



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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COP 21: Progress on Climate Change -- Finally

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*"Everyone's talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God's creation."
-- Laudato Si Par. 14*

EXPERIENCE

Ursula's face glistens like the sun shining upon Pacific Ocean waves as they lap upon an island beach that was her beloved home. Her home is now a memory. She is a women leader among the 3,500 people of her Cartaret island nation. They are among the first climate refugees. And, she is one of our sisters.

I heard her story at the UN Conference of Parties Climate Meeting (COP21) in Paris in December 2015. Her courage and determination in finding a new home for her people is an inspiration to each of us as we face the difficult and daunting challenges of climate change. Amidst losing home, land, culture, stories, spirituality, and way of life, Ursula's island community works for the future. In their new location they have planted 21,000 fruit, nut, and palm trees for food and 6,500 cacao trees to create a marketable crop to support their people.

"The time has come for the women not to lament, but to aggressively come out for life and the needs of their communities," she said.

There were many stories at COP21 in the midst of public demonstrations, educational forums, prayers, and what seemed like endless negotiating about a temperature target, human rights, compensation for loss and damage, and equity.

A Bangladeshi sister shared another story of hope. Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world, and one of the most affected by climate change's rising waters, displacement, and food insecurity, installs 60,000-70,000 solar units a month. For those who have the least, the government offers free solar. Bangladesh seeks to be the first solar nation.

There were three great gifts in being part of COP21. The first was hearing stories from people around the world. The second was standing with thousands applauding the historic climate agreement made by 195 nations in the halls of Le Bourget. The third was the chance to join

spiritual leaders from many traditions, praying and witnessing to the spiritual, moral, and ethical values that are foundational as we address climate justice. The agreement is not perfect. Several women from Durban, South Africa eloquently stated, "The text before us is not perfect. But it is a foundation from which we can work. This is the best that we can get at this historic moment and it is a turning point to a better moment."

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SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Since 1992 the world has grappled with coming to a binding international agreement on climate change. The United States signed, but never ratified, the Kyoto agreement. Some nations ratified but failed in their obligations to reduce carbon emissions. The 2009 COP in Copenhagen was the last major meeting of parties. It failed miserably. That 195 nations of the world were able to come to an agreement at COP21 in Paris is remarkable.

The reality of climate change forced the nations of the world to compromise. Most nations are experiencing one or more of its effects, rising tides, unprecedented storms year after year, more intense droughts, greater water and food insecurities, economic chaos, and ensuing conflicts.

During COP21 civil society and people of faith were engaged on the streets, in public meetings, and during the negotiations. One of the chief French facilitators of COP21 told a press conference that this was the first COP where delegates really heard the voice of religious people and felt the ethical and moral imperative to act on climate change. The way forward requires strong religious voices and courageous action to make real the 2-degree Celsius goal and to be faithful to the aspirational goal of 1.5. The chant of the developing nations from COP21 must ring in our ears "1.5 to stay alive."

REFLECTION

"We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature." -- Laudato Si, Par. 139

The papal encyclical, *Laudato Si*, and other documents from the major world religions were instrumental in COP21. All of them speak of a universal communion, a sisterhood and brotherhood that reaches beyond human boundaries to all of created life and a call to healing, equity, human rights, and just actions.

Even as some suggest that climate change is too large to address, or it is too late, or we are too busy, we know that we cannot ignore the danger nor can we say no to climate justice and creation care. I am reminded of the scripture story inviting people to the banquet. They had many excuses. Living on Our Common Home is a banquet every day. Do we join the banquet, or eat alone and in excess and then refuse to clean up? When we refuse to join the banquet we fail to see the faces, hear the stories, and engage in serious solidarity work with brothers and sisters and all of creation at the table of Our Common Home.

ACTION

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The future needs each of us. There are many things we can integrate into our already busy lives.

Prayer and Reflection

- Listen to the voice within for your next steps. At its core the climate crisis is a soul crisis. We live in a

disconnected way that fails to understand the command to Love.

- Invite others to pray and reflect, join the Faith Climate Action Week in April, www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/programs/preachin

Lifestyle

- Take the Interfaith Power and Light Paris Pledge as an individual or congregation and make choices that will reduce carbon emissions. www.parispledge.org.
- Eat less meat or move to a vegetable based diet.
- Walk, carpool, and utilize public transportation.
- Grow food and support local food.

Policy Advocacy

- While lifestyle actions are important, climate change requires public policy shifts. Support renewable energy, renewable portfolio standards and other local and state legislation.
- Ask the candidates, "What will you do about climate change?"
- Support the EPA Clean Power Plan especially as it pertains to low income households and energy efficiency.
- Stay informed and act. Various groups including Interfaith Power and Light, Franciscan Action Network, and Maryknoll, follow agency policy and legislative concerns.
- Consider divesting from fossil fuels. www.greenfaith.org/programs/divest-and-reinvest/listing-of-known-religious-divestment-efforts

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