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Focus on money destroys environment, says cardinal

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By Catholic News Service

DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA (CNS) -- Excessive focus on money is destroying the environment and dehumanizing people, said Honduran Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga, president of Caritas Internationalis.

Religious communities have a duty to call attention to the importance of the human person, who is "at the center of creation," he said while international leaders were debating the extension of legal limits on the production of greenhouse gas emissions.

Officials from nearly 200 countries were in Durban Nov. 28-Dec. 9 for United Nations-sponsored climate change talks.

The cardinal, archbishop of Tegucigalpa, led a 20-person Caritas delegation to the talks to press for a reduction of emissions by more than 40 percent by 2020 and for an agreement on behalf of poor countries that have been severely impacted by climate change.

In a panel discussion Dec. 1 with religious leaders on "What's God got to do with it?" when it comes to the issue of climate change, Cardinal Rodriguez said, "Our economic system and its search for money above all have dehumanized human beings. Religious groups have a duty to humanize them again."

According to a Caritas Internationalis news release Dec. 1, panelists, who represented Christian, Jewish and other faiths, argued that climate change is a moral issue, not just an environmental concern.

However, Cardinal Rodriguez said climate talks two years ago in Copenhagen failed even to focus on the environment and instead, only debated economic issues, resulting in a failed bid to create a worldwide agreement that would bind major industrial nations to emissions reductions.

"Our tendency to search for money is destroying the environment," he said.

During a Mass celebrated at Emmanuel Cathedral Dec. 4, the cardinal said people need to understand that a materialist, consumerist lifestyle not only has a harmful impact on the environment, it also distances people from God.

"We're filling up our lives with things, but remain empty inside. We're informed about everything, but have no idea where to direct our lives," he said.

People must shed "all the superfluous things in our excessive consumer society," embrace only that which is necessary for life, and be guided by God's peace and love in order to promote justice and solidarity in the world, he said.

The Durban meeting is the latest in a series to consider follow-up action to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which obligated industrialized countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by a specific amount. The Kyoto Protocol expires at the end of 2012, and the Durban encounter is considered crucial in forging an additional commitment period.

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