

Brussels, 24th September 2021

«We need a new ecological approach that can transform our way of inhabiting the world, our lifestyles, our relationship with the Earth's resources and, in general, our way of looking at humanity and of living life (..)»

Pope Francis, May 21, 2021

Dear,

The COVID pandemic has brought to light, in the starkest of ways the fact that everything is interconnected and interdependent and that our health is inextricably linked to the health of the environment in which we live. This crisis keeps confronting us with the need to ensure that our social and economic systems are fair and equitable. If we fail in this urgent task the already dire conditions of the most marginalised and vulnerable will be exacerbated. Furthermore, the ramifications for all living beings and the planet will be disastrous.

Pope Francis speaks of how the Earth 'cries out.' In recent months those cries have taken the form of soaring temperatures with records being broken across many regions; of deadly floods and wildfires devastating communities across Europe; of material loss compounded by social and psychological trauma. The causes of such devastation are made clear in the 6th Assessment Report issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Climate change is happening more quickly than science anticipated and the global threshold to warming of 1.5°C is much too close. We are at the edge.

«Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems». (Laudato Si 61).

The opportunities to halt this tragedy are to be found at every level of society. The leaders of the European Union will soon have an opportunity to make a difference when meeting other world leaders in Glasgow in November.

Our response to the crisis will be judged by its effectiveness in mitigating the damage, by the just treatment of vulnerable people, and by whether the measures enacted will prevent the recurrence of disruptive events or make them unlikely. It is our collective responsibility to radically change our lifestyles, to put an end to mindless consumerism and predatory resource exploitation and to live in harmony within planetary boundaries. Being part of Creation demand no less.

The Parties to the United Nations Conferences on Climate Change and Biodiversity will soon be meeting to agree on their future ambition in response to the twin global crises of accelerating climate change and spiralling biodiversity loss. Recent increases in European ambition on the reduction of greenhouse gases are welcome and point in the right direction. The latest scientific warnings remind us, however, that further ambition is urgently required by all. Individual and collective contributions from the European Union to prevent ecological catastrophe must be equitable within a global effort, reflecting Europe's responsibility.

Finding a pathway likely to respect the 1.5°C threshold for global warming is a profound moral imperative. This is a matter of fundamental respect for Creation in all its forms - human and other-than human - as a gift from God. From the newest babe to the oldest forest, all of Creation is interconnected and has the right to flourish; they give glory to God by their very existence. Thus, upon this pathway, no more biodiversity loss can be contemplated.

«I renew my appeal: let us take care of our mother Earth; let us overcome the temptation of selfishness that makes us predators of resources. From God's hands we have received a garden, we cannot leave a desert to our children». (Pope Francis, Message for the launch of the Laudato Si Action Platform)

We no longer have any choice other than to stop what urgently needs to be stopped and to scale up what must replace it. Both science and sense emphatically call for an immediate end to new investment in fossil fuel infrastructure. It will also be necessary to phase out, without further delay, counter-productive subsidies that prolong the dependence of communities on fossil fuels and environmentally destructive industrial agriculture. At the same time adequate protection and opportunities are needed for workers and communities affected. This is particularly true for those indigenous communities who are being displaced from their ancestral homelands.

Special attention needs to be given to the exceedingly polluting airline and shipping industries whose contribution to combating climate change is completely inadequate.

Pope Francis points out that «countries and businesses from the global North have enriched themselves by exploiting the natural resources of the South». He also emphasizes that this has created an 'ecological debt'. Honouring commitments to provide adequate and accessible financial and technological support to the global South is more than a matter of solidarity; it is a matter of basic justice and it is fundamental to the repayment of this debt. A great deal more will have to be done.

In this period of global transformation Europe has a responsibility to respect, protect and promote the rights and dignity of people, not least those in the most vulnerable and marginalised situations. Their wisdom on living in harmony with Creation must be respected and their rights to the land protected. At present the endorsement of irresponsible activities that damage societies and the environment in the global South continues the long-standing wound of colonialism. Efforts to exploit new fossil fuel reserves in Vaca Muerta in Argentina, and to construct new fossil fuel infrastructure in East Africa, are particularly harmful examples of this tendency. Such activities

undermine the credibility of the European Green Deal and impose additional burdens on people who have already suffered enough.

If Europe is to achieve its global and internal goals, coherence is needed between those goals and policy. It makes no sense for European countries to promote policies to protect the environment while, at the same time, allowing them to be actively undermined. This requirement of coherence means that solutions to the ecological crisis and to other social and economic problems can and must go hand in hand. This is the very essence of the concept of integral ecology, and it lies at the heart of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* and its teaching.

COP 26 and COP 15 represent critical moments to achieve new ambition. Europe alone will not resolve the ecological crisis but Europe can and should play a leading role at the international level in these upcoming fora. As the President of the European Commission stressed in her Speech on the State of the Union, COP26 will be a “moment of truth” for all of us. We agree with this statement and therefore urge you, as leaders in the European Union institutions, to work for outcomes able to bring about a bold response to tackle the climate emergency. In particular we ask you to:

- Increase ambition: update near-term national targets on climate and biodiversity action to reflect Europe’s fair national share of the global effort to deliver on a 1.5°C limit to warming, and a new global goal of 50% protection of nature.
- Fulfil promises ensure delivery of existing finance commitments and agree new targets to support adaptation, mitigation, loss and damage in developing countries.
- Catalyse transformation: stop all new fossil fuel infrastructure and redirect destructive subsidies towards socially responsible renewable energy and agro-ecological farming approaches.
- Prioritise rights: reaffirm and respect obligations to protect and respect human rights, including the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities in climate and biodiversity action.

ELSiA, an alliance of six Catholic institutions and organisations, is committed, in the spirit of *Laudato Si'*, to the realisation of the above mentioned goals as a means of promoting the European Common Good.

Yours sincerely,

+ Jean-Claude Card. Hollerich SJ
Archbishop of Luxembourg
President of COMECE