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“Climate as a Common Good of the Common Human Family”

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Caritas Internationalis, the Confederation of Caritas organizations worldwide, has been engaging on climate issues for a long time. Due to its own mission – building justice in solidarity with the poorest – Caritas is constantly committed to working with and for people suffering from climate change, defend their rights and uphold their dignity through empowerment, from an integral human development perspective. The poorest people are the ones most affected by climate change. All over the world, Caritas organizations provide aid during humanitarian disasters, carry out projects in climate adaptation, sustainable agriculture and agroecology, pre-disaster prevention and risk management, and awareness raising. Our role in advocacy is, consequently, to bring the demands of those affected by climate change before national and international institutions, as well as the business community, challenging them to adopt policies and behaviour that promote human rights, social justice and sustainable development.

Especially last year, with the release of the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, Caritas Internationalis has been at the forefront - along with the Holy See, national Bishops Conferences, Catholic sister organizations, Religious Congregations and faith-based movements - in the run up to the climate negotiations in Paris, which culminated in the adoption of the Paris Agreement (PA) on 12 December 2015. *Laudato Si'* had certainly a very important impact in shaping the political, societal and spiritual thinking. We ourselves could testify the high interest for Pope Francis' teachings on the care of our common home on behalf of notable political leaders holding key positions, whose diplomatic work was instrumental to achieve the balance of interests that made it possible for the new climate agreement to come to light. On the evening of 12 December 2016, during the celebrative session that concluded COP21 after laborious negotiations, two State representatives openly thanked Pope Francis for his inspiring Encyclical.

What do we see today, one year on? How have world leaders responded so far to the call to ecological conversion, to hear as one the cry of the earth and of the poor, to achieve justice, and to care for our common home in solidarity with future generations?

1) Laudato Si' brings forward the guiding concept of **integral ecology**, the inseparable bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and inner peace. It considers **climate as a common good** belonging to all, as a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life (23). Climate change is a global problem impacting seriously the environmental, social, economic, political sphere, as well as the distribution of goods (25). It affects entire populations and is among the causes of human displacement (26). To preserve the climate “represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day” (25).

The PA certainly represents a milestone, seeing climate change as “common concern of humankind”, as an “urgent threat” while at the same time a long-term challenge requiring universal cooperation and solidarity. It recognizes, in its Preamble and Art. 2, the relationship of climate change with sustainable development and the eradication of poverty. However, beyond this encouraging wording, the PA does not go very far. We as Caritas were expecting it would lay the conditions to transform, deeply and irreversibly, our economy based on fossil fuels, our model of production and consumption towards a new inclusive model of development allowing for the participation of all humankind. The PA does not put into question the current predominant economic model, leaving it up to State Parties to choose their strategies to mitigate global warming “well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and “pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C” (Art. 2). For this, States are required to undertake and communicate Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) representing a progression over time, to be reviewed every 5 years. The rules establishing the features and contents of NDCs were expected to be drafted at COP22 in Marrakesh, the so-called “COP of action”. However, no decision was taken and debates will continue in Spring 2017.

2) Laudato Si' invite us to listen spiritually to the results of the **best scientific research** available today; even though this has been formally recognised in previous climate negotiations and in the PA, the gap between current trends of greenhouse gas emissions and the 1.5°C long-term goal still persists, and needs urgent enhanced action on mitigation, adaptation and finance before 2020, year from which the PA shall be implemented. Yet, scientific evidence indicates 2016 as the hottest year ever, and the world is set on a trajectory of 3°C or more of global warming.

3) Laudato Si' also warns us against the **technocratic paradigm** dominating the economy and politics. “by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion” (109) says the Encyclical. Yet, market-based approaches to “fix” the carbon emissions problem by buying and selling “carbon credits” – explicitly disapproved by the Encyclical (171) - persist until today. The new Sustainable Development Mechanism established under the PA should not repeat past mistakes and take a transformative approach based on human rights, pursuing sustainable, low-carbon development that

respects environmental integrity and protects biodiversity, and ensuring participation, transparency and accountability, including with regards to the private sector.

4) The Encyclical calls for comprehensive solutions are needed, considering that we are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather **one complex crisis which is both social and environmental** (139). Integral or human ecology is inseparable from the common good (158), i.e. to make choices in solidarity based on “a preferential option for the poorest” (158). Caritas keeps advocating for UN Climate conferences to deliver results that contribute to food security, poverty eradication, increasing climate resilience, and sustainable development for the most vulnerable. As an example, we think that the provision of scaled-up financial resources for developing nations is fundamental to guarantee these objectives. The priorities and needs of the most vulnerable countries should be the focus of this finance. The recent submission by developed countries of a roadmap of USD 100 bn made steps in the right direction, however much more work is needed clarify the methodology to track, report and verify climate finance. The real priority from now on should be to address the gap in finance for adaptation and ensure that it is directed to those who need it most. Other key issues are agriculture and food security in climate negotiations. Lamentably, after many years of discussions, no agreement was found in Marrakesh on a just and common way to addressing these issues, even though all States recognize the importance of food security, as stated in the Preamble of the PA. This is detrimental, above all else, to the most vulnerable people.

So what is the message of hope we can give today? However imperfect it may be, the international climate regime embodies the contemporary international consensus on what is needed to preserve climate and the world. Much of what it promises will depend on States and their degree of willingness to implement its provisions in an ethically sound way. For this we, as the Catholic family, have to work to bring the message of Laudato Si’ to the attention of decision-makers.

a. Chapter V of the Encyclical proposes a series of **guidelines for the renewal of international, national and local policies** in the public and business sector, for the relationship between politics and economy. Pope Francis expresses true concern for an honest and open debate, so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good (188). He calls for a dialogue for new national and local policies, for honest and transparent decision-making processes, in order to “discern” which policies and business initiatives can lead to “genuine integral development” (185). He calls for efforts to promote a sustainable use of natural resources as a real investment for the medium term” (191) and for a redefinition of our notion of progress (194) in a way that links it to improvements in the quality of life.

It is therefore important to build on this teaching; as a first example, this can happen through the work being done by all countries, on their national action plans on how they will reduce their carbon emissions. The principles drawn from Laudato Si’ could be adopted by States to

increase their ambition in relation to the review process of their plans. These principles should guide governments in realising an integral ecological approach by adopting more transformative views on their future development. The Catholic family can facilitate the creation of a space of dialogue for different actors, so they may come together and make progress towards the common good.

Some indicators of progress in this dialogue could be: in 2018¹ (date where the INDCs will be reviewed) there will be increased ambition; the Laudato Si' messages will be recognised in public documents or speeches; elements of future NDCs will be based on Laudato Si'. This dialogue should extend beyond Governments alone and involve businesses and civil society: they should all be led to recognise that the Laudato Si' principles offer an approach which integrates care for the environment and care for humanity. This dialogue should be sought immediately, to have effects prior to 2018 and further on, under the 5-yearly review of the PA.

¹ In its Decision 1/CP.21 on the Adoption of the Paris Agreement, the COP convened a facilitative dialogue among Parties in 2018, to take stock of collective efforts towards the agreed long-term goal. Given the urgency of the matter, it would be crucial that countries take on increased commitments already on that occasion.