

Religious leaders in Africa take cue from Pope Francis in care for earth

Multi-faith leaders reiterate that as guardians of spiritual wisdom and moral guidance they are disheartened by the climate crisis as sacred teachings demand that all be responsible for creation

Justine John Dyikuk, *La Croix International*, 26 September 2023



Religious leaders at the event (Photo supplied)

In line with Pope Francis' call in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato si'*, religious leaders in Africa are working to make the world a better place to live in its care for the earth, food sustainability and global improved human conditions.

This charge was contained in a joined faith-statement by the *Laudato si'* Movement in partnership with six international organizations titled, "Nairobi Declaration on a new Financial Architecture" which was issued at the African Climate Summit and the African Climate Week held earlier in September in Nairobi, Kenya. A key figure at the summit, Nigerian Catholic bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto told *La Croix International* that the message is "a joint statement of the *Laudato si'* Movement in partnership with Green Faith, TearFund, Christian Aid, Act Alliance, National Council Churches of Kenya and Lift Humanity Foundation."

Africa has special needs and circumstances

In line with Pope Francis' *Laudato si'* which they referred to as "a moral compass," the faith communities maintained that, "We all have a duty and a responsibility to protect, respect and sustain all forms of life that God has accorded to us on this earth."

Insisting that we "urgently [need to] address the looming dangers that threaten our environment" they advised all to reflect on the pope' warning that, "We are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it" which is why "as faith leaders in Africa, we believe that each one of us can respond to this challenge [and] call on religious leaders to build bridges of friendship and reverse the new surge of religious extremisms which are destroying the foundations of our faiths and destroying our people."

They pointed out that "Africa is anticipated to be confronted with the severest adverse effects of human-induced climate change, compared to most other regions of the world due to a

relatively low adaptive capacity" even though the continent "has contributed in negligible amounts about three to four percent of the global greenhouse gas emissions."

They jointly called for equity and fairness of finance by global financial institutions to poor countries suffering losses and damages as well as operationalization which includes "capitalization by rich countries, of the loss and damage fund to offer relief to global south countries through provision of grant financing for addressing loss and damage."

Recognizing structural traps that have undermined Africa's potential

In what organizers described to *La Croix International* "as a statement of faith from around the African continent addressed to the Kenyan government, the African Union and the United Nations framework convention on climate change," they recognized that "African countries continue to face high levels of famine and malnutrition despite the vastness of its arable land. Chronic and acute malnutrition, particularly among children, remains a grave concern."

They urged African leaders to "recognize the structural traps that have undermined Africa's agricultural potential and compromise capabilities to build adaptive agricultural capacities" and to "prioritize climate change coping strategies featured in various agricultural methods such as agroecology, conservation and adaptive agriculture to strengthen agriculture in Africa."

On promoting food security and sovereignty which they tagged "the right of the African people to control their own food systems," they cited "supporting small-scale farmers, promoting local food systems, and ensuring that agricultural policies prioritize and protect local communities and the environment" as well as recognizing "the critical role small-holder farmers play in providing food and protecting our environment".

Role of religion

The faith leaders maintained that "our lands, our waters, our air, and myriad life forms they sustain are sacred gifts bestowed upon us by the Divine" while noting that, "however, we stand at a crossroads in history, a moment of unprecedented challenge where the very fabric of creation is threatened by the heedless actions of humanity and the quest to profit from creation."

They were unanimous about the role of religious groups in providing help for victims of climate disasters. "When climate disasters strike, it is often the faithful who respond with open hearts and helping hands. It is our churches, mosques and temples that become safe havens and new homes for the displaced" they observed.

The multi-faith leaders said that "As guardians of spiritual wisdom and moral guidance we are disheartened by how actions to tackle climate change fall short of the required urgent ambition. The time for more ambitious political leaders, communities and ourselves must heed the cries of the earth and the loud cries of those most affected by its changing climate. Our sacred teachings demand that we be responsible for creation," they said