

An Open Letter to COP-17

By

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

To the COP-17
United Nations Climate Change Conference

Durban, South Africa
November 28 - December 9, 2011

It is with sincere delight that we greet the distinguished governmental leaders, eminent dignitaries and honorable participants of the COP-17 meeting in Durban, South Africa. You have assembled at a critical time for a vital opportunity to address the serious challenges of the environmental crisis.

Throughout the conference, you will be presented with significant scientific, economic, and social considerations of the problems that we face. You will hear of regional and global issues related to troubling changes in our climate, including: extreme weather conditions, depletion of food supplies and agriculture, as well as escalating diseases on our planet.

The manifold effects are widely known and well substantiated. The various statistics are abundantly alarming and easily available. Nevertheless, these are, at least in our mind, just the beginnings of the disruption to the climate system. Moreover, and more importantly, they are merely the surface of the problem.

As we look behind and beyond these first effects, unfortunately we tend to ignore – although we ought to focus upon – the lives of those of our brothers and sisters who are and will be directly affected by these conditions and consequences. We conveniently tend to overlook - although we are compelled to remember - that we are all responsible for the future of our planet and for human life. Climate change affects all people and all nations. None among us can remain a mere spectator.

Previous meetings in Copenhagen and Cancun failed to produce a legally binding agreement with regard to affluent and poor nations. Furthermore, next year marks the expiration of the Kyoto Protocol, even if prominent and prosperous nations have yet to submit to measurable mitigation and adaptation plans.

Beloved friends, at first glance, it may appear strange that a religious institution

concerned with "sacred" values can be so profoundly involved in "worldly" issues. Yet, there is much more to climate change than environmental preservation. We are dealing with a profoundly moral and spiritual problem. Our ministry and mandate is to sensitize consciences and energize listeners of good will.

Therefore, we ask that you contemplate the following challenges:

(i) A first challenge for participants at this conference is *the struggle to surmount national and regional considerations and to consider the larger picture.* Climate change is a global problem. We share one world and the same resources, one atmosphere and the same habitat. We are all inseparably interconnected. Any genuine solution demands the ability to think for the whole world. We are all connected and our actions affect each other. Conservation and compassion are intimately interrelated.

(ii) A second challenge is *remembering that sacrifice is needed to arrive at a successful conclusion.* When will we face the inevitable truth that all ecological activity is ultimately judged by its impact on the poor? When will we sense the painful reality that the continent that has scarcely contributed to global warming is bearing the most detrimental repercussions, even while being the least equipped to cope with its consequences? The greatest delusion is that measures to deal with climate change must not or may not affect economic growth. Without sacrifice, both personal and national, we cannot reach the unity necessary for an enduring agreement.

(iii) A third challenge is *the priority of securing moral leadership.* Global climate change presents an unprecedented threat to the integrity and diversity of life on earth. At the Ecumenical Patriarchate, we have already denounced ecological abuse as sin against God; we should recognize how it is also a crime against humanity. Blame is no solution. Instead, we must discover the resources that lie deep within the human spirit in order to develop a sense of urgency and resolve.

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The moral leadership that is required is a commitment to embrace and become the solutions that we advocate. We humbly invite all of you - whether delegates, politicians, activists, and individual citizens - to make a personal commitment to effect transformations in the many and minute details of daily life, especially in the way we deal

with energy and relate to the poor.

The world is watching. And the world is waiting.

May God bless your deliberations.

At the Ecumenical Patriarchate,
the 23rd of November 2011

Prayerfully yours,

✠ BARTHOLOMEW
Archbishop of Constantinople,
New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch