

Speech
by
His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

"Climate Change, Human Security and Development Cooperation"

May 30th, 2008

By the grace of God, it is a blessing that we can address you, your Excellencies and distinguished guests, in the name of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on climate change, human security and development cooperation.

We who are here stand against a background of grave pronouncements from scientists about the consequences of climate change for every living thing on earth. Global hunger has re-emerged on the world stage with even a greater sense of urgency. How will we feed the world's people? And we see how climate change acts as a 'threat multiplier', by interacting with food insecurity, economic weakness and the ever growing pressure of population. The measure of human security is not so much the threat of war or terrorism, but the freedom and capacity of individuals or communities to avoid, mitigate or adapt to the threats to their human, environmental and social rights. But given that human security, the environment and global warming are inextricably woven together, human interference with ecosystems gives rise to a new quality of threats.

As the distinguished speakers before us have made clear, climate change fundamentally threatens the ability of the Earth's ecosystems to meet the needs of present and future generations. Adverse climate change poses a serious threat to food security through erratic rainfall patterns and decreasing crop yields, its impacts on natural systems, resources, infrastructure and labour productivity may reduce economic growth, exacerbating poverty. Deprivation, displacement and migration may reduce access to education. Depletion of natural resources may place additional burdens on women, on their health, on gender equality, on women's' empowerment and on all the marginalized. The increase of vector-borne diseases and heat-related mortality, with decline in the quantity and quality of drinking water, will threaten the achievement of the World Health Organisation's Millennium Development Goals.

The potential impacts of climate change proliferate before us. We hear of air and water pollution, of global warming and the threatened extinction of numerous animal and plant species. Human suffering in the poorest countries increases; nowhere is this shown more vividly than in Africa, where global warming and human interference with ecosystems have brought a new quality of threat to Africa's water and all who depend on it. Pasture land gives way to desert at an accelerating pace. Lake levels fall, animal and

bird migrations change, fish stocks dwindle. River waters grow polluted and aquifers are drained for 'development'. The predicted rise in ocean levels threatens to submerge Africa's coastal cities (including Alexandria). Gigantic conurbations discharge untreated waste far beyond the capacity of the environment to absorb. High dams on major rivers block the natural supply of silt to downstream communities. The evidence and statistics are indeed alarming. How should we react?

Every product we make and enjoy, every tree we fell, every building we construct, every road we travel, permanently alters creation. This reveals a fundamental difference between human, natural, and divine economies. In the Orthodox tradition, the phrase "divine economy" is used to describe God's extraordinary acts of love and providence toward humanity and creation. "Economy" is derived from the Greek word "oikonomia," which implies the management of an environment or household (oikos), which is also the root of the word "ecology" (oikologia). Let us consider, however, the radical distinction between the various kinds of economy. Our economy tends to use and discard; natural economy is normally cyclical and replenishes; God's economy is always compassionate and nurturing. Nature's economy is profoundly violated by our wasteful economy, which in turn constitutes a direct offence to the divine economy. The prophet Ezekiel again recognized this abuse of the natural eco-systems when he observed:

Is it not enough to feed on good pasture? Must you also trample the rest with your feet? Is it not sufficient to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? (34,18)

The liturgy, the Eucharistic assembly of the Church, provides for us a mystical basis for a broader, spiritual worldview. This world-view is neither a political plan nor an economic strategy. It is essentially a way of reflecting on what it means to perceive the world through the lens of the soul.

Seeing clearly is precisely what the liturgy teaches us to do. It enables us to hear new sounds and behold new images. It creates in us a mystical appreciation and genuine affection for everything that surrounds us. The truth is that we have been inexorably locked within the self-centred confines of our own individual concerns with no access to the world beyond us. We have violated the sacred covenant between ourselves, our world, and our God and now this is being reflected around the world.

The liturgy restores this covenant; it reminds us of another way and of another world. It provides for us another means of comprehension and communication. The liturgy is the eternal celebration of the fragile beauty of this world. It is this fragile beauty that brings us all together as a global community, but this fragility also makes the world susceptible to our actions.

In practical terms, this would naturally imply a way of life that would be respectful of the divine presence in creation. We should not be blindfolded by personal

interests, but be sensitive to the sacredness of every peninsula and every island, every river and every landscape. How tragic it would be for us if we were simply to pass through the world like the indifferent priest in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. If we are not in fact moved to compassion, bandaging the wounds of the earth, assuming personal care, and contributing to the painful costs, then we might easily be confronted with the question, which of these do you resemble: the Good Samaritan or the indifferent priest?

Perhaps for the first time in the history of our world, we recognize that our decisions and choices immediately impact the environment, ultimately undermining our human security and ability for economic growth. Today, we are able to direct our actions in a caring and compassionate way. It is up to us to shape our future; it is up to us to choose our destiny. Breaking the vicious circle of ecological degradation is a choice with which we are uniquely endowed, at this crucial moment in the history of our planet.

Mitigating the overwhelming force of climate change in order to restore human security and environmental sanctity will be long, complex, and full of uncertainties. Addressing global warming in a piecemeal way, diluting emission targets and abandoning provisions outlined in the Kyoto Protocol is a potential political failure: an appropriate political environment and regulatory system are needed to guide the transition to sustainability. But we must look further to the responsibilities of the commercial firm that creates wealth and has the ability to eliminate or mitigate adverse effects of technology on health, safety and the environment. There must be a willingness to replace old technologies and industries with new ones fit to meet the challenges to all of God's creation which we confront.

We are all passengers of this one ship; this implies we face a common journey and no nation will be spared. We have embarked on a journey that is symbolic of the journey humans have travelled through history and of the journey that we each individually have to travel in our inner and outer lives. Metaphorically, we can be compared with the sojourners on Noah's ark, warning people of the great floods destined to cover the earth, as a consequence of human actions and endeavouring to promote God's message and save His creation. We might also be likened to the companions of Jonah; some of them denied him and some threw him into the stormy sea where he found refuge in the belly of a whale - that great fish which gave him the chance to rediscover himself and repent.

Let us walk no further down this dangerous path towards climate destabilisation and human insecurity. Instead, let us walk together in a spirit of penance, and pilgrimage, towards the final destiny of mankind, the earth and the whole of creation.