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**Pathways that respect our common home**

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**I would like to thank the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and CIDSE for inviting me to be part of this important conference, celebrating as it does Pope Francis’s Encyclical Letter ‘*Laudato Si*’. It is significant that the Pope speaks about climate change and inequality in this critical year of 2015, when the global community has the opportunity to take decisions to change our direction of travel to a pathway of more sustainable, low carbon and resilient development.**

**Let us explore the theme of this session - Pathways That Respect Our Common Home – by focusing in on ‘our common home’, what it means to ‘respect’, and some of the priority ‘pathways’ that will allow us to live together in our common home.**

**Our Common Home**

**In order to respect our common home we need to first recognise ‘our home’ in its richness and recognise those with whom we**

**share it. Our home is not just the house, tent or apartment we live in, nor is it limited to our immediate family of loved ones. Although it is tempting, particularly when times are tough, to focus our energies on our immediate family – to do so risks closing our minds and hearts to the needs of others, and to the enrichment we gain from interaction with our wider human community and from living in and appreciating the natural world.**

**‘Our home’ stretches beyond the narrow confines of those we love most dearly to embrace all the people and creatures we share life on earth with, as well all the natural life earth supports. As Pope Francis reminds us *‘there has been a growing conviction that our planet is our homeland and that humanity is one people living in a common home’*.**

**So our common home is earth, the people we share it with and the creatures and ecosystems on which life itself depends. As with the physical home we live in, we have a responsibility and a self-interest in making sure that our common home is well maintained and looked after. We have a duty of care to the earth as our shared inheritance, and we share it with those living with us on the planet now as well as who come after us.**

**Looking after a home requires contributions from all members of the family, to cook, to clean, to repair and to maintain. The contributions of all family members, young and old, male and female to these tasks are valued. Without them the house falls into disrepair or the family living within it fails to thrive. Likewise in ‘our common home’ all inhabitants have a contribution to make, all contributions should be valued and cooperative actions will yield the best results for all.**

**A family that works well together will have a happy home and the same applies to our human family on earth. We can work as individuals on our own tasks and focus on solving our own problems, or we can act as one single human family sharing the tasks and pooling our resources for the common good.**

**In Ireland we have a tradition of Meitheal where people in rural communities gathered together on a neighbour’s farm to help save the hay or harvest crops. Each person would help their neighbour who would in turn reciprocate. If a neighbour was ill, the farm was taken care of. Everybody benefited in some way and this built up strong friendships and respect among those involved in the Meitheal. This is similar to the African tradition of Ubuntu which is founded in the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity. Archbishop Tutu explains Ubuntu as ‘I am because you are’. These forms of community and ways of living**

**in a common home are reflected in the teachings of many faiths and enable the moral and spiritual enrichment of human beings.**

**There is an echo of this also in Article 29 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. ‘Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his or her personality is possible’. It is regrettable that this Article has not had a stronger influence, and that the development of human rights has tended to focus on a more individualistic concept of human rights. We need to revisit the idea that without carrying out our ‘duties to community’ we, ourselves, cannot reach the full development of our personality.**

**Pope Francis reminds us that ‘*Whether we are believers or not, we are agreed today that the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone*’. Sharing these fruits with everyone is part of the next theme I would like to explore – respect.**

## **Respect**

**The Encyclical makes it clear that we have a moral responsibility and a duty of care to look after ‘our common home’. This duty of care applies to nature and to our fellow human beings. Hence**

**to respect our common home is to respect all those with whom we share nature as well as nature herself.**

**For me, having worked on human rights my whole life, the need to respect rights and to uphold human dignity form a part of our responsibility as residents of our common home. Eleanor Roosevelt and her Commission on Human Rights captured this sentiment in Article 1 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948; ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’. Yet in our world today too many people are deprived of their rights and as a result live in poverty and hardship.**

**Pope Francis sees no distinction between the ‘*cry of the poor and the cry of the earth*’. If we deprive people of their rights, of their dignity, we can be sure that we are treating the earth, our common home, with a similar lack of respect. Climate change brings this into sharp relief. As we disrespect our common home by polluting the atmosphere, we are damaging the climate system, resulting in more unpredictable growing seasons, floods, droughts, extreme storms and rising sea levels. As a result the human rights of men, women and children living in the most vulnerable situations around the world are undermined; affecting their rights to food, to water, to health, to shelter and to life.**

**The injustice of this is that the pollution that causes the problem is not created by those who suffer the worst impacts. Instead the pollution comes from the wealthy in the world who consume the world's resources without consideration for their limited availability or whether or not they are taking their fair share. This self-centred use of the earth's resources is the opposite of 'respect for our common home'. Pope Francis warns that *'we can be silent witnesses to terrible injustices if we think that we can obtain significant benefits from making the rest of humanity, present and future, pay the extremely high costs of environmental deterioration'*.**

**Climate justice is a reaction to this injustice. It puts people and respect for their rights at the centre of decision making on climate change and sustainable development. Climate justice amplifies the voices of the people most affected by climate change and least responsible for causing it. It seeks to ensure that those affected unjustly by climate impacts are more than victims and become active participants and beneficiaries of climate action.**

**Through the work of my Foundation, and our partners around the world, we have evidence of how women are disproportionately affected by climate change, due to the fact that they are already discriminated against in society and have unequal access to their rights. As farmers, women are most affected when their crops are**

washed away in a flood or due to sea level rise. As young girls and teenagers they suffer when collecting water for the family becomes more difficult due to drought. And as mothers they suffer from the increased incidence of disease associated with a warming climate.

Because women are the primary caregivers and homemakers in most places around the world - they are at the forefront of protecting our common home. We will not solve the climate crisis or embark on a new pathway to sustainable development if we don't fully engage the 50% of the world's population that are women. Women around the world are already adapting to a changing climate, if necessary migrating to find new livelihoods and opportunities for their families, and leading the transition to renewable energy. Respecting and empowering women to realise their rights is part of respecting nature herself. I think it is a pity that Pope Francis didn't emphasise more the importance of the empowerment of girls and women to his vision of the world.

Responsibility is borne of respect, and respect for our common home means that we all bear responsibility. However, some are more responsible for the causes of climate change than others, as they are more responsible for over consumption of the earth's resources than others. And this greater responsibility creates an

**obligation to take the lead in finding and implementing solutions to the problem.**

**Pope Francis does not dodge this difficult issue of responsibility – he states ‘*Reducing greenhouse gas emissions requires honesty, courage and responsibility, above all on the part of those countries which are more powerful and pollute the most*’. This is a core tenet of climate justice – that the burdens of resolving climate change are shared equitably bearing in mind levels of responsibility, and with the aim of protecting the people that are most vulnerable to climate risks. The climate agreement to be adopted this year offers an opportunity for the countries that are most responsible to lead by reducing their emissions, and by showing their respect for our common home through assisting the countries that are most vulnerable and least responsible to contribute their share of climate action and benefit from renewable energy.**

**As Pope Francis makes clear, this is not just an issue of responsibility of governments. It is our responsibility as well. We need to change our habits – to consume differently, produce differently, waste less and rekindle a sense of wonder at the richness and diversity of the ecosystems of our world which we must cherish.**



As I read the chapter on “*Integral Ecology*”, with its emphasis on the interconnectedness of everything, I was glad to see the inclusion of cultural ecology as follows:

*“Ecology, then, also involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity in the broadest sense. More specifically, it calls for greater attention to local cultures when studying environmental problems, favouring a dialogue between scientific technical language and the language of the people. Culture is more than what we have inherited from the past, it is also, and above all, a living dynamic participatory present reality, which cannot be excluded as we rethink the relationship between human beings and the environment.”*

This passage reminded me of a short poem by Seamus Heaney called ‘Postscript’, where he encourages us to drive to the West of Ireland, describing the landscape and concluding:

**“Useless to think you’ll park and capture it  
More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,  
A hurry through which known and strange things pass  
As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways  
And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.”**

The last line of the poem speaks to a later passage in the Encyclical:

*“Inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good because, lived out authentically, it is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with a capacity for wonder which takes us to a deeper understanding of life.”*

## **Pathways**

**This brings us to the pathways we take to respect our common home. The good news is that there are alternative pathways and that our knowledge of the risks and opportunities associated with the different pathways is adequate to inform the choices we will make.**

**The path we are currently on will lead us to a 4°C warmer world with irreversible impacts on ecosystems and devastating impacts on people, particularly those with least resources to adapt. There are signs already of the negative impacts of this pathway as the extreme events, sea level rise and erratic weather affect the poorest and most vulnerable people around the world. The warning signs are already plain to see.**

**Or we can choose a different pathway – the path less known, but the safer path. And I believe a path that can result in greater equality and dignity for all. We know that the costs of this alternative pathway are affordable and much less than the costs**

**associated with a 4°C world. Research commissioned by my Foundation – Zero Carbon Zero Poverty, The Climate Justice Way - finds that a zero carbon pathway poses fewer risks to human rights than the pathway we are on, and that with attention to human rights obligations we can design climate policies that enhance peoples’ rights. We can take action on climate change, eradicate poverty and increase equality: we can have zero carbon and zero poverty if we choose the less known pathway.**

**Our success along the safer, closer to 1.5°C sustainable pathway, is dependent on a new era of collective self-interest and human solidarity – what Pope Francis calls ‘*a new and universal solidarity*’. It requires a new global movement rallying around the holistic message of the encyclical. To be fair and to be effective our pursuit of zero carbon and zero poverty must be undertaken by all countries together – otherwise we will exceed the carbon budget and lock poorer countries into decades of high carbon infrastructure. This means that rich countries have a responsibility to enable poorer countries to be part of the transition away from fossil fuels and to low carbon, climate resilient development.**

**No country has developed without fossil fuels to date. So we are asking developing countries to meet their sustainable development goals without using fossil fuels – in other words they**

**will have to develop using a different model to that which made the industrialised countries wealthy. This can only be achieved when developing countries are supported with the necessary climate finance, investment and transfer of technology to make this transition.**

**Climate action and high quality inclusive development are not just compatible goals, climate action is a prerequisite for long term prosperity. Investing in renewable energy in developing countries is firstly a development action because development requires energy, and currently 1.2 billion people live without access to electricity. But it is also a climate action as it avoids dangerous greenhouse gas emissions.**

**Increasing the use of clean cook stoves improves the health of women and children by reducing their exposure to air pollution as well as reducing deforestation, freeing up women's time - as they spend less time collecting wood - and also reducing emissions.**

**Throughout the world, regardless of level of income, cleaning up our energy and transport systems will also improve human health as the Lancet Commission informed us just a few weeks ago. For example, it cites research from the US that shows that the**

**improvements to human health from climate action can be worth 10 times the costs of cutting emissions.**

**These win-win scenarios are common along the alternative pathway we can choose to follow. The alternative pathway will be most effective if it is founded on respect, dignity, equality and justice, because this is the path that will allow for the full participation of all people in both the actions to be taken and access to the benefits that follow. We will not save our common home if we do not care equally for all who inhabit it – this after all is the central message of the pope’s encyclical. We are interdependent – we rely on each other -we share a common home.**

**You might ask, as many have asked me, why I seek climate justice in a world of injustice? I am heartened by Pope Francis’ statement that *‘Injustice is not invincible’*. Like him I believe that *‘the rich and poor have equal dignity’* and that if we respect that equal dignity we can pursue a new development pathway - a just transition - that protects both people and the planet.**

**The summits that lie ahead over the remainder of this year offer an opportunity for political leaders to give leadership and move to a new development pathway that respects our common home. Later this month leaders will gather in Addis Ababa, for the**

**Third International Conference on Financing for Development. In September in New York deliberations will conclude on a new set of Sustainable Development Goals for all countries, which will be adopted at a Special Summit. Following this will be the adoption of the new climate agreement in Paris in December. The coming together of these processes creates a unique opportunity to stabilise our climate, and transform the lives of billions of people. For this to happen, a robust ambitious set of agreements must be adopted which guarantees a pathway to end extreme poverty, to reduce inequality and to minimise the risks posed to development from climate change.**

**At the end of his Encyclical Pope Francis points to hope with these encouraging words, “*Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope*”. I am also hopeful. We have a great opportunity this year. We understand the problem and we know what needs to be done.**

**Robert Frost’s poem The Road Not Taken, comes to mind, which ends:**

**Two roads diverged in a wood, and I  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference!**

**Let us take the pathway of solidarity, and of respect for human dignity and rights and also of the ecosystems of our common home:**

*“A sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.”*

**It will make all the difference.**

**ENDS.**