



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the
Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 28th Session of the Human Rights Council
Item 1: Full-Day Discussion on Human Rights & Climate Change
Geneva, 6 March 2015

Mr. President,

The Holy See is encouraged by the growing efforts to address global climate change initiated by a variety of stakeholders.

There is increased evidence that the poorest people in the more vulnerable countries will bear most of the burden of adapting to climate change consequences which they had almost no role in creating¹. As we look toward the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, we are offered a significant opportunity to make two ethical decisions. Firstly, the nations of the world need to commit themselves to curbing carbon emissions at a minimum level to avoid dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system; and secondly, the nations of the world must sufficiently fund adaptation measures needed by vulnerable nations and peoples to withstand the impacts of climate change. Our concern for the common good of the planet, and for humanity, urges us to recognize our sense of interdependence with both nature and one another. No one is exempt from either the impacts of climate change or our moral responsibility to act in solidarity with one another to address this global concern.

We believe that such decisions will demonstrate humankind's commitment to showing respect for the environment, for those who suffer the most, and for the sake of present and future generations. While science continues to research the full implications of climate change, the virtue of prudence calls us to take the responsibility to act to reduce the potential damages, particularly for those individuals who live in poverty, for those who live in very vulnerable climate impact areas, and for future generations. As Pope Francis underlined, *"The effective struggle against global warming will only be possible with a responsible collective answer, that goes beyond particular interests and behavior and is developed free of political and economic pressures ... On climate change, there is a clear,*

¹ As pointed out by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "In the Netherlands, people are investing in homes that can float on water. The Swiss Alpine ski industry is investing in artificial snow-making machines," but "[i]n the Horn of Africa, 'adaptation' means that women and young girls walk further to collect water." In the Ganges and Mekong Deltas, "people are erecting bamboo flood shelters on stilts" and "planting mangroves to protect themselves against storm surges."

definitive and ineluctable ethical imperative to act ... The establishment of an international climate change treaty is a grave ethical and moral responsibility."²

Mr. President,

Solidarity with the most vulnerable nations and peoples that are experiencing the impact of climate change in a more prominent and immediate way impels us to contribute to improving their situation and defending their right to development. Poverty and climate change are now intimately linked. Strategies to address the first need to take into account the latter and vice-versa.

In fact, poor people living in developing countries are particularly vulnerable given their disproportionate dependency on climate-sensitive resources for their food and livelihoods³. The Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has documented how extreme climate events are increasingly threatening livelihoods and food security. Indeed, an estimated 600 million people will face malnutrition due to climate change, with increasing malnutrition rates in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa in particular.⁴

Moreover, the proliferation of floods and storms and the rising of the sea level are showing some of the effects that climate change will have also on the human right to adequate housing. The erosion of livelihoods, partly caused by climate change, is a main "push" factor for increasing rural to urban migration. Many will move to urban slums and informal settlements where they will be forced to build shelters in hazardous areas.⁵ Already today, an estimated one billion people live in urban slums, on fragile hillsides or flood-prone river banks, which are acutely vulnerable to extreme climate events.

As we continue to search for viable solutions, we know that the path to a more just and sustainable future is complex and often uncertain. In our collective work to address global climate change, the Holy See is committed to working with all people of good will and it pledges its support for efforts that advance the common good, respect for human dignity and a special care for the most vulnerable.

The Holy See hopes as well that the pledged contributions to the Green Climate Fund will continue to increase so as to enable the most vulnerable nations to mitigate,

² Message of Pope Francis to the President of COP 20 under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

³ IPCC AR4 WG II, p. 359. United Nations Millennium Project 2005, *Halving Hunger: It Can Be Done*, Task Force on Hunger, p. 66. Furthermore, according to the Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on the right to food, "half of the world's hungry people ... depend for their survival on lands which are inherently poor and which may be becoming less fertile and less productive as a result of the impacts of repeated droughts, climate change and unsustainable land use" (A/HRC/7/5, para. 51).

⁴ <http://www.ifpri.org/>

⁵ A/63/275, paras. 31-38.

and adapt to, the effect of climate change more effectively. Finally, the continuing and deepening collaboration and engagement of civil society and the private sector is a welcome sign. All of these measures should improve the chances for meaningful and constructive steps to address climate change at the forthcoming Paris Conference. The expected new agreement should embody binding measures of responsibility and solidarity for an effective action by the international community to address together the threats resulting from climate change. Climate change is, in fact, an issue of justice for everyone. The new instrument should rest on that justice, which must guide our deliberations in the weeks to come. Both developed and developing countries have a responsibility to protect: they constitute the one human family of this earth with an equal mandate to manage and protect creation in a responsible manner to ensure that also our future generations find a world that allows them to flourish.