



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

A Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops of Southern Africa on the occasion of the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP 17) to the Catholic Community and to all people of goodwill

Beloved people,

South Africa is about to host the 17th United Nations Conference on Climate Change (Conference of the Parties—COP 17) which will be held in Durban from 28 November–9 December 2011.

Our precious world and the whole of Creation – which God gave us and “saw was very good” (Gen 1:31) – is now threatened by climate change. While climate change is a process that occurs naturally, there is now general agreement that human activities are causing it to happen much faster than it naturally would. This is due to far too many ‘greenhouse gases’ like carbon dioxide and methane being emitted into the atmosphere

- through our excessive burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil, petrol and gas;
- through the chopping down and burning of forests that should be absorbing carbon dioxide; and
- through intensive livestock farming.

We are all already feeling the effects of climate change which has dire consequences especially for the poor, while endangering all forms of life on the planet.

This global climate crisis poses a great spiritual challenge to all Christians, people of all faiths, and all people of goodwill as it is the consequence of the destruction of God’s creation in which we have all participated in one way or another. It calls for a change of mindset, and a change of lifestyle to reduce our dependence on fossil-fuel energy like coal and oil.

We call on all parishes, communities and organizations at local, regional and national levels, as well as individual Catholics

- to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions by using your own properties productively to grow trees that will absorb carbon dioxide;
- to grow vegetables and crops organically to reduce the use of chemical-based fertilizers; and
- to share the food thus grown with the hungry and malnourished in your midst.

As this global climate change crisis continues to grow, individuals are also called to link their efforts to those of national governments and the United Nations to achieve the goal of lessening the carbon footprint (which is our contribution to carbon emissions) on the planet for our sake, the sake of future generations and that of all living beings.

The gathering of the world member states at the upcoming UN COP 17 Conference offers a unique opportunity to take crucial decisions that will reduce the causes and impact of climate change.

We therefore appeal to all people to pressurise and encourage the Government of South Africa, which is chairing the Conference in Durban, to support the following resolutions:

- that global greenhouse gas emissions (especially of carbon dioxide), the primary factor responsible for climate change, be substantially reduced so that temperature rises remain below 1,5 ° C degree;
- that present decisions pertaining to economic development be not based on immediate economic needs only, but on the survival needs of future generations;
- that high emitting industrialized countries meet their obligations to finance developing countries to reduce their own emissions and to adapt to the negative impact of climate change;
- that South Africa, the world's 13th highest global emitter of carbon dioxide, demonstrates political will by pledging much higher targets of renewable energy production, by phasing out coal and nuclear production, and by developing the job creation potential of renewable energy;
- that the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 be extended and that the treaty becomes a binding agreement;
- that concrete measures be adopted to monitor the implementation process of the agreements, so that they are adhered to especially by industrialized countries and other large emitters in developing countries.

Finally, we invite you to pray for a successful outcome of the UN Conference on Climate Change, and to lead by example in your own lives:

God, creator of the universe, all life and goodness comes from you.

You have made us in your own image and likeness to care for and use with moderation the goods of the earth.

Yet, we have sinned against You by exploiting natural resources with greed and selfishness, causing great damage to the life on our planet.

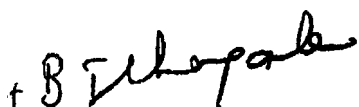
Forgive us Lord! Help us to amend our ways and to become more responsible stewards of the goods entrusted to us, mindful also of the needs of future generations.

Come Holy Spirit and renew the face of the Earth!

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ your Son who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God forever and ever. Amen

Yours in Christ,

On behalf of the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Buti Tlhagale', with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

Archbishop Buti Tlhagale OMI

President of the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference