

Message

By

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

For World Oceans Day

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For seven years now, the international community has officially celebrated World Oceans Day, jointly commemorating one of the most precious gifts of our Creator, which all of us – people of deep faith as well as people of good will – are called to preserve and conserve.

Over the past two decades, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church worldwide has drawn the world's attention to the deteriorating condition of our oceans. Now then, more than ever, it is important to recognize the need to respect and protect this invaluable and inalienable resource of our planet, which is the unique source of sustainability and biodiversity, but also the innate cradle of religion and culture.

As the invariable model of industrial development and growth becomes the inevitable norm of global behavior, so too does the world's dependency on fossil fuels drive society's indifference toward creation care. By the same token, greenhouse gas emissions are ever rising, thereby irreversibly tarnishing the earth's atmosphere and irrevocably creating detrimental dimensions and adverse manifestations of climate change. Furthermore, over half the carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere dissolves in the oceans creating increasing acidification. And acidification destroys marine ecosystems by killing coral reef and other sea creatures.

While many of us in more affluent societies unfortunately cannot comprehend the consequences of climate change due to our comfortable, if not complacent and complicit circumstances, the more vulnerable among us who live on low-lying islands fully understand the dire situation as they witness the rising sea levels consume their home and threaten their survival.

Still, we are all called constantly to remember that what we put into our waters is as harmful as what we take out of the oceans. The way that we pollute our oceans – whether intentionally through non-biodegradable waste or else inadvertently through precipitation – is as destructive as our practices of overfishing and harvesting of particular fish populations in a manner faster than they can naturally reproduce.

Moreover, basic human rights are also at risk when we do not protect the oceans. The way we defile the oceans is plainly reflected in the way we exploit their resources, which

in turn is directly related to the way we treat our fellow human beings, particularly the more marginalized and less fortunate of our brothers and sisters.

Nonetheless, if we have created the dire conditions that we now face, we are equally *accountable for* and *capable of* remedying the health of our environment. Each of us can and must appreciate the way in which our individual and collective lifestyles impact the environment; we can and must acknowledge the harmful consequences of our moral and material choices; indeed, we can and must assume responsibility for positive and permanent change.

Finally, we call upon global leaders, as they finalize the United Nations Post-2015 Development Agenda, to consider advancing proposals and models that preserve the planet's oceans and protect the world's people. Rather than embracing or endorsing profit-driven models of development at any cost, it is time for right choices and creative changes.