

Faith communities stress moral dimension of climate change

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From left to right: Martina Liebsch, Mohammad Abdus Sabur, Abraham Colque Jiménez, Elias C. Abramides, Martin Lago. Photo: Caritas

Faith communities came together to address climate change, poverty and sustainable development in a side event jointly organized by Caritas Internationalis, ACT Alliance and the World Council of Churches (WCC) at the Cancun climate summit on 7 December.

“At the end of the day, we are talking about people, not words. It is about working towards climate justice so the poor don’t pay the price for climate change,” said the moderator Martina Liebsch, director of policy at Caritas Internationalis.

The four speakers at the event entitled “Faith based organizations advocate for climate justice” came from Mexico, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Thailand.

They offered ethical contributions to the international negotiations and highlighted the need for greater awareness raising at the grassroots level, social mobilization and advocacy for climate justice.

“Something new is happening on earth: disasters are more frequent and more intense. This is due to the neglect and abusive treatment of the earth. Extreme poverty is exacerbated by exposure to climate hazards. Living in spaces prone to disasters is like living with the sword of Damocles over the head because no one knows where or at what time another flood could happen, nor how to predict it”, said Fr Salvador Urteaga Gutiérrez, advisor on emergencies at Caritas Mexico.

Carlos Javier Cardenas Martínez from the Nicaraguan Council of Evangelical Churches (CEPAD) gave a case study on climate change in Nicaragua and said: “We are messengers that climate change is a matter of justice and we call on governments in Cancun to make true sacrifices for that. ACT Alliance is concerned

for the slow progress in the negotiations. We work to empower the poorest communities to create alternatives to cope locally with destruction caused globally.”

The ecumenical declaration from the World People's Conference on Climate Change held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in April 2010, entitled “**Listening to the cry of Mother Earth – Towards a new spirituality of respectful co-existence**” was presented by the rector of the Andean Ecumenical Higher Institute of Theology (ISEAT), Abraham Colque Jiménez. He brought a rainbow flag to the side event in order to remind the listeners of God’s covenant with all living creatures and of human responsibility to be inclusive and to live in harmony.

“At the Cochabamba Conference of Peoples on 22 April 2010, 30,000 people gathered to call on the world to listen and to demand the rights of Mother Earth, the creation of a climate change tribunal, a global referendum on climate change, and the recognition and reparation for climate debt,” he said.

The event was also an opportunity for Christian and Muslim presenters to share theological perspectives and explore further joint actions.

“The science and the language of climate change needs to be made understandable to people so that they can be part of the process to address the links between climate change, water, food and land issues. Faith communities must come together to reach the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable to climate change,” said Mohammad Abdus Sabur, secretary general of the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) in Thailand.

During the discussions there was a strong call that faith based organizations should push for climate policies to be based on ethical foundations. They were also called to enable people affected by climate change to be protagonists of their situation and not objects of assistance. The role of religious organizations engaging in the education of the authorities of the respective religions was also discussed.