

Interfaith Forum calls for protection of human rights amid Covid-19

The Geneva Interfaith Forum appeals for the protection of human rights amid the twin crises of Covid-19 and climate change.



The Geneva Interfaith Forum call for protection of human rights (AFP or licensors)

By Fr. Benedict Mayaki, SJ, Vatican News, 7 July 2020

The Geneva Interfaith Forum (GIF) has called on the United Nations to ensure that States protect human rights, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and the climate crisis.

“The Covid-19 pandemic and human-induced climate change are rooted in an unjust and ecologically unsustainable economic system and have profound implications for people and their enjoyment of human rights,” the statement reads.

The made this call in a joint statement presented by the World Council of Churches (WCC) on behalf of the GIF during the 44th session of the UN Human Rights Council meeting, from 30 June to 17 July in Geneva.

The Geneva Interfaith Forum includes, among others, the **Dominicans for Justice and Peace**, the Lutheran World Federation, and the World Council of Churches.

Two sides of the same coin

In the statement, the GIF **highlights the link between the Covid-19 crisis and the climate crisis, pointing out that “both are adversely affecting people’s enjoyment of the human right to health and SDG-3 (Sustainable Development Goals).”**

The statement notes that while the Covid-19 pandemic has infected millions of people around the world and resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths, **climate change is projected to increase malnutrition, respiratory illnesses, vector-borne diseases, and the risk of new epidemics “through its destructive effects on biodiversity.”**

Furthermore, reads the statement, **economic shutdowns and other unparalleled measures to contain the spread of Covid-19 have “led to soaring joblessness and therefore rising poverty and hunger in both the developed and developing world.”**

“Climate change is already eroding bases of sustenance and decimating livelihoods, especially of farmers, fisherfolk and Indigenous Peoples,” the statement points out. This is

“projected to undermine on a massive scale the rights to food and water, among other economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR).”

The vulnerable are most affected

The GIF statement highlights that **vulnerable and disadvantaged groups are often the most hard-hit by the effects of both the climate and Covid-19 crisis**. These include minorities, migrants, refugees, Indigenous People, and the income-poor, among others.

The statement **highlights the particular plight of women**. It notes that both crises place heavy burdens on **women who are disproportionately represented in the healthcare sector and the care economy, as well as accounting for the majority of the poor**.

“Women have less access to basic human rights like the ability to move freely, acquire land and secure employment,” the statement affirms. **They also “face systematic discrimination and sexual and gender-based violence that escalate during periods of instability, such as a pandemic or a climate-related disaster.”**

Political and civil rights

The interfaith group also brings to the fore instances in some countries where lockdowns in response to the Covid-19 were forcefully imposed by military and police with “adverse impacts on people’s political and civil rights.”

At the same time, it notes that climate activists and environmental defenders, especially in countries that have developed militarized responses to Covid-19, face “intensified vilification, harassment and even threats to life.”

Recommendations

In light of their concerns, the forum makes some **recommendations to the UN**.

The GIF appeals for **recognition and monitoring of the intersection between the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change and human rights**, and recognition of the human right to a safe, clean and healthy environment for all.

The statement also calls for **ensuring the respect for human rights when implementing measures against Covid-19**, and the **cancellation of the debt of the poorest countries**, as well as **global tax reform to support states in fulfilling their human rights obligations**.

“**The crises have clearly exposed our interconnectedness as one humanity** and how we are part of a larger community of life,” the statement notes, adding that **the crises reveal the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights**.

“We see in this moment of intertwined emergencies a **window of hope and rare opportunity to open a deep discussion on values in our societies**.”