Faith leaders and leading scientists joined at the Vatican to raise ambition ahead of COP26.

4 October 2021 - Joint Appeal

One family in a common home

Today we come together united, in human fraternity, to *raise awareness* of the unprecedented challenges that threaten us and life on our beautiful common home, the Earth.

As leaders and scholars from various religious traditions, we unite in a spirit of humility, responsibility, mutual respect and open dialogue. This dialogue is not limited to merely the exchange of ideas, but is focused on the desire to walk in companionship, recognizing our call to live in harmony with one another and with nature.

Today's gathering is the fruit of months of involved fraternal dialogue among faith leaders and scientists coming together, aware of the necessity of an even *deeper solidarity* in the face of the global pandemic and of growing concern for our common home.

Our awareness: nature is a gift

Nature is a gift, but also a life-giving force without which we cannot exist. Our faiths and spiritualties teach a duty, individual and collective, to care for the human family and for the environment in which it lives. We are not limitless masters of our planet and its resources. *We are caretakers of the natural environment* with the vocation to care for it for future generations and the moral obligation to cooperate in the healing of the planet.

We are deeply *interdependent* with each other and with the natural world. This connection is the basis for interpersonal and intergenerational solidarity and for overcoming selfishness. Damage to the environment is a result, in part, of the predatory tendency to see the natural world as something to be exploited with disregard for the extent to which survival hinges on biodiversity and on maintaining the health of planetary and local ecosystems. Multiple crises facing humanity are demonstrating the failures of such an approach; these are ultimately linked to a *crisis of values, ethical and spiritual.*

Faith and science are essential pillars of human civilization, with shared principles and complementarities. Together, we must address the threats facing our common home. The warnings from the scientific community are becoming increasingly stark and clear, as is the need for concrete steps to be taken. Scientists say that time is running out. Global temperatures have already risen to the point where the planet is warmer than at anytime in the last 200,000 years. We are on course for a rise in temperature of more than two degrees above the pre-industrial levels. It is not just a

physical problem but also a moral challenge. The climate crisis affects us all, but it does not involve us all equally, because it will have different yet devastating effects on people in industrialized and non-industrialized countries. In particular, it affects the poorest, especially women and children in the most vulnerable countries, which are the least responsible for it.

Humanity has the *power to think* and the *freedom to choose*. We must address these challenges using the knowledge of science and the wisdom of religion: to *know more* and to *care more*. We should seek solutions within ourselves, within our communities, and with nature, adopting an integral approach. We must think long-term for the sake of the whole of humanity, now and in the future.

We need to *expel the seeds of conflicts*: greed, indifference, ignorance, fear, injustice, insecurity and violence. We must focus particularly on those at the margins. We need to act together to inspire and energize each other. We need to live in peace with one another and with nature. Now it is the time to take transformative action as a common response. As the COVID pandemic rages, 2021 presents a vital challenge to turn this crisis into an opportunity to *rethink the world we want* for ourselves and for our children.
Care must be at the heart of this conversion, at all levels.

Our call: the need for greater ambition at COP26
We need a framework of hope and courage.
But we also need to change *the narrative of development* and to adopt a new kind of economics: one that places human dignity at its center and that is inclusive; one that is ecologically friendly, caring for the environment, and not exploiting it; one based not on endless growth and proliferating desires, but on supporting life; one that promotes the virtue of sufficiency and condemns the wickedness of excess; one that is not only technologically driven, but is moral and ethical.

Now is the time for urgent, radical and responsible action. Transforming the present situation requires the international community to act with greater ambition and fairness, in all aspects of its policies and strategies.

Climate change is a grave threat. In the interest of *justice and fairness*, we advocate for common but differentiated climate action at all levels, from individual behavioral changes to high-level political decision-making processes.

The world is called to achieve net zero carbon emissions as soon as possible, with *wealthier countries taking the lead* in reducing their own emissions and in financing emission reductions from poorer nations. It is important that all governments adopt a trajectory that will limit the global average temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. To achieve these goals of the Paris Agreement, the COP26 Summit should deliver ambitious short-term actions from all nations with differentiated responsibilities. There is also an urgent need to deliver action to meet its medium- and long-term commitments.

We beg those nations with the greatest responsibility and present capacity to: step up their climate action at home; fulfil existing promises to provide substantial financial *support to vulnerable countries*; agree on new targets to enable them to become climate resilient, as well as to adapt to and to address climate change and loss and damage, which is already a reality for many countries.

We will accompany nations in seeking to protect and invest in the marginalized groups and vulnerable populations within their own borders, who for too long have borne disproportionate burdens and been on the frontlines of poverty, pollution and pandemic. *The rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities* must be given special attention, protecting them from predatory economic interests. They have been caretakers of the earth for millennia. We should listen to them and be willing to be guided by their wisdom.

We appeal to governments to raise their ambitions and their international cooperation to: favor a transition to clean energy; adopt sustainable land use practices including preventing deforestation, restoring forests and conserving biodiversity; transform food systems to become environmentally-friendly and respectful of local cultures; end hunger; and to promote sustainable lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production.

We ask that full consideration be given to the effects on the workforce of the transition to a clean energy economy. Priority must be given to the creation of decent employment for all, particularly those in fossil fuel dependent sectors. We ask to ensure an effective and inclusive *just transition* to low greenhouse gas emissions and climate resilient development. At the same time, we call on them to consider both short-term and long-term social and economic consequences, and adopt a balanced approach that combines care for future generations with guarantee that no one is deprived of his/her daily bread in our own time.

We call upon *financial institutions*, banks and investors to adopt responsible financing for investments that have positive impacts on people and the planet.

We call upon *civil society* organizations and everyone to face these challenges with courage in a spirit of collaboration.

In parallel, we ask the leaders attending COP26 to ensure that no more *biodiversity* is lost, and that all land and water ecosystems are restored, protected and sustainably managed.

In order to achieve these goals, a major *educational challenge* stands before us. Governments cannot handle such ambitious change alone. We need all of society – the family, religious institutions, schools and universities, our businesses and financial systems – to engage in a transparent and collaborative process, ensuring that all voices are valued and all people represented in decision-making, including those most impacted, especially women, and those communities whose voices are often ignored or devalued.

This is where we, religious leaders and institutions, can make an important contribution. Humanity must *rethink its perspectives and values*, rejecting

consumerism and the pervasive throwaway culture, and embrace a culture of care and cooperation.

Raising public awareness is indispensable to the change of course that is needed.

Our commitment and our creativeness

The *followers of religious traditions have a crucial part* to play in addressing the crisis of our common home. We commit to taking much more serious action. Young people are demanding that we listen to the scientific insights and that we, their elders, do much more.

First, we commit to *advancing the educational and cultural trans*formation that is crucial to sustain all other actions. We underline the importance of:

- Deepening our efforts to bring about a change of heart among the members of our traditions in the way we relate to the earth and to other people (‘*ecological conversion*’). We will remind our communities that care for the earth and for others is a key tenet of all our traditions. Recognizing the signs of the divine harmony present in the natural world, we will strive to incorporate this ecological sensitivity more consciously into our practices.

- Encouraging our *educational and cultural institutions* to give priority in their programs to relevant scientific insights, to strengthen integral ecological education, and to help students and their families relate to nature and to others with new eyes. Beyond the transmission of information and technical knowledge, we want to instill deep-rooted virtues to sustain the ecological transformation that is required.

- Participating actively and appropriately in the public and political discourse on environmental issues, sharing our *religious, moral and spiritual perspectives* and uplifting the voices of the weakest, of young people, and of those too often ignored, such as Indigenous Peoples. We underline the importance to reframe environmental debates from being about technical issues alone to include moral issues.

- Engaging our congregations and institutions with their neighbours in the *building of sustainable, resilient and just communities*, creating and developing resources for local cooperation in, for example, restorative small-scale agriculture and renewable energy cooperatives.

Second, we underline the importance of taking *far-reaching environmental action* within our own institutions and communities, informed by science and based on religious wisdom. While calling on governments and international organizations to be ambitious, we also recognize the major role we play. We wish to emphasize the importance of:

- Supporting actions to reduce carbon emissions, achieve carbon neutrality, promote disaster risk reduction, improve waste management, conserve water and energy, develop renewable energy, provide green open spaces, conserve

coastal areas, prevent deforestation and restore forests. Many of these actions require *partnership* with farming and fishery communities, especially small-scale and family farmers, whom we will support.

- Working to make bold plans to achieve *full sustainability in our buildings*, land, vehicles and other properties, joining the global race to save our planet.
- Encouraging our communities to embrace *simple and sustainable lifestyles* at home, so as to reduce our collective carbon footprint.
- Striving to *align our financial investments* with environmentally and socially responsible standards, ensuring greater accountability and transparency as the tendency to move away from investments in fossil fuels and toward investments in renewable energy and restorative agriculture is becoming ever more widespread. We will encourage public and private sector stakeholders to do the same.
- Evaluating all *the goods we purchase and the services we hire* with the same ethical lens, avoiding two different moral standards being applied to the business sector and to the rest of social life. For instance, we will raise awareness in our faith communities about the need to examine our banking, insurance and investment choices, to correct them in line with both the values we proclaim here.

Our hope: a time of grace, an opportunity that we cannot waste

We are currently at a moment of opportunity and truth. We pray that our human family may unite to save our common home before it is too late. *Future generations will never forgive us* if we squander this precious opportunity. We have inherited a garden: we must not leave a desert to our children.

Scientists have warned us that there might be only one decade left to *restore the planet.*

We plead with the international community, gathered at COP26, to take speedy, responsible and shared action to safeguard, restore and heal our wounded humanity and the home entrusted to our *stewardship*.

We appeal to everyone on this planet to join us on this *common journey*, knowing well that what we can achieve depends not only on opportunities and resources, but also on hope, courage, solidarity and good will.

In an age fraught with division and despair, we look with hope and unity to the future. We seek to serve the people of the world, particularly the poor and the future generations, by encouraging a prophetic vision, a creative, respectful and courageous action for the sake of the Earth, our common home.