

RIO + 20 CONTRIBUTION – October 2011



This joint statement is the contribution of a coalition of faith based organizations¹.

The Rio+20 Conference will take place at a crucial moment when our global community is facing a multidimensional crisis.

We reaffirm the importance of Principle 1 of the Declaration of Rio which states *“Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature”*.

We also recognize that all human beings are part of an ecosystem comprising all living beings on earth, therefore both humans and nature must be at the center of our attention, when we work for human development in a sustainable way. All living beings are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with each other.

We stand for a holistic and ethical approach. The human person is a created being, as are nature and all its creatures. Not only are men and women good, but so too are all created beings and ecosystems. The Earth and cosmos don't belong to humanity but to God. Men and women need to be responsible for caring for creation.

Abuses committed because of arrogance and greed lead to injustice which results in suffering for all creation. In the context of a liberal market ideology, everybody works for his/her own interest primarily. Some will profit and many others will not. As long as free markets and maximization of profit are the only agreeable basis for a market economy, greed and non-solidarity are necessary prerequisites for its functioning.

We draw two criteria from this perspective: justice and the common good. Recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples are at stake. The common good is *“the good of all of us, made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it. To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice”*².

¹ faith based organizations: Franciscans International, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Dominicans for Justice and Peace (Order of preachers), Edmund Rice International, Daughters of Charity, Vivat International

² Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Chapter II, Principle of the Common Good, §164ss

We highlight the need to link environmental issues with the common good. In order to take into consideration individuals as well as peoples, it is necessary to use a human rights based approach.

OUR CONCERNS

The mainstream economic system is a market-based approach. Any single good is commodified. In the same logic, the human being is trafficked. Economic wealth is not the only value. You cannot trade the value of a forest or a human body.

The “*business as usual*” system is predominant and contravenes strongly the Rio Declaration statement:

*“All states and all people shall cooperate in the essential task of eradication of poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world.”*³

Our statement addresses the theme: “**Green Economy** and the eradication of poverty”.

UNEP currently states: “*For the purposes of the green Economy Initiative, UNEP has developed a working definition of a green economy as one that results in **improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities***”⁴.

The Green Economy, while positive in principle, raises **some concerns**.

Economic growth is not the problem. The economy needs to generate benefits. The concern is about **equity and shared benefits**. “*The world's wealth is growing in absolute terms, but inequalities are on the increase. In rich countries, new sectors of society are succumbing to poverty and new forms of poverty are emerging. In poorer areas some groups enjoy a sort of ‘super development’ of a wasteful and consumerist kind which forms an unacceptable contrast with the ongoing situations of dehumanizing deprivation. The scandal of glaring inequalities continues*”⁵.

The Green Economy should be regarded as a mechanism which addresses social issues for eradicating poverty and environmental protection, rather than as a particular type of economic system.

Climate change increases this growing chasm of inequality. It also calls all peoples to a new degree of partnership, where traditional knowledge is valued and where scientific knowledge is shared. This will require the implementation of the Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (Principle 7 Rio Declaration). This will enable less developed countries to make a technological leap, bypassing environmentally harmful stages of the development process, and moving directly to green technology.

We are living in a world with limited material resources. The production of ever more goods and services is only possible at the risk of the collapse of the earth's ecosystems

³ Rio Declaration, Principle 5

⁴ <http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/AboutGEI/WhatIsGEI/tabid/29784/Default.aspx>

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI Encyclical letter Caritas in Veritate Chapt II Human Development in our time, §22

as such. Green Economy must address the question of production and consumption patterns.

As environmental issues are global in scope, States need a system of global governance to develop and adopt a common policy on Sustainable Development, so as to ensure an effective implementation by public and private actors.

As the world has been experiencing a series of global crises, for instance the food crisis, banking crisis and is beginning to feel the effects of the climate crisis, it is crucial that we seek to protect the most vulnerable from shocks that affect their livelihoods and their rights to development and wellbeing. The provision of a social protection floor ensuring access to cash transfers and social services is an essential element of a comprehensive sustainable livelihood approach to development in the 21st century.

Access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice on environmental matters (Principle 10 of Rio Declaration) is a prerequisite to empower peoples, to respect self-determination, and to promote a rights-based approach. Women should be part of the process equally with men. In many countries, they are the custodians of the family, of the environment, and of traditions (Principle 20 of Rio declaration).

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples advocates “free, prior and informed consent” (Article 19) to recognize indigenous peoples’ inherent and prior rights to their lands and resources and to respect their legitimate authority to require that third parties enter into an equal and respectful relationship with them, based on the principle of informed consent.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) We call for an **ambitious strategy and fundamental reforms** which will fill the gap of lack of accountability of governments in implementing agreements and meeting their international responsibilities to address Human Rights obligations.
- 2) We call for all States to put in place a **social protection floor** for people living in poverty.
- 3) We call for the **equal participation of women** in all decision-making processes.
- 4) We call for all States **to implement the Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities.**
- 5) We call for a renewed framework which will take into account the **free prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples** in all policies that affect them, at local, regional and national level.
- 6) We call for all States to recognize the **inherent value** of every human being and of the natural environment.
- 7) We call for all States to ensure that the shared benefits of the economy assure the **common good** and are not merely for personal profit.