

A Glance at the New Climate Agreement

Overview

The Confederation of Caritas organizations worldwide welcomes the outcome of COP21, the [Paris Agreement](#), adopted on 12 December 2015. Saluted by many as “historical”, it is the new international instrument to set the world’s pathway towards reducing emissions from our economies and foster sustainable and inclusive development.

We share the analysis that the agreement could have been more ambitious, offered better guarantees, especially for the world’s poorest and most vulnerable countries and communities, and tackled more strongly the structural causes of climate change. However, we cannot but welcome the efforts of the 196 State Parties who have pulled in the negotiations with increased sense of cooperation and good will throughout the process. The Paris Agreement can be recorded as the most inclusive international agreement on climate, whereby the views of all States were heard. It gives a clear message to the world that time for change has come.

Caritas organizations expected COP21 to announce that our economy based on fossil fuels, our model of consumption and our relation with the earth must transform deeply and irreversibly, and that a new paradigm of development shall be constructed with the participation of all humankind. Although unequivocally marking a progress in the right direction, the Paris Agreement does not (yet) go that far. Below a [brief analysis](#) based on a [first reading](#) of the text:

- **Poverty eradication** is recognized as intrinsically linked to climate action¹. Poor and vulnerable communities must now be addressed by climate finance through the mechanisms foreseen in this agreement, what requires a stronger commitment towards more balanced allocation of funds between adaptation and mitigation. This must be a priority for immediate action before 2020.
- **Ending hunger and safeguarding food security** are recognized as fundamental priorities², which *per se* is very positive. However, the body of the text (i.e. the operational part of the Agreement) does not follow on this assumption, making references only to food *production*, which does not by itself ensure better access to food for everyone. In addition, there is no longer reference to ‘land use’ but land is referred to only in terms of “sink and reservoir”, which limits the land sector approach to an accounting mechanism that does not consider the people living on those lands. This could open the door to market-oriented large-scale production solutions, while we maintain this should allow for promoting agroecology, family farming and local markets, especially in those vulnerable countries where growing food for local consumption is truly threatened by climate change.
- **Human rights** – which reflect and guarantee human dignity - have only found their place in the wishful language of the Preamble, rather than in the operational part of the Agreement. This is worrisome, as it entails that future climate actions will not necessarily be bound to guarantee respect, protection and realization of human rights for all. This is very regrettable, as Caritas organizations already testify the dangerous impacts of climate actions insensitive to the rights of local communities. In particular, indigenous communities shall be protected, as recognized in several

¹ Poverty is in the Preamble of the Agreement, its Articles 2, 4 and 6.

² Preamble.

parts of the agreement³. They play a vital role in the protection of forests and their rights over land must receive special attention. **Participation** is, however, defended in Adaptation action, where traditional, indigenous and local knowledge can play a role.

- The **long-term goal** of stopping global warming is a sign in the right direction, setting the limit at “well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” committing State Parties “to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C”. The latter was a great achievement for countries most vulnerable to climate change effects, in particular low-lying and small island states. Yet, current emission targets do not meet this goal, nor there is a stringent timeframe for this purpose. However, the strength of the Agreement may lay in its **5-year review mechanism** which, if rigorously applied, will progressively allow for deeper cuts in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Caritas organizations should thus ask from their governments to submit, every 5 years, reviewed pledges corresponding each time to lower fossil consumption⁴. The textual reference to decarbonization was dropped and substituted by “carbon neutrality”, whereby the use of fossil energies can continue while removals by sinks⁵ of GHG have to compensate for such emissions. The Agreement does not mention renewable energies.
- **Finance** – the duty of developed countries to provide financial resources in favor of developing countries is reaffirmed, while other countries (not officially recognized as developed) are encouraged to do so on a voluntary basis. Climate finance can be mobilized from a wide variety of sources (including private ones) and *should*⁶ aim at a balance between mitigation and adaptation, taking into account the priorities and needs of developing countries. There is no quantification in the Agreement (only a generic reference to “a progression beyond previous efforts”), but the [Decision](#) related to the adoption of the Agreement details that a new collective quantified goal will be set to increase, as from 2025, the current floor of USD 100 billion per year. The Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF)⁷ are entrusted with climate finance management.
- **Loss and damage** – the Agreement recognizes the importance of averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, fostering cooperation in areas such as early warning systems, emergency preparedness, risk assessment and management, resilience of communities, livelihoods and ecosystems. However, the Agreement explicitly excludes any liability or compensation burdens on richer countries in favor of poorer ones for the loss and damage they already suffered (e.g. coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion).
- For the **entry into force** of the Agreement, ratification by at least 55 countries representing an estimated 55% of total GHG emissions is needed. The entry into force will concretely occur on the 30th day after the date on which such a combination of numbers and percentage will be achieved. The Agreement will be open for signature at the UN Headquarters in New York from 22 April 2016 to

³ Preamble of both the Agreement and related Decision, besides Article 7 par.5, point 136 of Decision.

⁴ In its Decision 1/CP.21 on the Adoption of the Paris Agreement, the COP convened a facilitative dialogue among Parties in 2018, to take stock of collective efforts towards the agreed long-term goal. Given the urgency of the matter, it would be crucial that countries take on increased commitments already on that occasion.

⁵ “Sinks” include forests and other vegetation that absorb and remove CO₂ from the atmosphere. See Caritas Internationalis, [“What Climate Change Means for Feeding the Planet”](#), note 59.

⁶ Textual quotation. We obviously want such a balance to be realized, to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable ones are met. We also call for 50% of public finances for climate change to be allocated to adaptation for communities already affected, in particular to smallholder farmers. See CI-CIDSE, [“Catholic international organisations facing up to climate change”](#), 2014.

⁷ Established in 1991 and restructured at the UN Earth Summit in 1992, the GEF is the financial mechanisms of a series of international agreements such as the UNFCCC, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and others.

21 April 2017 (a high-level signature⁸ ceremony will take place on 22 April). **For the sake of expediting entry into force and thus climate action, Caritas organizations should advocate in their own countries for ratification by national governments at the earliest.**

Caritas is aware that a step forward was taken, but the real work starts now. Caritas organizations worldwide are called to engage and maintain dialogue with their governments, monitoring whether their conduct is coherent with their promises, whether or not their future policies and “nationally determined contributions” to mitigate global warming are compliant with the global long-term goal set in the Agreement.

The Encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* gives us a moral stimulus and shows the path we should walk towards integral ecology. We must embrace ecological conversion, profoundly reform our development model and change our lifestyle in order to live more simply, to simply let others live.

⁸ The sheer signature of an international agreement does not, by itself, establish a State's consent to be bound by it, although it is an expression of willingness in that direction. For such a willingness to be perfected, ratification is required, the formal act whereby a State manifests internationally its consent to be bound. Ratification implies specific approval at national level and sometimes the adoption of legislation to give the treaty domestic effect.