

Preserving nature – Changing our lifestyle!

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**by the Justice and Peace Commissions of Albania, Austria,
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Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and Ukraine**

"The progressive development of peoples is an object of deep interest and concern to the Church. This is particularly true in the case of those peoples who are trying to escape the ravages of hunger, poverty, endemic disease and ignorance; of those who are seeking a larger share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are consciously striving for fuller growth."[1]

That is how the *Populorum Progressio* encyclical begins, and we, as Justice and Peace commissions of Europe, do not wish to ignore this concern, and want, through this reflection, "to awaken in the People of God full awareness of their mission today. In this way they can further the progress of poorer nations and international social justice, as well as help less developed nations to contribute to their own development"[2].

We observe with great concern how nature, which God has given man for him to look after, is continuously being reduced and endangered.

Climate change is the main problem, but not the only one, which mankind is facing. Not long ago, on 5 September 2007, His Holiness Benedict XVI said in a message to the participants in the international symposium "The Arctic: mirror of life", held in Greenland: "Care of water resources and attention to climate change are matters of grave importance for the entire human family. Encouraged by the growing recognition of the need to preserve the environment, I invite all of you to join me in praying and working for greater respect for the wonders of God's creation!" In the same way, he told the youth in Loreto on 2 September 2007: "Before it is too late, it is necessary to make courageous decisions that can recreate a strong alliance between humankind and the earth. A decisive 'yes' is needed to protect creation and also a strong commitment to invert those trends which risk leading to irreversibly degrading situations."

A small part of mankind, among which we are as inhabitants from rich countries, is contributing to make the world's problems worse, with our untempered consumer behavior. This lifestyle does not only harm nature, but also endangers peace in the world. Indeed under lots of wars and international conflicts lies the control for resources. Oil, water, forests and essential minerals are not far from the main focuses of world tensions.

The environmental problems, the shortage of resources in certain areas, the tensions to get them and natural catastrophes, many of which avoidable if nature and the rules holding it were observed, are nowadays the main reason why millions of people are migrating, trying to find somewhere to live with dignity. In these massive migrations the poorest are the most vulnerable, particularly children and old people.

Aware that nature and all within it has been given to mankind to be managed wisely and justly and that "the environmental crisis and poverty are connected by a complex and dramatic set of causes that can be resolved by the principle of the universal destination of goods, which offers a fundamental moral and cultural orientation"[3], we urge all good-willed people, especially all believers to make it a goal to focus all human activities so that the world can be a better place for us all.

Environmental matters are everybody's responsibility:

- of the States, which "must increasingly share responsibility, in complimentary ways, for the promotion of a natural and social environment that is both peaceful and healthy"[4]. The richest and most powerful states must not keep holding the management of the natural resources as if they were only theirs, and must accept their responsibility in the pollution that their activities generate.
- of the peoples, that must respect the legacy of the Earth, received from their ancestors, and keep it and improve it for the coming generations.
- of every single person on the Earth, who must consider that all the goods from our Mother Earth must be shared by everyone of her offspring.

This is why we insist on the necessary new life style in which hedonism and consumer behavior must be substituted by service and responsibility for Creation.

Our concern for preserving nature should make us improve our relation with it: the use of energy, reuse of materials, reduction of consumption, recycle, share, respect every way of life, etc. We should not behave as the rich man who used to leave the beggar Lazarus only the crumbs from his banquet. Rather, we must share all His goods so that the Creation, the whole Creation, praises God.

[1] Populorum Progressio, no 1.

[2] Populorum Progressio, no 5.

[3] Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no 482.

[4] Message from His Holiness John Paul II for the World Day for Peace, 1990.