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Catholic climate group reacts to Durban climate talks

Brian Roewe | Dec. 5, 2011 Eco Catholic

Climate talks in Durban, South Africa, entered their second week today, with negotiations producing little, to date.

Historically, more serious discussions materialize in the second week, but expectations around the world remain timid toward significant resolutions.

Among those attentively following the Durban climate talks is the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change. Launched in 2006, the Coalition works to share the U.S. bishops? statement on climate change [1], through providing resources and through various partnerships.

Dan Misleh, executive director of the Coalition, spoke with NCR about the Durban climate conference, as well as the conference?s importance to the Catholic community.

On Durban

?My reaction so far to the events in Durban is probably not much different from what has been reported,? said Misleh. ?These meetings are incredibly complicated, and developed nations ? proceed with great caution, and neither group wants to make the first move without clear signals from the other.?

He added that the conference offers a chance to reflect on how we as a country, as organizations and as individuals have contributed to the climate problem, and the impact it has had on the poor ? both in the U.S. and around the globe.

While progress in Durban has so far moved slowly, Misleh believes that the presence of ongoing meetings and dialogue on climate change is a good sign.

?In an issue as critical as the climate ? and the future of the planet ? it seems to me that progress and understanding stop if the dialogue stops, even if the progress and understanding is barely creeping along.?

Misleh doesn?t expect ?any grand new deal? to emerge in Durban. In addition to a renewed commitment to curtailing global warming to 2 degrees Celsius and to aiding poor countries adapt to climate impacts, he hopes a new roadmap for future, binding commitments emerges in the last days.

?I do hope that these negotiations will continue to drive home the point that climate change is a serious business that requires serious commitments on the part of all nations ? especially by those with the means to both create new ways of providing needed energy to a growing world and to help poor nations adapt to unfolding climate impacts.?

Misleh reiterated, whatever ultimately results in Durban has ?impacts on both real people and the future of the planet.?

On the Catholic view on climate change

?This conference, like those in the past, represents important opportunities for the Catholic community to remind ourselves that the climate crisis is not going away, and solutions are still needed,? he said.

Echoing Pope Benedict XVI?s remarks before the conference [2], Misleh said that the Catholic contribution to international climate talks is ?to remind the nations and the powerful interests involved in the negotiations that there is a moral measure to what they do and decide.?

The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change takes its lead on policy issues from its primary partner the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. In terms of climate issues, the conference has prioritized the protection of human and natural ecology.

Catholic teaching on climate change emphasizes three principles as the foundation of the church?s work: prudence, poverty and the common good [3].

According to the Coalition, the issue of climate change is a spiritual and moral issue, due to the relationship between God, his people and his creation. Such a bond requires everyone to examine their use of the world?s resources, with consideration to the effect on the planet and those in need.

As part of its efforts to encourage greater engagement in the protection and preservation of God?s creation, the Coalition launched the St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor [4], in 2009.

NCR will have more on the St. Francis Pledge and other efforts of the Coalition later in the week.

On Kyoto

?I don?t think the end of the Kyoto Protocol necessarily spells disaster,? Misleh said.

The first commitment period of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol is set to expire at the end of 2012. Serving as the only global agreement to reduce emissions levels (currently applying to only 37 industrialized countries), the Protocol?s future remains uncertain as countries have shown caution in renewing their pledges for a second period, tentatively set to run through 2020.

Misleh said that there is an urgent need for continued dialogue, and that doing nothing is not an option.

?For the Catholic community, we ought to measure any agreement not to who wins and loses. We should not be the ones dismissing the science nor seeing the climate crisis as an end to life on the planet.

?What we should be concerned about it how to protect this fragile planet upon which all life depends ? human and non-human ? and is deeply integrated and interdependent.?

Check back later this week for part two of NCR?s interview with Misleh, where he discusses the impact of climate change on developing countries, the Coalition?s current efforts and ways individuals can support the cause.

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Links:
[1] http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/global-climate-change-a-plea-

for-dialogue-prudence-and-the-common-good.cfm
[2] http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/pope-urges-international-agreement-climate-change
[3] http://www.catholicsandclimatechange.org/church_teaching/index.html
[4] http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/