

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's Statement on the Global Wildfires



In recent weeks, our planet has witnessed extreme heatwaves and expansive wildfires throughout the world—from the rain forests of the Amazon and desert regions of Africa, normally snow-covered regions such as the Arctic and Alaska to far away countries from Spain to Siberia. Month after month, we have experienced record temperatures and unprecedented heatwaves, resulting in the destruction of millions of acres and the disruption of millions of people. And the intensity of these fires and storms is progressively increasing and intensifying, mandating critical and commensurate changes on our part.

Scientists warn us about the threat of such fires to the world's ecosystems, which are becoming increasingly jeopardized and vulnerable. The impact of these fires could reverberate for generations, affecting soil, infrastructure, and human beings. Trees are vital for the soil, for our survival and for our soul. Trees are not simply valuable for their aesthetic beauty or commercial benefit, but essentially for our defense against climate change. Planting more trees is certainly commendable, but cutting down less trees is perhaps the most compelling response to global warming.

While this global wildfire crisis may not entirely or exclusively be a consequence or

cause of climate change, the calamitous events that the world is now experiencing undoubtedly and undeniably sound the alarm about the urgent and dire repercussions of a rising level of carbon emissions. Therefore, if nothing else, such extreme phenomena compel us to consider the fundamental fragility of nature, the limited resources of our planet, and the unique sacredness of creation.

In our Encyclical that will appear on September 1st, we outline the diverse initiatives and activities pioneered by the Ecumenical Patriarchate over the last thirty years, while observing the fundamental principles and precepts proposed by the Orthodox Church over the last twenty centuries with regard to preserving God's creation.

We pray for all those threatened or afflicted by the fires in all corners of our world. We call all faithful and all people of good will to consider carefully how we live, what we consume, and where our priorities lie, using the words of the Divine Liturgy: "Let us pay attention! Let us stand with awe!"

At the Phanar, Saturday August 24th, 2019

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