

12/12/2022

ADDRESS OF HIS ALL-HOLINESS ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW AT THE 2022 G20 INTERFAITH FORUM “ENGAGING FAITH COMMUNITIES: G20 AGENDAS AND BEYOND”



Your Highness,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Honored participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

It is an honor to address you today regarding two issues central to our service as Ecumenical Patriarch and two topics essential to this vital conference: migration and climate change. We sincerely thank the G20 Interfaith Forum and the Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities for organizing such a gathering, as humankind faces a battle for survival due to the current reality of the Earth's climate system. The

conference title, “Engaging Faith Communities: G20 Agendas and Beyond,” invites intuitive thought and fervent devotion to protect and preserve the integrity of the Lord’s earthly creations for present and future generations. In a spirit of care and compassion for the entire world striving for a sustainable future, we wish to address the relationship between the climate crisis and migration.

We have dealt extensively with both topics in various international fora for many years. Climate crises and migration both reflect the excruciating human suffering in which we discern the compassionate presence of the living God whose image and dignity are being violated. The Earth has been facing a series of unprecedented ecological crises. New data reveals increased heating in the Arctic. Climate change is pushing endangered species to the brink of extinction, and tropical deforestation has been occurring at an alarming rate for the last few decades. In the meantime, many migrants have been forced to flee from inhuman and degrading treatment and places where the consequences of climate change wreak chaos and destruction.

We must not ignore that environmental refugees have not caused climate disruption; however, the actions of others during years of overconsumption have affected these refugees most significantly. The Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, convened in Crete in 2016, described the spiritual dimension of this crisis: “The roots of the ecological crisis are spiritual and ethical, inhering within the heart of each man. This crisis has become more acute in recent centuries on account of the various divisions provoked by human passions – such as greed, avarice, egotism, and the insatiable desire for more – and by their consequences for the planet, as with climate change, which now threatens to a large extent the natural environment, our common home.” (§ 15)

The environment is not only a political or a technological issue; it is, as we have come to appreciate, a primarily religious and spiritual problem. Religion has a pivotal role to play; meanwhile, spirituality that remains uninvolved with outward creation is ultimately uninvolved with the inward mystery. This spiritual dimension is essential to understand the interconnectedness between the two phenomena being examined today. Our spiritual warfare against sin has clear and tangible repercussions on how we relate to the environment and our neighbor. To place the human person within the natural environment, as an integral part of its existence, is to acknowledge that God is the bond, the common origin, that unites both.

Unfortunately, war, armed conflicts, poverty, environmental degradation, and climate change have forced people to leave their homelands. It is logical and natural that most people want to reside and prosper in the country and region

where they were born and where their families have dwelled for generations. Yet to do so, they require safety, food security, economic opportunity, freedom from environmental distress, and prospects for their children's futures. Because of the above factors, we are currently facing the largest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War. And the face of the migrant is increasingly youthful—for the first time in history, half of all refugees are children and youths. One in every 200 children in the world today is a refugee. Preventing the mass forced displacement of people has become one of the most significant ethical challenges of the 21st century.

Responding to the fundamental causes, peace, prosperity, and sustainability are the most effective solutions to forced migration. Pope Paul VI declared that “development is the new name of peace.” We embrace that wisdom by restating that today sustainable development should be the new name of peace. We recognize that frequent human-caused ecological disasters constitute a new and growing threat in our own time and are a spur to mass migration. We affirm a moral obligation to welcome refugees and that such an obligation extends to the countries responsible for causing hostilities and environmental disasters that force people to move in the first place. We recognize that children especially need a home, a safe haven, a decent education, and an appropriate response to any physical and mental health challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we find ourselves in the time of preparation before the feast of Christmas, our thoughts and prayers are with the people and families of those who suffer in their search for asylum and with those placed in harm's way due to the ever-intensifying climate crisis. The tragedy of climate migration and displacement affects an increasing number of people throughout the planet. It is fundamentally a crisis of humanity, calling for a response of solidarity, compassion, generosity, and an immediate practical commitment to convert our way of life and to place the most vulnerable at the center of our concerns and care.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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