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Statement by Archbishop Celestino Migliore to the U. N. Climate Change Conference

Rich Heffern | Dec. 21, 2009 NCR Today

"The Way Humanity Treats the Environment Influences the Way It Treats Itself"

Here is the statement Archbishop Celestino Migliore, permanent observer of the Holy See at the United Nations, delivered Thursday to the U.N. conference on climate change in Copenhagen. Archbishop Migliore is head of the Holy See delegation to the meeting.

"Mr President,
This conference reiterates how long it takes to create the clear and firm political will necessary to adopt common binding measures and adequate budgets for an effective mitigation and adaptation to ongoing climate change.
Is this political will slow in taking shape due to the complexity of the interlinking issues that we must tackle? Is it mainly a problem of conflicting national interests? Or is it the difficulty in translating into numbers the by-now acquired principle of common and differentiated responsibility? Or is it still the predominance of energy policies over care of the environment? Undoubtedly, there is a little of all of this.
However, it should be noted how the many considerations that are being developed during this process converge on a central aspect: the necessity of a new and deeper reflection on the meaning of the economy and its purposes, and a profound and far-reaching revision of the model for development, to correct the malfunctions and distortions. This, in fact, is required by the good ecological health of the planet and especially as an urgent response to the cultural and moral crisis of man, whose symptoms have long been evident all over the world.

With realism, trust and hope we must assume the new responsibilities which call us to the scene of a world in need of a deep cultural renewal and a rediscovery of fundamental values on which to build a better future. The moral crises that humanity is currently experiencing, be they economic, nutritional, environmental, or social -- all deeply interlinked -- oblige us to redesign our way, to establish new guidelines and to find new forms of engagement. These crises become thus the occasion for discernment and new thinking.

Obviously, this obligation requires the collection of detailed and accurate scientific analysis to help avoid the anxieties and fears of many and the cynicism and indifference on the part of others. It also requires the responsible involvement of all segments of human society to search for and discover an adequate response to the tangible reality of climate change. If the diagnosis -- by force of circumstances in the hands of science, information and politics -- finds it difficult to provide clarity and to motivate the concerted and timely action of those responsible for human society, reason and the innate sense of shared responsibility of the people once again must prevail.

Civil society and local authorities did not wait for the expected political and legally binding conclusions of our meetings, which take such an incredibly long time. Instead, individuals, groups, local authorities and communities have already begun an impressive series of initiatives to give form to the two cornerstones of the response to climate change: adaptation and mitigation. While technical solutions are necessary, they are not

sufficient. The wisest and most effective programs focus on information, education, and the formation of the sense of responsibility in children and adults towards environmentally sound patterns of development and stewardship of creation.

These initiatives have already started to build up a mosaic of experiences and achievements marked by a widespread ecological conversion. These new attitudes and behaviors have the potential to create the necessary intra-generational and inter-generational solidarity and dispel any sterile sense of fear, apocalyptic terror, overbearing control and hostility towards humanity that are multiplied in media accounts and other reports.

Mr President, The Holy See, in the albeit small state of Vatican City, also is making significant efforts to take a lead in environmental protection by promoting and implementing energy diversification projects targeted at the development of renewable energy, with the objective of reducing emissions of CO2 and its consumption of fossil fuels.

In addition, the Holy See is giving substance to the necessity to disseminate an education in environmental responsibility, which also seeks to safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic human ecology. Many Catholic educational institutions are engaged in promoting such a model of education, both in schools and in universities. Moreover, Episcopal Conferences, Dioceses, parishes and faith-based NGOs have been devoted to advocacy and management of ecological programs for a number of years.

These efforts are about working on lifestyles, as the current dominant models of consumption and production are often unsustainable from the point of view of social, environmental, economic and even moral analysis. We must safeguard creation -- soil, water and air -- as a gift entrusted to everyone, but we must also and above all prevent mankind from destroying itself. The degradation of nature is directly connected to the culture that shapes human coexistence: when the human ecology is respected within society, the environmental ecology will benefit. The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself.

In his recent encyclical "Caritas in Veritate" and World Day of Peace Message 2010 Pope Benedict XVI addressed to all those involved in the environmental sector an inescapable question: how can we hope that future generations respect the natural environment when our educational systems and laws do not help them to respect themselves?

Mr President,Environment and climate change entail a shared responsibility toward all humanity, especially the poor and future generations.
There is an inseparable link between the protection of creation, education and an ethical approach to the economy and development. The Holy See hopes that the process in question can ever more appreciate this link and, with this outlook, continues to give its full cooperation.
Thank you, Mr President."

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