



Statement by His Eminence Cardinal PETER K. A. TURKSON,
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High Level Event on Climate Change
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Your Excellencies, President of the United Nations General Assembly and Secretary-General of the United Nations, distinguished Moderators and Speakers, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I bring you the greetings of affection and encouragement of Pope Francis. His Holiness wishes that this extraordinary gathering and honest debate bear fruit in the important decisions which await the world community.

The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro proclaimed that “human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development”¹. Today, over two decades later, Pope Francis’s Encyclical Letter *Laudato si’* insists that the plight of the poor and the fragility of the planet are intimately related, and so encourages the world’s governments to embrace integral ecology as the necessary approach to such development, inclusive of all and protective of the earth.

Through its Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the United Nations has availed itself of the best scientific research available. We need to allow such scientific conclusions to touch us deeply, so that we see and hear how the poor suffer and how the earth is being mistreated.

In the encyclical *Laudato si’*, the Holy Father argues that “climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. Sadly, there is widespread indifference to such suffering, which is even now taking place throughout our world. Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded”.

¹ *Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development* (14 June 1992), Principle 1.

Pope Francis further affirms that “the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all...” But “if present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us”. Prudence and precaution must prevail and humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption.

Pope Francis exhorts us to make courageous choices at all levels – as one global family, as nations, as communities, as individuals - “to reverse the trend of global warming” and to reduce the negative impacts of climate change.

Facing us all – as leaders and representatives of the world’s nations, as adults today and in the name of our children and their children – is the “urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced”. “The use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas – needs to be progressively replaced without delay” with intelligent and widespread access and use of renewable sources of energy, facilitating this energy transition.

Overcoming poverty and reducing environmental degradation will require the human community seriously to review the dominant model of development, production, commerce and consumption. Yet the single biggest challenge is not scientific or even technological, but rather within our minds and hearts. “The same mindset which stands in the way of making radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty. A more responsible overall approach is needed to deal with both problems: the reduction of pollution and the development of poorer countries and regions.”

Such a courageous review and reform will take place only if we heed “the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress”. The political dimension needs to re-establish democratic control over the economy and finance, that is, over the basic choices made by human societies.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, this is the path we must take. This is the path to Paris. This is the path to a better future.

Thank you very much.