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EarthBeat



Sister Mary Wangare, director of justice, peace and integrity of creation at Franciscan Africa, reads a statement during an interfaith media briefing on the Fossil Fuel Treaty in Nairobi, Kenya, Friday, Sept. 20, 2024. The Rev. Dennis Nthenge, of Green Anglican, from left, Hakeem Khalid from Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims, the Rev. Peter Mbaro, director, centre for social justice and ethics at Catholic University of Eastern Africa and Kamita, of Hare Krishna group, join the briefing. (Fredrick Nzwili)

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NAIROBI, Kenya — September 25, 2024
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Faith leaders and climate activists in Africa announced their support Friday (Sept. 20) for an international treaty to halt the production and use of fossil fuels, the main cause of climate change, analogous to non-proliferation treaties governing the production of nuclear weapons.

"As people of faith, we have a moral duty to protect God's creation," said Ashley Kitisya, the African coordinator of the Laudato Si' Movement, the global network of Catholics working to ameliorate climate change in the spirit of Pope Francis' encyclical of the same name. "The Fossil Fuel Treaty gives us a tangible way to act on this duty by advocating for the preservation of our environment for future generations."

Kitisya spoke at a media briefing organized as part of the Season of Creation, an event observed annually by Christian denominations and Christian climate activists from Sept. 1 to Oct. 4. Following the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios' declaration in 1989 of Sept. 1 as a day of prayer for creation, the World Council of Churches and Roman Catholic Church leaders joined the movement and sponsored prayer and action to call attention to climate change.

The 2024 theme, "To Hope and Act with Creation," urges Christians and the world at large to reflect on what organizers say is a sacred responsibility in caring for the Earth. The Fossil Fuels Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative began in September 2022, when Vanuatu, a tiny Pacific island state, called for the negotiation of such an

agreement at the U.N. General Assembly. In December of that year, Tuvalu, another state in the South Pacific, made a similar call at the plenary of the United Nations Climate Change Conference.

Since then, momentum has grown, with the Vatican, the European Parliament and 101 Nobel Laureates endorsing it. "We are making progress, but there is still so much work to be done. We must continue to build momentum, to engage more communities of faith, and to push for governments and international bodies to recognize the urgent need for this treaty," said Kitisya on Friday.

Papa Prince, the African campaigner for the initiative, explained at the media event that though 13 states in the Pacific were leading the push, it was open to all nations. "It will be discussed fully when we have a sizable number of heads of state sitting on the table. We are very open to countries that are willing to negotiate," he said. "I urge African countries to join the discussions. We urge the faiths to help endorse it."

The treaty has three pillars: global transition to renewable energies; non-proliferation, which focuses on ending the expansion of any new coal, oil and gas production; and fair phase out, which focuses on a staged end to existing fossil fuel production.

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According to Prince, use of fossil fuels emitted 86% of the carbon dioxide in the whole world in the last decade, contributing to climate catastrophe on the continent. He explained that Africa’s fossil fuel sector is largely foreign-owned, while much of the fuels extracted are exported to foreign markets. Reports indicate that the industrialized nations are responsible for most of the carbon emissions.

Still, despite decades of coal, oil and gas extraction on the continent, 600 million people in Africa are without electricity or power.

On Sept.10, Catholic Bishop Leonard Ndjadi Ndjate, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Kisangani in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, said the treaty was an ethical imperative that served the best interest of humanity.

"Indeed, given the many dangers to human health, well-being and fulfillment, it is morally honest to take a clear stand against the proliferation of fuels. We cannot

afford to be indifferent to a danger that threatens human life," he told an online conference organized by the Laudato Si’ Movement Africa.

Ndjate is in charge of ecological pastoral care and environmental protection in the archdiocese, which is located in the Congo Basin, one of the world’s largest carbon sinks. He urged governments to prepare to ratify the treaty and developed nations to provide resources for the transition to renewable energies.

"We now need a treaty that aligns a broad consensus to halt the expansion of new coal, oil and gas projects and manage a global transition away from fossil fuels," said the bishop.