



**KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives  
Statement on the UN Conference on Climate Change  
Durban, South Africa, 28 November - 9 December 2011**

*You care for the earth, give it water; you fill it with riches,  
Your river in heaven brims over to provide its grain.*

*And thus you provide for the earth; you drench its furrows,  
you level it, soften it with showers; you bless its growth.*

*You crown the year with your goodness; abundance flows in your steps,  
On the pastures of the wilderness it flows.*

*The hills are girded with joy; the meadows covered with flocks.  
The valleys are decked with wheat. They shout for joy, yes, they sing.*

Psalm 64: 10-14 <sup>1</sup>

We stand in awe of the goodness of our Creator who has endowed the Earth with the capacity to provide life in abundance for human and non-human species.

Our faith enables us to envision a sustainable economy where all people share in the Creator's gifts of clean water, nutritious food, adequate shelter and opportunities to care for one another, engage in creative work and deepen their spiritual lives.

We believe that it is possible to transform our economic system into one that is just and sustainable for all, living within the bounds of the Earth's biophysical limits.

Yet we note that that human-induced climate change is now causing more severe storms, floods, heat waves and droughts and accelerated loss of polar ice. We mourn for the 300,000 people who perish every year due to climate change.

We have heard the calls from our ecumenical partners in Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America to take responsibility for the sizeable ecological debt we in the global North owe to the peoples of the global South and to the Earth due to our over appropriation of natural wealth, particularly the Earth's carbon absorption capacity.

We confess our complicity in an economic system that values the accumulation of money and material goods at the expense of the wellbeing of humans and life-sustaining ecosystems. As institutions, churches and religious communities are initiating education programs for their members about climate change and about

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<sup>1</sup> The translation used here is from the Gelineau psalter that follows the Hebrew numbering. In Bibles that follow the Greek numbering it is Psalm 65:9-13.

practical and innovative ways that churches, families, and individuals and families can reduce their carbon footprint.

We must continue to do more as a society. Scientists warn that unless we substantially reduce our greenhouse gas emissions we risk extremely dangerous climate change that would:

- Displace millions of people due to coastal flooding;
- Deny sufficient water to hundreds of millions of people due to droughts and the disappearance of glaciers; and
- Risk extinction for 15% to 40% of the Earth's plant and animal species.

We have heard the warnings from our Inuit, First Nation and Métis sisters and brothers who testify to changes already occurring in Northern Canada where temperatures are rising faster than the global average endangering their cultures and livelihoods.

We are particularly alarmed by the prospect of irreversible climate change due to the melting of Arctic sea ice and permafrost releasing of billions of tonnes of methane, a greenhouse gas much more potent than carbon dioxide, threatening human and non-human life on Earth.

We are concerned that the 2009 Copenhagen Accord, reinforced at the 2010 Cancún UN climate conference, involves only voluntary emission reductions by industrial countries, instead of the legally-binding reductions negotiated under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. Even if these voluntary cuts are achieved, global temperatures will rise by 2.5 to 5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Scientists warn that even a 2 degree increase would be extremely dangerous for life on our planet.

If we are to have any hope of keeping global temperature increases near 1.5 degrees Celsius, industrial countries' emissions must be reduced to 40% to 50% **below** 1990 levels by 2020.

We are dismayed that the target adopted by Canada at Copenhagen for a level of emissions that would be 2.5% **above** 1990 levels in 2020 is grossly inadequate. We note with alarm that Environment Canada projects that with current policies in place our emissions will be 33% above their 1990 levels.

Emissions from the tar sands already account for 5% of our total emissions and are projected to rise to 16% by 2020. The recoverable oil in the tar sands contain sufficient carbon to raise global atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations by about 30 parts per million (ppm) when the challenge is to reduce concentrations from their current 391 ppm to 350 ppm.

In 2010, the Andean Indigenous peoples' vision of *buen vivir* or *living well* inspired the World Peoples' Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth In

Cochabamba, Bolivia. We embrace this worldview of living in harmony with the natural world and with our Creator, sustained by an economy of sufficiency for all.

We call on the members of our KAIROS churches and all people of good will to join us in urging the government of Canada to champion the following three goals at the November-December 2011 UN Conference on Climate Change at Durban, South Africa:

- Keeping the increase in global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, by renewing the legally-binding Kyoto Protocol for the period beyond 2012 with adequate emission reduction commitments.
- Reducing our own emissions to 40% to 50% below 1990 levels by 2020 in order to make restitution for the ecological debt we owe to the peoples of the global South and to the whole Earth community. As a first step towards this goal, Canada should immediately redirect the \$1.4 billion in annual federal subsidies to fossil fuel industries to programs to promote energy conservation and development of renewable forms of energy.
- Cancelling the financial debts of the nations of the Global South and providing sufficient funds for climate adaptation and mitigation measures through a United Nations body independent from International Financial Institutions such as the World Bank. This would be a further step in making reparations for the ecological debt we owe the Global South.

In making this call, we are guided by our sacred scriptures that proclaim good news for the poor, Sabbath rest for the land and Jubilee remission of debts as embraced by Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth. (Luke 4:16-22)

This is our hope for Durban, and for the world.

For more detailed background, please visit [www.kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org) to see the KAIROS briefing paper, *Is Durban the World's Last, Best Hope to Avoid Climate Disaster?*



KAIROS unites 11 churches and religious organizations in faithful action for ecological justice and human rights.

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