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EarthBeat



Sister Clara Mangwengwe, regional coordinator of the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa, is seen May 30, 2024, during a celebrations in Nairobi, Kenya, to mark the 10th anniversary of the Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa. She is standing in front of a board displaying the CYNESA logo. (OSV News/Fredrick Nzwili)

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NAIROBI, Kenya — June 4, 2024
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A Kenyan bishop urged young Catholics to act together to care for the environment and protect it, as he led the Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa in marking its 10th birthday.

Bishop James Maria Wainaina of Muranga said when he launched CYNESA in 2014 that he found a source of hope that young people were rising up to take care of creation.

"Gladly, some of you have committed to turn the tide," he told the gathering in Nairobi on May 30. "Now, you are here. You now know CYNESA. You now have heard about 'Laudato Si',' which is really a wonderful document for all of us. Perhaps you will hear about 'Laudate Deum.' Do not just hear. Hear and act," he said.

"And when you act, don't act alone. Work cooperatively and collaboratively. Work together. Work to complement one another and not to compete against one another," Wainaina added.

The network's anniversary involved a three-day youth assembly under the theme "A pilgrimage of reconciliation with our home; every little bit matters." Discussions during the May 30-June 1 panels in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, centered on "Laudato Si'" and "Laudate Deum," the two papal encyclicals on environmental care.

Allen Ottaro, CYNESA's founding executive director, said the network reaching 10 years was a clear indication that young people have the energy, are full of innovative ideas and determination to respond to the ecological challenges across Africa.

"Their enthusiasm and presence here is a demonstration of their concern and commitment towards the triple planetary crisis that we face: climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. The world needs to invest in young people to realize greater impact in addressing these issues," Ottaro told OSV News.

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Catholic religious sisters were among the participants of the assembly, also attended by young environmentalists, activists, climate and wildlife experts.

Sister Clara Mangwengwe, regional coordinator of the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa, told the assembly the network's action had inspired many people and turned the youth into champions of the environment.

"Your mantra … 'every little bit helps' — is encouraging," said Clara, a Zimbabwean missionary.

The sister welcomed the assembly's theme as timely, highlighting the devastating effect of floods, land and mudslides, severe droughts and extreme temperatures.

"The little actions I do, we do and they do — matter," she said. Clara urged everyone to be conscious of environmental degradation. "Bend down to pick up trash and place it in the right place, close the dripping tap to save that drop of the precious liquid, be more conscious of the food we serve and throw away," she said, calling these "simple but impactful actions."

"It calls us to more collaborative actions. It requires concerted effort. Well, here is one more force to reckon with, women religious!" she said, pointing out there are more than 30,000 sisters from close to 500 congregations in the association of consecrated women, spread across 10 African countries.

Clara said the sisters had established environmental clubs in their schools and were taking other actions, including in health care.

She gave an example of one sister who initiated the "A-child-A-tree" program at her health facility in Malawi. For every child born at the facility, the mother receives two tree seedlings, one fruit tree and one tree that is typical for the region, to plant and nurture.

"As the child grows, so do the trees until the child is able to take care of them. It is a simple, but effective initiative. … Every little bit helps," she said.