

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 190305a

Tuesday 05.03.2019

Press Conference to present the International Conference “Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Listening to the cry of the earth and of the poor”

Intervention by Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson

Intervention by Sr. Sheila Kinsey, FCJM

At 11.30 this morning, in the John Paul II Hall of the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held to present the International Conference “Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Listening to the cry of the earth and of the poor”, promoted by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, to take place in the Vatican’s New Synod Hall from 7 to 9 March 2019.

The speakers at the press conference were His Eminence Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; Rev. Msgr. Bruno Marie Duffé, secretary of the same dicastery; Dr. René Castro-Salazar, Climate, Biodiversity, Land and Water Department assistant-director general, FAO, Rome; and Sr. Sheila Kinsey, FCJM, executive co-secretary of the JPIC Commission USG-UISG.

The following are the interventions by Cardinal Turkson and Sr. Kinsey;

Intervention by Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson

In 2000, the UN held a *Millennium Summit*, where it adopted the *Millennium Declaration*. A part of this Declaration was the adoption of eight (8) international development goals, called the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs), and which it committed itself to achieving by 2015. The G8 finance ministers wanted to make available monies to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the African Development Bank to cancel debts of highly indebted poor countries, so that they can focus and re-direct resources to improving health and education, and to alleviating poverty.

As 2015 draws to a close, a post-2015 process and action plan to carry on further the development goals and objectives of the *MDGs* have been set in motion.[1] At the Rio+20 meeting (2012),[2] the meeting's document, "*The Future we want*", called for the identification and formulation of *sustainable development goals*, as a continuation of the MDGs. In 2014, the UN Open Working Group subsequently developed 17 goals and 169 targets, covering a broad range of developing issues.

We know about all this; so, the conference we present to you today is not about the evolution of the SDCs. Our SDG Conference of 7-9 March is about the urgency of the implementation of the 17 goals determined by more than 190 nations, and it is about marshalling the moral force of religion behind the implementation of the SDG goals. We need to work together; for no source of wisdom can be left out, just as no one can be left behind!

Subtitle of the conference: "responding to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor"

Today, after four years from the adoption of the SDGs, we have to realize even more clearly the importance to accelerate and tailor our actions to adequately answer to "both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (*Laudato si'* 49).

The response to those cries, and to the complex issue of sustainable development, have to be multi-layered and address multiple levels of society. For that purpose, we need to learn from the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality. If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of science and no form of wisdom can be left out; and that includes religion and the language particular to it (*LS* 63).

8 out of 10 people in the world are reckoned as professing one belief or another: a belief in God or some other being, and as belonging to some religious group. This represents an immense potential to unleash the power of love to lead the transformation that the world needs to respond to the suffering of the earth and of the billions of people who have no access to adequate food, a decent dwelling, a secure and dignified job, and who are also the most affected by climate change.

Religions: motivation for transformation

Religions are also key players in terms of development. We play a crucial role in providing education, a cornerstone of civil society for centuries – in some case millennia. We still provide or support 50% of all schools and in sub-Saharan Africa according to UNICEF 64% of all schools. Religious people represent also the fourth largest identifiable investment community with around 12% of the total capital investment worldwide, and run around a third of all medical facilities of the planet.

The vision of the SDGs is one that we share for a wide range of different reasons. We welcome the shared goals that the SDGs have given voice and purpose to; and purpose is what motivates us to change our lifestyles, our way of producing, trading, consuming and wasting. We are a "*narrative species*" – we never share anything important to our lives through just figures. No one was ever converted by a pie chart, but by being moved by a story. Stories underlie belief systems which enable most people to make their way through the struggles and hopes of the future. We would like to contribute, with our rich religious narratives, to a sustainable future, together with all societies and institutions.

Dialogue, yes, but without losing the sense of URGENCY to act

This conference is about how religious voices can contribute to the conversation at the United Nations' and world level about human development and the achieving of the SDGs. We are not, therefore, hosting a conference merely to discuss issues around development. It is rather to help each other to foster an ecological and comprehensive conversion that can transform the world. And we need to do this urgently. A cry calls for an immediate and an urgent response!

Last October, the IPCC warned that humanity has less than a decade to embark on a systemic transformation of our consumption and production systems so as to keep global warming within the range of 1.5 degrees. As Pope Francis has appealed to all of us in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, we need an urgent “new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet... since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all” (LS 14).

For too long we have been debating at the international meetings and summits about development. The United Nations have played a leading role in coordinating such conversations about how we shape the future of our planet. In 1972, at a conference in Stockholm, the United Nations already raised the concern that we only had one earth and that the model of development that countries had followed since industrialisation, and the limitless pursuit of economic growth, was putting our common home in danger. In 2012, in Rio de Janeiro, the United Nations convened an international conference about what kind of future we want, which prepared for the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals. But now that we have these goals, it is time to act. And a strong driver for a profound transformation is ***Religion!***

[1] Ban Ki-Moon refers to this *post-2015 action plan* as a “successor framework to the MDGs” (<http://www.diplomaticcourier.com/news/opinion/2461-achieving-a-road-to-dignity-by-2030-reflections-on-the-un-secretary-general-s-post-2015-synthesis-report>).

[2] The origins of the *sustainable Development Goals* are to be placed, perhaps in the 1987 UN meeting on “*Our common future*”. There the concept “***sustainable development***” was introduced. In 1992, at the Rio de Janeiro conference on the environment, ***Agenda 21*** (things to do in the 21st century), *sustainable development* was taken up further, especially in the context of the impact of human presence and activity on the environment. At the Johannesburg Conference in 2002: the *World Summit on Sustainable Development*, economic development, social development and environmental protection were identified as pillars of *sustainable development*; and Rio+20 (2012) called for the formulation of the *sustainable goals*.

Intervention by Sr. Sheila Kinsey, FCJM

With people around the globe as his audience, Pope Francis stands before the members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization just before the vote is to take place for the passage of the Sustainable Development Goals. He urges their positive decision to pass the SDG’s when he reminds them:

“The present time invites us to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society, so as to bear fruit in significant and positive historical events (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 223).’ We cannot permit ourselves to postpone “certain agendas” for the future. The future demands of us critical and global decisions in the face of world-wide conflicts which increase the number of the excluded and those in need.”

Guided by these words, the Dicastery of Integral Human Development and the Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue are hosting the International Conference on Religions and Sustainable Development Goals. This will draw together and integrate much of the thinking being proposed by Pope Francis.

The “goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening in our world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.” (LS 19)

With careful consideration of the 5 Ps from the Preamble of the Agenda 2030—People and Planet, Prosperity and Peace; and Partnership-- the interconnecting relationships of the 17 SDGs are evident. The methodology of these days follows the pattern: to see the reality, to judge with the faith perspective and to act in coordinated

partnership. Each topic consists of the reflective dialogues of expert presenters and faith leaders. In a special way the conference also honors Pope Francis' pastoral program for change.

Time is greater than space. This concept has been in process long before the conference with a comprehensive framework of experienced experts in fields related to the SDGs, committed religious leaders of different faith backgrounds and designated working groups of the 5 Ps to prepare action plans. Thus, continuity is built into the experience with the intention of ongoing growth and development. By bringing together persons who share our common vision for the well-being of all of creation, we can strive to find ways to responsibly promote a new reality that actualizes the SDGs.

Our unity prevails over conflict. By grounding our strengths for social concerns, our caring faith traditions with expert analysis can unify our efforts to work together for the good of all of humanity. This conference has been organized in preparation for the UN Conference in September which will be evaluating the progress of the SDGs. Eighty percent of the world's population identifies as being religious. Faith perspectives can have a vital role in realizing the SDGs. The conference brings together representatives of the Abrahamic religions, as well as Hindu, Taoist and Indigenous perspectives. It encourages us to look for ways to broaden our concerns and seek areas for interconnection.

Realities are more important than ideas. As we share our journeys with people who suffer deprivation of basic human rights—food, water, health, work, and the destruction on our planet—climate change, energy usages, consumption of resource. We are carefully addressing these experiences so that we can determine ways we can make a difference for our world. We explore in a deeper way the root causes of the pain. We ask questions from a broader and more comprehensive perspective, not only why are people poor, but why are people rich? As religious traditions, we ask these questions with our members.

The whole is greater than the part. The conference is intergenerational. We begin with the young people calling us to prayer. They remind us that we are creating their future by the way we live and how we use our resources. In the process we do not want to leave anyone behind in our work. Thus, the multi-cultural experience highlights the gifts shared by many countries in a cultural night of song and dance. In fact, there will be an artist present throughout the event who will be creating a mural of her perceptions of what is happening in the conference.

The conference is designed to build a sustainable road map with clear commitments and proposals to promote and develop the SDGs. It is hoped that by creating such a plan will respond to our call from Pope Francis knowing that "What we need, then, is to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society and engage other persons and groups who can develop them to the point where they bear fruit in significant historical events. Without anxiety, but with clear convictions and tenacity." (EG 223)
