

Catholics welcome climate fund

Brian Roewe | Dec. 19, 2011

The last time the world turned its eyes to South Africa, the Netherlands and Spain required extra time to settle the 2010 FIFA World Cup championship.

A year later, extra time was needed once more in the African nation, as delegates to the United Nations' climate conference in Durban worked an extra day and a half to finalize a new international climate road map to lower carbon emissions and aid poor countries' response to climate change.

"It is without any doubt in my mind that we have worked together to save tomorrow, today," South African Foreign Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, president of the Durban conference, said Dec. 11.

The hard-fought Durban Platform paves the way for a new agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol by 2020 that will curb carbon emissions by at least 25-40 percent of 1990 levels. The pact does not provide the terms of such an agreement but instead outlines a roadmap to get there, by no later than 2015. The platform also established the Green Climate Fund, a welcome result for Catholic climate advocates pushing for assistance to poor countries combating climate change.

While many have acknowledged that the fund and the pledge for an all-inclusive emissions agreement are another step forward, the perceived slow reaction to an increasingly serious issue tempered excitement.

"There needs to be an attitude of urgency about [climate change]," said Dan Misleh, executive director of the U.S.-based Catholic Coalition on Climate Change.

"I think that the moral position of seeing that failure to act and act immediately and in a serious way with regard to the threat of global warming is to bring upon the Earth terrible suffering," said Maryknoll Sr. Ann Braudis, co-chair of the NGO Committee on Sustainable Development at the United Nations.

Unlike Kyoto, which enforced emissions reductions for only 37 industrialized nations, the new agreement will apply to all countries, including the developing nations of China, India and Brazil -- all left out of Kyoto. The United States never ratified the protocol, instead choosing to make its own voluntary efforts to curb gases.

While the Kyoto members agreed to a second commitment period, beginning in January 2013, the accord will still not include the U.S., and it is expected Canada, Russia and Japan will also withdraw from the 1997 agreement.

The U.S. approach to climate change has frustrated many Catholic organizations.

"We have no clear public policy hook to help Catholics appreciate the need for our nation to get serious about addressing climate change and its impacts on poor people," Misleh said.

For years, climatologists and climate activists have urged world leaders to take decisive action on the world's

rising average temperatures, a result of high carbon emissions. Currently, scientists estimate the world's average temperature rise at 0.7 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

To avoid the most serious climate change, scientists say the rise must be limited to 2 degrees Celsius. Based on countries' current carbon-reducing pledges, they project the rise could exceed 4 or 5 degrees Celsius.

On Nov. 29, the second day of the two-week conference, the World Meteorological Organization, the U.N.'s weather agency, reported 2011 temperatures ranked as the 10th-highest on record and Arctic Sea ice volume was at its lowest point.

Five days later, the Global Carbon Project reported that after two years of decline, global carbon emissions rose 5.9 percent in 2010, the largest increase recorded. These reports led many climate activists to criticize world leaders and the Durban Platform for continuing to delay action.

"The longer we delay this, the more difficult it will be to come to a solution that really is a solution," said Carmelite Sr. Jane Remson, president and CEO of Carmelite NGO at the United Nations.

A step toward helping the world's poorest nations find solutions was the establishment of the Green Climate Fund. "It is imperative that the international community continues to recognize the plight of the most vulnerable," Misleh said.

Originally agreed upon in 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark, the fund will provide financial resources for developing nations to manage, mitigate and adapt to climate changes.

"The developing and poor countries will be able to secure the well-being of their people and likewise, nature," said Holy Names Sr. Eugenia Masheane, who represented the nongovernmental organization UNANIMA International in Durban.

The fund could provide \$100 billion annually to poorer nations by 2020, but the Durban Platform's language is vague on the source of funding. It is unclear if or how much national governments will contribute. Most of the initial backing would come from private investors.

The funding could mean a boost to the efforts of many Catholic organizations already assisting developing nations cope with climate change.

Carmelite NGO has members in Kenya and Zimbabwe, where inconsistent rainy seasons have farmers uncertain when to plant seeds.

Maryknoll sisters, including Braudis, worked with people in the northern Philippines city of Baguio to build an ecological sanctuary after a 1990 earthquake struck the city, which was susceptible to increased damage due to large-scale gold mining in the area.

With the Durban conference concluded, the focus for many Catholic nongovernmental organizations will turn to working with the U.N. delegates to enact the agreements made in South Africa.

"We need to look at this as a global issue, a family of nations," Remson said.

[Brian Roewe is an *NCR* Bertelsen intern. His e-mail address is broewe@ncronline.org.]

ON THE WEB

For more coverage on the Durban conference, read the [Eco Catholic blog](#) [1] at NCRonline.

Source URL (retrieved on 02/28/2015 - 13:21): <http://ncronline.org/news/catholics-welcome-climate-fund>

Links:

[1] <http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic>