International Solidarity Reflection

School Sisters of Notre Dame

Shalom

Climate Justice **May 2023**

Introduction

Climate justice is a call for inclusion, representation, reparation and protection of the rights of the most vulnerable populations affected disproportionately by climate change, especially children and women. According to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), climate crisis is a human crisis (COP26). It results from destructive methods of extraction, production and consumption. In February 2023, forty indigenous leaders met Pope Francis, calling for climate justice. They argued that extractive and exploitive industries are responsible for the unequal access to basic human rights and lack of environmental sustainability. The UN Environment Programme also affirms that economic benefits come at a cost. It raises questions regarding people's rights and those of nature as well as social, economic, environmental, ethical and political concerns. Everyone has to continue to make physical and economic activities more sustainable from an environmental social justice viewpoint as we deal with its root causes.

Call to Prayer

God of all the earth, as climate chaos wreak havoc on lives and all other creatures, we raise our voices and call for justice for those who suffer most but are least responsible for the causes of the climate crisis. Let us pray for wise and courageous actions for all creation in this critical hour. Triune God, we implore you for care, peace and love in and for our common home.

Experience

Rainfall above normal has become a common phenomenon in many parts of the world. In November 2022, heavy rains hit the small town of Santo Antonio da Imperatriz, SC, Brazil, where I minister. It had been raining for five days but we were warned that the rain would be even heavier. The rivers overflowed into the streets, repeating what had happened in 1997. Lives and property were lost. We had to wait for the waters to recede before cleaning and rebuilding. These were days of great suffering! Faith and solidarity were essential, because they kept the most affected people standing up in the face of pain, loss, and insecurity.

After two days, the electricity came back. People worked together to support those who needed donations, welcome and meals. We, the School Sisters of Notre Dame present in the city for more than 40 years, provided spaces of welcome and offered services. They were intense weeks of dedicated work, welcoming several families until Christmas. We could now resonate better with others in many other parts of the world suffering effects of climate change. The words of Pope Francis, in 2015, became clear to us, "God always forgives, we humans forgive sometimes, but nature never forgives. If you give her a slap, she will give you one. I believe that we have exploited nature too much." We learnt many lessons from this experience and realized how sometimes we selfishly wasted resources on what was not really needed.

Experts tell us that nature-based solutions are cheaper, bringing positive changes on physical and mental human health, than the infrastructural solutions. We can see this in India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka where they are investing in mangroves to protect against flooding. This is cheaper than engineered sea-level protection. There is also a need to advocate for and

support local and small-scale farming. We do not need to transport food around the world if we can support its production and consumption locally.

Reflection

The climate justice movement emerged in the 1990s. But it was at COP 26, in 2021, that it gained more visibility. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the deep inequalities in our world. The impacts of global warming, driven mainly by human action, have never been so evident. The 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports warn us that extreme weather phenomena, increasingly intense and frequent, are rapidly worsening. Damage to some ecosystems is already irreversible. We are not prepared for the consequences that are happening today, and, besides a huge loss of biodiversity, this is costing human lives. Even though the climate crisis is a global reality, its consequences affect the population unequally. Three billion people in the world live in places vulnerable to the climate crisis (IPCC), 10 countries together account for almost 70% of global greenhouse gas emissions (Carbon Brief), 2 million people have died in the last 50 years as a result of extreme events and natural disasters influenced by climate change (World Meteorological Organization).

The Pontifical Academy of Sciences organized a workshop in June 2022: The health of the ocean and its seas and their role in the present and future of humanity. The participants declared that at the end of this century, 10 billion people might live on earth. They will consume resources, emitting greenhouse gases, polluting oceans, increasing the impact of climate change more than now unless actions are taken now. Pope Francis invites us to reflect: "*The climate is a common good, a good of all and for all. Humanity is called to become aware of the need for changes in lifestyles, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming, or at least the human causes that produce or accentuate it.*" (LS 23).

God calls us to hear the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor; to commit to change our lifestyle, methods of production and levels of consumption; and to advocate for the poor. To live into the "Prophetic Witness of Universal Communion," we need to risk innovative responses that urge us to challenge unjust structures for the sake of life and dignity for the most vulnerable. What are the causes and effects of climate injustice in my country? What relationship can we establish between human rights and climate justice? How are we involved in issues of climate justice on our planet? How have we advanced with our congregational commitment to the Laudato Si' Action Platform?

Action

We have to guarantee and protect human rights, work together to secure the present and the future for next generations.

- Check if your city has signed up to the Malmö commitment. If not, propose it.
- Push for debt cancellation, greenhouse reduction and increased adaptation funding.
- Raise awareness and encourage action, organize a public viewing of film "The Letter" in which Pope Francis dialogues with five people affected by the climate crisis firsthand.
- Resist fossil fuels and advocate for clean energy, access to clean water, soil, and air for all.

Closing Prayer

Giver and Sustainer of Life, grant courage and a sense of urgency to decision-makers to assure a sustainable future, putting people before profit, nature before perpetual growth, ensuring justice for those most affected by the climate crises. Help us to do all we can to participate in the restoration of Creation. Amen.

Prepared by Sister Helena Coelho, Province of Latin America and the Caribbean, for the International Shalom Network.
Graphic taken from the Directional Statement, 24th General Chapter. Design: Congregational Communications Office.