



# World Council of Churches

## **World Leaders Must Act Now in the Face of Climate Emergency**

Statement from the Faith-Based Organizations

To the High-Level Ministerial Segment of the

25<sup>th</sup> Session of the Conference of the Parties – COP25 to the UNFCCC

Madrid, Spain

10 December 2019

Madame President, Her Excellency Carolina Schmidt,  
Distinguished Participants,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

For many decades, science has provided persuasive facts on human-induced climate change and how it is affecting our only planetary home. However the response from those in power has been insufficient and slow. Action has been deferred even if the voice of warning rings stronger every day.

Social movements, communities and municipalities around the world are now declaring a state of climate emergency, emphasizing the urgency with which we need to address the crisis and the radical and transformative actions it requires. From different faith traditions, we are deeply concerned about the inaction on climate protection and outraged over the injustices that short-term extraction and carbon dioxide emissions create.

The latest reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change point out that climate change has become a top driver of hunger all over the world. The reports predict rising sea levels of up to 1 metre by 2100 due to melting glaciers, water scarcity affecting nearly 2 billion people and more intense sea-level events such as hurricanes and flooding, if warming is not kept at the safer limit of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Additionally, destructive fires and the expansion of industrial agriculture and mining have fuelled deforestation in the Amazon, Congo Basin, West Papua and elsewhere. These forest ecosystems – a critical resource in confronting the threat of climate change and home and sources of sustenance for many Indigenous Peoples – are being dissipated at an alarming rate.

At the same time, the 2019 UN Environment report on emission gaps reveals that greenhouse gas emissions are still on the rise despite scientific cautions and political commitments. We are concerned that the Paris Agreement might lose its importance if the political will to commit to emission cuts is so much lower than what science calls for.

The short-term focus on political wins and economic gains is undermining the spirit of cooperation that made the Paris Agreement come to life; it is obstructing its effective implementation. We are bitterly disappointed by the failure of many governments, especially the biggest emitters, to embrace sufficient climate action needed to stabilize temperatures

to a 1.5 C limit, and by regressive measure such as those that place additional financial burdens on poor communities and that criminalise ecological defenders.

Numerous protests against scandalous and increasing levels of inequality in many parts of the world, including in Chile, provoking the sudden transfer of COP 25 from Santiago to Madrid, underline that the transition to a carbon-neutral economy must not only be swift. It must also seek to conjoin the goals of sustainability and equity, ensuring that the costs of transition are not endured by those who already possess scant means.

Young people and children have made public demonstration of their indignation at the lack of ample response by governments to the enormity of this global crisis, and against the backsliding by some governments. We stand in solidarity with them in demanding what adults have thus far denied them – deep-seated changes in economic and social systems in order to safeguard Mother Earth, their future and their rights.

Human rights and the rights of nature are intrinsically connected. Indigenous Peoples and their ancient and diverse traditions have long nurtured a profound understanding of the interconnectedness of all life on the planet. This integrity is at the heart of the struggle for a socio-economic system that honours life above all. In this sense, the climate crisis is also a cultural and spiritual crisis.

Therefore we call on COP 25 to:

- uphold human rights in the Paris Agreement;
- commit to more ambitious cuts in greenhouse gas emissions as part of Nationally Determined Contributions with a view to attaining carbon neutrality by 2050 and limiting warming to not more than 1.5°C.
- ramp up commitments by wealthy nations to provide sufficient, predictable and transparent climate finance to low-income nations for adaptation and resilience-building;
- strengthen the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage to include finance to support people and communities affected by the impacts of the climate emergency;
- and foster actions to engage and learn from Indigenous Peoples in and beyond the UNFCCC process, protect biodiversity, combat deforestation, encourage agro-ecology and build circular and redistributive economies.

It is time for *metanoia* for all. We call for systemic, cultural and spiritual transformations that may be translated into changes in the ways we live, produce and consume. It is indispensable that our lifestyles – supported by socio-economic policies and institutions – respect ecological boundaries. In our different faith traditions, we find strong orientations to defend the vulnerable and to abstain in favor of the less fortunate. We fast for the rights of all to a good life.

As our Interfaith Declaration on COP 25 reads:

“As faith communities we seek to offer a positive and empowering voice of hope over fear, of compassion over indifference, and urgent and fair action as a moral obligation.

We encourage personal and political responsibility, immediate and just climate action...and a positive transformation of societal structures as well as a change in mindset.

We have faith and hope that as humanity we can come together to address the severe climate crisis and open windows to a better future.”