the climate crisis is a lived reality for the people across Africa, and it was sometimes difficult to see the solution to the complex situation. He highlighted the recent summer heat waves in North Africa, the devastating storms and cyclones early this year in southern Africa and the worst food crisis in generations in East Africa.

In West Africa, cities are flooded, communities are submerged in creeks and conflicts that had simmered for years are now intensifying due to climate-induced displacement, he said.

"Wherever you look on this continent, a continent already struggling due to an unjust global economic system, you see climate change holding back the potential for development," said Ambongo Besungu.

The dialogues enabled the groups to learn from each other and enabled them to identify key policy priorities ahead of the U.N. meeting. Catholic leaders helped frame the ethical questions raised by climate change in relation to the action of God and the demands for justice.

In the communique, the faith and civil society groups call for Africa's transformation from fossil fuel to renewable energy, promotion of peace and regional integration in Africa, especially in the Congo Basin, and abandoning all false solutions to climate change, among others.

"Church leaders and the civil society organizations in Africa and beyond demand world leaders, business leaders and decision makers heed to this ... and in so doing, heed to the cry of the poor and cry of the earth," said the cardinal.

Ephraim Mwepya Shitima, Zambian climate negotiator, said as Africa moved toward COP27, all must agree that it cannot be business as usual.

"We emphasized that this must be an implementation ... and when we talk about implementation, we mean to address the real challenges that the populations in Africa are facing," Shitima told the news conference.

He said Africa has more than 600 million people with no access to electricity, and if a transition into green and clean energy was to occur, this was a good starting point that would also help address both social and economic and climate challenges.

Tasneem Essop, executive director of Climate Action Network International, said Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si*' was the most inspirational message that was received ahead of COP21 in Paris.

She said the world has not taken "the voice of faith-based organizations and civil society seriously enough; we are witnessing that we have moved backward instead of forward." She added that trends working against the theme of taking care of "our common home" were visible.

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