News
EarthBeat



Members of the Accra Archdiocese in Ghana Oct. 11, 2024, demonstrate against illegal mining. In a first-ever joint appeal released July 1, 2025, Catholic bishops in Latin America, Africa and Asia called for an end to fossil fuels and decried the exploitation of natural resources, ecosystems and people. (OSV News/Reuters/Francis Kokoroko)



by Brian Roewe

NCR environment correspondent

View Author Profile

broewe@ncronline.org
Follow on Twitter at @brianroewe

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

July 1, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The Catholic Church across the Global South sounded the alarm on climate change in a first-of-its-kind communiqué, calling for the end of fossil fuels while urging nations to avoid false "green" solutions that perpetuate exploitation of natural resources, ecosystems and people.

"Abandoning fossil fuels is not only necessary to reduce emissions, but also to repair an ecological and moral debt to the global South and communities affected by pollution, extraction, and climate change," said the declaration from the Episcopal Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, and the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar.

The 34-page letter is the first-ever joint appeal issued by the continental conferences of Catholic bishops in Latin America, Africa and Asia, representing 821 million Catholics. The letter laid out an expansive Catholic vision for the forthcoming United Nations climate summit, COP30, in Belém, Brazil, in November.

"At COP30, we demand that States take transformative action based on human dignity, the common good, solidarity and social justice, prioritising the most vulnerable, including our sister Mother Earth," the bishops said.

They described the U.N. climate gathering as a moment for the church "to reaffirm its prophetic stance."

"The Church will not remain silent. We will continue to raise our voice alongside science, civil society, and the most vulnerable, with truth and consistency, until justice is done."

Advertisement

The July 1 statement, released at a press conference at the Vatican, comes five months before COP30 opens in the Amazonian city of Belém, where nations will review updated national climate targets. Overall, countries have lagged in meeting current commitments, which remain well off-track from holding average global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the loftier goal under the Paris Agreement.

In 2024, global temperatures exceeded 1.5 C for the first time. Scientists have repeatedly concluded that greenhouse gas emissions — currently at peak levels — must be nearly halved by 2030 and reach net zero by midcentury to put the 1.5 C goal within reach.

To help monitor national climate pledges, and call out noncompliance, the continental church conferences are launching an Ecclesial Observatory on Climate Justice.

For more than a year, Catholic organizations, especially in Latin America, have prepared to bring a sizable church voice to the international climate negotiations taking place in the second-most populous Catholic country.

The declaration by the Global South bishops is the latest church intervention in international climate deliberations, following Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* and 2023 follow-up *Laudate Deum*; another unprecedented appeal from Francis and other leaders of world religions in 2021; and the Holy See's entry into the Paris Agreement in 2022.

In their letter, the Global South bishops aligned Catholics across three continents on the side of nature, Indigenous communities, family farmers, the vulnerable and women, who face disproportionate vulnerabilities to climate change.

In their statement, the bishops joined assessments of COP29's finance deal as insufficient, and reaffirmed church positions that wealthy nations repay an "ecological debt" to the Global South to help fund climate mitigation, adaptation and loss-and-damage efforts.



A view shows a deforested area in the middle of the Amazon rainforest near the Transamazonica highway in the municipality of Uruara, Brazil, July 14, 2021. (OSV News/Reuters/Bruno Kelly)

"The obligation to address this debt is not only financial, but also moral. The Global North must recognise its historical and current role in driving the climate crisis and take responsibility," the bishops said.

The bishops' declaration was unveiled at the Vatican at the same time the U.S. Senate was debating a massive spending and tax cut bill that would unravel much of the country's signature law in addressing climate change — a priority of President Donald Trump, who again has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement and whose administration has championed the "morality" of fossil fuels.

The bishops, in condemning climate denialism, said it is "a priority to eradicate perceptions that link the idea of 'progress' and 'development' to the intensive use of

fossil fuels."

They said the transition from coal, oil and gas to sustainable alternatives must have defined timelines and cease new fossil fuel investments or infrastructure. They also suggested taxing further those profiting from the industry.

But they also warned against false solutions and perils they see in the emerging "green" economy. They singled out the use of carbon markets and offsets, "which allow large polluters to continue emitting gases"; the mining of minerals for clean energy, which is "devastating territories and sacrificing communities, especially in the Global South"; and massive wind and solar projects imposed on local communities.

"We need to transform the economic and cultural model, replacing the logic of unlimited profit with integral ecology, that is, solidarity, justice, and care for creation," the bishops said.

The bishops pledged to do their part in education and fostering ecological conversion. They also called for "a historic coalition" across the globe to strengthen dialogue and democratic processes to the benefit of humanity and well-being of the planet.

"Inspired by the cry of the peoples and the urgency of climate collapse, [we] stand together to raise a prophetic voice from the Global South," they wrote. "We share a common conviction: without climate justice there is no peace, without ecological conversion there is no future, without listening to the people there are no real solutions."