

Church leaders statement: Copenhagen climate summit – a Kairos moment

20 November 2009

Now is the favourable time

2 Corinthians 6:2

Many people of faith and good-will are conscious that the world is perched on the brink of a Kairos moment – a moment of significance that has the potential to alter the future of this planet on which we find our home.

As governments and communities prepare for the Copenhagen climate summit in December, we as New Zealand Church Leaders are urging bold action by our government and all world decision makers. We also urge that members of our own communities again take time to learn about climate change, reflect on our own lifestyles and take the necessary actions to protect the environment for current and future generations.

A Kairos moment in scripture is a moment of opportunity, of grace and of truth. Many people may be aware of it through the 1985 statement of South African theologians, who called on their country not to allow the moment to slip by. *“Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He wept over the tragedy of the destruction of the city and the massacre of the people that was imminent, ”and all because you did not recognize your opportunity (KAIROS) when God offered it” (Lk 19: 44).”*[1]

As Church Leaders, we have spoken out for several years in our different congregations on the significant impact climate change is having and will continue to have, particularly on the most poor and vulnerable members of our global communities. Since 2007, information from the scientific community has become ever more pressing and urgent. Scientists warn us that the window of opportunity for change is now very narrow. They warn us that if we do not grasp this opportunity, future generations will be the ones to bear the cost.

The Christian faith and our religious tradition have much to offer the world at this time. The Genesis account of creation is one in which God created the world in beauty and balance, “God saw that it was good”. According to our tradition, human beings were charged with the stewardship of the earth and all living creatures. Because we are stewards and not the owners of creation, we are summoned by God to “watch over and care for it”. This implies the principle of sustainability; our uses of the Earth must be designed to conserve and renew rather than to deplete or destroy.

The urgency of this moment is not just about an environmental problem – it is also an economic one. The Stern report told the UK government in 2006 that urgent action now, using existing technologies, would be far less costly than delaying action until later this century. In New Zealand, it is easy to see the increasing costs from extreme weather events, such as the recent flooding and landslides in the Philippines, which are projected to worsen in coming decades.

As Churches, we are particularly concerned about these increasing disasters and rising costs, because they impact disproportionately on the poor and weak in our community and globally on people in developing countries, including the small island states in the South Pacific. However, it also concerns us that rarely do we hear from the Government and the media about the economic costs of doing too little, and the benefits from cleaning up the environment, and of tackling climate change.

Leading scientific voices have told us that the world community has six years to bring about a major change in the way we are doing business all over the world to avoid catastrophic climate change later this century. As Church Leaders we have applauded the steps that have been taken so far by the present and previous government, but we do not feel that the urgency of the situation is sufficiently understood. Last month we urged the Prime Minister to take bolder steps in leading New Zealand's efforts to curb our greenhouse gas emissions, and to strive for the strongest commitment by the international community at Copenhagen.

We are joining with the World Council of Churches in calling on all churches throughout New Zealand to ring their bells at 3pm on Sunday 13 December, midway through the United Nations summit in Copenhagen. Churches throughout the world will ring their bells to call people to prayer and action in the face of climate change. As each group starts their own observation of the 13 December, a chain of chimes and prayers will be start from us in the South Pacific – where the day first begins and where the effects of climate change are already felt today – to Denmark and across the globe.

Decisions taken by us at every level of society will affect climate change – at a global level, at a national level, at a community level and at a personal level. Whatever the outcome at Copenhagen, changes will need to be made which will affect us all. The new Emissions Trading Scheme brings necessary changes, but will have an impact on people in the form of petrol prices and other fuel costs. We need to ensure that we continue to look out for the most vulnerable members of our society.

Our world has the choice right now to embrace simpler lifestyles or to have them forced on us and other people by necessity. We hold in our hands an opportunity for change that future generations will not have. What we will say to them about how we used this Kairos moment, this moment of truth that we have been given?

Church leaders:

The Right Rev Dr Graham Redding, Moderator, Presbyterian Church

Commissioner Donald Bell, Salvation Army

Archbishop John Dew, Catholic Church

Archbishop David Moxon, Anglican Church

Alan Upson, Methodist Church

Rodney McCann, Baptist Church