Solidarity with Victims of Climate Change

Reflections on the World Council of Churches' Response to Climate Change

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN POINTS

The Third Assessment report issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change confirmed that climate is changing because of human activities and that weather and climate extremes will increase in many places. Floods, intense rainfalls and periods of drought will become more frequent. The reduction targets of the Kyoto Protocol are an important beginning but fall far short of what is eventually required as called for by the scientific community. **Inevitably, therefore, we shall have to face a higher number of natural catastrophes and will have to adapt to new climatic conditions on the planet.**

The negotiations in the framework of the United Nations aim at *mitigating* the impact of climate change; even if the targets of reduction called for by the scientific community should be reached, weather patterns will change. Nations will therefore in any case need to *adapt* to changing situations.

Climate Change will cause enormous damage. Re-insurance companies speak of an annual amount of US$300 billion. The figure does not include adaptation costs. In addition, climate change has influence on health and psychological stability – generally on the quality of life. It is essential to underline that the impact will be most severe in the vulnerable countries in the South; it creates a new form of injustice.

Climate Change cannot be isolated from other factors of social and environmental degradation. They inter-act. The real danger is their accumulated impact.

Why is action so slow? Many psychological reasons can be given. But the main reason lies in the fact that measures to reduce greenhouse

gas emissions run against the dynamics of the present project of society based in ever-expanding production and consumption. A vision of society is at stake.

What are the tasks which arise for society and, in particular, for the churches? Four areas can be mentioned: a) A new round of negotiations on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions must be initiated at the earliest possible date; b) Since natural catastrophes are bound to increase, society needs to be prepared to stand in solidarity with the victims of climate change, especially those in the most vulnerable countries; c) Strong emphasis must be placed on adaptation measures protecting vulnerable people against the weather hazards of the future; d) The challenge posed by the needs of adaptation may well exceed the capacity of human solidarity. The calculations of the insurance business give an impressive illustration of the growing risks. More and more areas are left to the spontaneous solidarity of people.

Relief and Development Agencies face new challenges. Policies may need to be reviewed. a) More emergencies will occur; b) Relief must be so organised that it does not end in dependence; c) Adaptation to changing climate conditions becomes a major emphasis; d) The concept of development needs to be re-thought as to include disaster preparedness; e) Risk assessment acquires increased importance; risk assessment findings need to be widely communicated; f) Relief and development agencies are well placed to plead the case of a new round of climate change negotiations.

Spiritually, the struggle against environmental degradation, in particular, the impact of climate change, must address the contradictions in society, especially the present economic course e.g. non-sustainable consumption in many countries, the increasing gap between rich and poor, the net flow of money from poor to rich countries. Every effort needs to be made to maintain the quality of solidarity in a world whose quality of life is steadily deteriorating.

INTRODUCTION

For many years the WCC has consistently addressed the issue of climate change. It has sought to assess the warnings of the scientific community in a Christian perspective. It has pleaded with governments to take action and called on the churches to support, and participate in, efforts aiming at the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Representatives of the WCC have closely followed the negotiations on reduction targets in the framework of the United Nations.

With the publication of the Third Assessment Report (TAR) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2001 a new situation has arisen. We are now told that the threat of climate change is even more serious than so far assumed. There is therefore even more reason not to delay action. But the nations, in particular the governments of industrialised countries, continue to be slow in responding to the challenge. If the assessment of the IPCC is correct, humanity and ecosystems will find it very difficult to adapt to the rapid changes in climate. ***Weather anomalies will multiply and the number of victims will increase.***

What does this mean for the witness of the churches and in particular the World Council of Churches? How are they to respond to the contradiction between scientific analysis and political behaviour which has become apparent?

EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS ARE BOUND TO INCREASE

The scientific community has become more affirmative in presenting its findings on the threat of climate change. While earlier reports placed strong emphasis on the 'remaining uncertainties', the third report (TAR) uses plainer language. We read in the report phrases like the following:

> **An increasing body of observations gives a collective picture of a warming world and other changes in the climate system. Since the release of the Second Assessment Report, additional data from new studies of current and paleoclimates, improved analysis of data sets, more rigorous evaluation of their quality, and comparisons among data from various sources have led to a greater understanding of climate change.**

The report affirms, in particular, more clearly the contribution of human activities to global warming. While the Second Assessment Report (SAR) in 1995 used circumspect language "The balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate", the new report is much more straightforward:

> There is new and stronger evidence that most of the warming observed over the last 50 years is attributable to human activities … Since the SAR, progress has been made in reducing

> uncertainty, particularly with respect to distinguishing and quantifying the magnitude of responses to different external influences.

In his address to Sixth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP6) in The Hague, November 2000, Robert T. Watson, IPCC chair, adds:

> The atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases are changing due to human activities … Their concentrations are higher now than at any time during the last 420,000 years, the period for which there are reliable ice-core data, and probably significantly longer.

The report projects a darker picture of the future than previous reports. While earlier estimates spoke of a temperature rise of up to 3 degrees Centigrade, new estimates are more dramatic:

> Human influences will continue to change atmospheric composition throughout the 21st century … Global average temperature and sea level are projected to rise under all IPCC scenarios (cf. Special Report on Emission Scenarios) … *The globally averaged surface temperature is projected to increase by 1.4 to 5.8 °C over the period 1990 to 2100* … Temperature increases are projected to be greater than those in the SAR.

Robert T. Watson gives the following description of the changes:

> Model calculations show that evaporation will be enhanced as the climate warms, and that there will be an increase in global mean precipitation and an increase in the frequency of intense rainfall … Seasonal shifts in precipitation are also projected …

> In general, precipitation is projected to increase at high latitudes in winter, while run-off and soil moisture is projected to decrease in some mid-latitude continental regions during summer. The arid and semi-arid areas in Southern and Northern Africa, Southern Europe, the Middle East, parts of Latin America and Australia are expected to become drier.

Despite these persistent warnings, the response of the international community is far from adequate. Since the ratification of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1994, negotiations have taken place to reach an agreement on binding targets of reduction of greenhouse gases. In 1997 the Kyoto Protocol was proposed obliging the industrialised countries to achieve by 2012 an average reduction of 5.2% of CO_2 emissions from 1990 levels. The agreement met with much opposition. In March 2001, the United States made clear that they were not prepared to go along with it. Despite this resistance, the Seventh Session of the Conference of the Parties in Marrakech (COP7) in November 2001, was able to work out a compromise which is likely to allow the Kyoto Protocol to be ratified by a sufficient number of the nations (with the continuing exception of the United States) to allow the Protocol to come into effect as international law.

But the Kyoto Protocol represents, in reality, not more than a modest beginning. It is to be welcomed because it presents a first step on the road to an adequate response. Despite its obvious limitations it is a unique achievement because it represents a first binding 'international treaty' on climate change. It provides the basis for further efforts. But the Kyoto Protocol does not do justice to the challenge of the scientific community. Scientists plead for a 60% reduction of CO_2 emissions by the year 2050. Compared with this target, a reduction of 5.2% in the industrialised world is clearly insufficient. In addition,

in order to make the agreement acceptable, large concessions were made. According to the Kyoto Protocol, industrialised countries are allowed to fulfil at least part of their obligation through trading with certified emission rights and through the so-called 'Clean Development Mechanism', i.e. promoting projects in developing countries which achieve a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Sinks, i.e. measures to increase the absorption of CO_2 emissions, in particular forests, can also be counted as credits toward meeting national emission reduction targets.

Since developing countries have a legitimate right to pursue industrial expansion, there is a risk that the overall emission of greenhouse gases will continue to increase.

Weather anomalies are therefore bound to become more and more frequent in the coming years and decades. If the predictions of the TAR are correct, action on climate change is no longer simply a matter of 'precaution'. Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) declares: *The world has already signed up to a certain level of human-induced climate change,* and the consequences – sea level rise, more intense rainfalls, floods, storms as well as increasing desertification will be with us.

We have to plan for adaptation. In particular, we have to prepare ourselves to face an increasing number of 'natural catastrophes'.

THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

In early 2000, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) published a detailed study report of Munich-Re, one of the biggest re-insurance companies of the world. It claims that "climatic changes could trigger world-wide losses totalling many hundreds of billions of US dollars per year. Most countries can expect their losses to range from a few tenths of a percent to a few percent of their GNP per year; and certain countries, especially Small Island States could face losses extending to 10%." Other re-insurance companies confirm these expectations.

These figures also do not include adaptation measures. Increasingly, protection measures against the impact of weather anomalies will be called for. Recently, for instance, a tourist resort in Switzerland voted an amount of CHFr.17 million for the protection against avalanches.

Even more serious is the increase of environmental refugees which is bound to result from climate change. Though forecasts are difficult, studies have advanced the figure of 150 million persons displaced by for the year 2050.

But the damage of climate change cannot be fully expressed in figures. In many places the quality of life is likely to diminish. Destroyed areas cannot quickly be restored. What has been developed in centuries cannot be repaired in a short lapse of time. Areas, once hit by 'natural disasters' (or should they rather be called 'un/natural disasters'?), are no longer the same as before. They do not provide home and security to the same extent. Refugees lose their homes and with their homes, the connection with previous generations. Natural disasters also imply a loss of beauty. Two examples: The snow cap of the Holy Mountain Ararat is disappearing, and in many parts if the world the coral reefs are gradually bleaching.

Climate Change has an impact on physical health. Details can be found in a carefully researched report of the World Health Organisation. But, often, the psychological consequences are not sufficiently taken into account. Climate change causes a feeling of fear and insecurity. In areas prone to natural disasters, the sense of initiative can easily be diminished. The anxious question 'When will we have to face the next catastrophe?' can have a paralysing effect. Adaptation is therefore not simply a matter of improved technological devices. It has also a deeper psychological dimension. To respond to the present situation, there is need for new spiritual resources.

The impact of climate change is not the same in all parts of the world. There are areas, especially in the Southern Hemisphere, which are particularly vulnerable. Though their per capita contribution to the causes of climate change is negligible, they will suffer from the consequences to a much larger degree. In addition, they do not have the means to take measures of adaptation. Climate change aggravates the social and economic injustice prevailing between industrialised and developing countries. Through climate change, solidarity acquires a new dimension.

Ultimately, climate change affects the whole of creation. It constitutes a threat for animals and plants, and disturbs the subtle equilibrium on which the present civilisation is built in nature. To contribute to this deterioration is not only sin against the weak and unprotected but also against the earth – God's gift of life.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND OTHER FACTORS OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Climate change is part of a larger picture. It cannot be isolated from other threats humanity is facing today. As we consider the impact of climate change, other factors causing social and environmental degradation also need to be taken into account such as:

- the scarcity of more and more resources;
- the fact that we live today in a 'fuller world', i.e. the explosive growth of the world population, coupled with the rapid process of urbanisation; and consequently the increased claims on natural resources;
- the vulnerability of the technological world;
- conflicts, violence and war.

These factors interact. The impact of climate change is aggravated by these other destabilising factors. On the other hand, climate change increases their impact on human society and nature. It is important, for instance, to recognise that the genocide in Rwanda and the war in Afghanistan were preceded by years of unusual drought. Climate change adds to the complexity of social and political conflicts.

The reports of Working Groups II and III of the IPCC on 'mitigation' and 'adaptation' are based on the conviction that solutions are within reach. In his address to the COP6 in The Hague, Robert T. Watson, chairman of IPCC stated:

> The good news is that the majority of experts believe that significant reductions in net greenhouse gas emissions are technically feasible due to an extensive array of technologies and

> policy measures in energy supply, energy demand and agricultural and forestry sectors."

Many academic studies confirm this statement. The targets of reduction can in principle be reached. The measures to make both mitigation and adaptation possible are available. But it is important to recognise the intimate connection of climate change with the other factors mentioned above. Scenarios can easily be disturbed by unexpected events which complicate the overall picture. Priorities can change over night when new threats emerge. In particular, with the outbreak of a war, careful ecological planning will almost automatically be abandoned.

To struggle for adequate measures against climate change requires a multifaceted response to the totality of the threats. It requires, in particular, a strong sense of priorities.

A VISION OF SOCIETY IS IMPLIED

There has been no lack of appeals to take the necessary steps. But there is, obviously, little readiness to act and the negotiations on reductions have been extremely laborious.

The information is available. The IPCC assessment reports have been widely covered by the media. While for a long time dissenting scientific voices denouncing climate change as an unfounded hysteria were given prominence, the verdict of the majority of the scientific community is today generally accepted. Nevertheless the findings are not sufficiently appropriated to generate the action which is required.

Partly, this may be due to the fact that these findings are difficult to communicate. Though first signs of climate change can be observed in the present, its full impact lies in the future and can therefore not yet be felt. It requires imagination and a developed sense of responsibility to take measures today for the good of future generations. Without much reflection, the assumption is made that they will find in their time the solutions which are required. Upon reflection it becomes clear that the threat of climate change is of such magnitude that it surpasses the human capacity to react. People tend therefore to protect themselves by pursuing their present way of life.

But there are other reasons. The reductions of CO_2 emissions called for – 60% by the year 2050 – cannot be achieved without a far-reaching re-orientation of the contemporary society. From an environmental point of view, the present economic system is destructive and as long as the 'economic dynamism of the status quo' continues, there is little likelihood of a new equilibrium in the atmosphere. The recent discussions at the WTO Conference in Doha (November 2001) show how difficult it is to include criteria of ecological responsibility among the principles governing trade activities. Even the modest

proposal to set up a Commission to study the relevance for WTO on environmental criteria which have, over the years, been formulated by various UN Organisations was only approved with the qualification 'without prejudging the outcome' of the conversations. The system is basically incapable of integrating the environmental dimension. Though market mechanisms are to be affirmed for the promotion of the exchange of goods, they are unable to set the scales and limits which must be respected for the sake of the environment. For measures containing the dynamism of the market the role of the state is indispensable. Take just the example of research. Though industry is vitally interested in innovation and will substantially support profit oriented research, the state will need to make sure that research activities can be oriented towards the demands of a sustainable future.

As long as measures for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions can be proposed within the framework of the present economic system, they can to a certain extent count on the approval of the parties. Characteristically, the measures which can be fulfilled through trade activities were given in the course of time more and more prominence in the Kyoto Protocol (trading with emission certificates, Clean Development Mechanism, etc). Industry and business can, indeed, achieve substantial reductions. But as the next, more demanding, stages of reduction are envisaged, the dilemma increases. It becomes clear that fundamental changes are called for – of patterns of production and consumption, in particular in the field of energy, of life style, e.g. in the field of motorised mobility etc.

In the light of these reflections, questions must be raised with regard to the current concept of 'sustainable development'. The vision was proposed in the late 1980s by the UN report 'Our Common Future' and no doubt represented at that time a breakthrough. It combined the need for stewardship with the recognition that all nations – and also future generations – are entitled to their share of the resources

of the planet. But the discussion in subsequent years did not do justice to the challenge inherent in the concept. It was governed by the axiomatic assumption that there was no fundamental tension between the demands of sustainability and development in the terms of the present economic system. 'Development' was considered to be the noun to be qualified by the adjective 'sustainable'. The demands on the planet continued therefore unabated. But for a society to be sustainable, scales of exploitation need to be respected. For justice to be achieved, limits to development must be set in the developed world. As long as these two requirements are not met, the degradation of life conditions is inevitable.

In fact, life conditions are deteriorating. It is not cynical to speak of 'Rio minus 10' instead of 'Rio + 10' which is the colloquial title for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 on the tenth anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit. The destructive processes have continued and are continuing. Change is unlikely to occur through persuasion. It may take place as the dysfunctioning of the system becomes more and more obvious. It will be accompanied by upheavals and suffering. As we seek to re-define the concept of 'sustainable development', this hard reality needs to be taken into account. Increasingly, the need to resist degradation and to limit its effects will have to be recognised as an important dimension of sustainability. The term development has no longer the connotation of improving life condition and eventually leading to a 'better world'. The emphasis will be much more on increasing the capacity to survive in deteriorating life conditions.

TASKS ARISING IN CONNECTION WITH CLIMATE CHANGE

What are then the priorities with regard to climate change? What witness are the churches called to bear?

a) A new round of negotiations

Clearly, the Kyoto Protocol, especially in the form in which was adopted by the Seventh Session of the Conference of the Parties in Marrakech (2001), cannot be the end. As soon as possible after its ratification, a new round of negotiations must be initiated. In accord with all reasonable people, the churches have to exercise maximum pressure to this effect.

The Kyoto Protocol clearly states that 'commitments for subsequent periods' need to be considered in good time. "The Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to this Protocol shall initiate the consideration of such commitments at least seven years before the end of the first commitment period (§3.9, cf. 9, 20 and 21)." Since the first commitment period ends in 2012, consideration of a new round needs to begin not later than 2005.

Aviation is at present responsible for 3% of all CO2 emission, and the percentage is rapidly growing. In addition, aviation, both civil and military, has other negative effects on the climate system. Only part of this impact is accounted for under the present climate change convention. The emissions of international travel are not included in any national account. It is essential that the effects of aviation will fully be considered in future negotiations.

A next round of negotiations may well need to be based on a new framework. To achieve a fair distribution of rights and obligations, it may be preferable to establish maximum levels of greenhouse gas emissions for each country rather than to fix overall targets of reduction. The proposal of the Global Commons Institute (United Kingdom) under the title 'Contraction and Convergence' deserves the attention and the support of the churches. The Contraction and Conversion proposal is an important reference point in the World Council of Churches statement "The Earth's Atmosphere – Responsible Caring and Equitable Sharing of a Global Commons" prepared for the Sixth Session of the Conference of the Parties in The Hague, November 2000.

b) Solidarity with victims of climate change

With the growing frequency of natural catastrophes, the number of victims is bound to increase. Whatever the outcome of future negotiations, there is therefore urgent need to strengthen the capacity to stand ready for immediate aid and to limit their impact.

As weather extremes multiply, natural catastrophes can no longer be considered as isolated events. They belong to the pattern caused by climate change and need to be faced as part of the risks which are inherent to human life. It is essential to sharpen the general recognition of this development.

Emergency help will more frequently be called for. Society, both nationally and internationally, needs therefore be so ordered that aid is available when catastrophes occur. Budget reserves need to be established. Personnel needs to be trained and capable and equipped to respond to unexpected situations. Invariably, authorities are accused not to have taken in time the necessary measures to reduce their ef-

fect and in particular to have neglected to work on disaster plans and to set up disaster teams.

As the number of environmental refugees increases, new approaches must be developed. What can be done to facilitate the return to the home country? What are the possibilities of providing new homes in other areas?

c) Adaptation to changed climate conditions

As weather extremes increase, adaptation acquires increased urgency. Every effort must be made to prevent disasters from occurring with the same devastating effects.

Today, catastrophes often occur unexpectedly in areas which are not prepared to cope with their impact. Every catastrophe provides lessons for the future. Maximum adaptation to new climate conditions must be achieved.

Both emergency help and adaptation measures call for international action. The capacity to respond is not the same in rich and poor countries. While in developed countries means for a certain degree of adaptation are available, developing countries can normally not afford adequate measures. A new form of international solidarity is required to meet the needs of adaptation.

d) The magnitude of the task

The challenge to human solidarity is formidable; and it is growing.

To measure its extent, it is useful to consider present developments in the insurance business. Climate change causes deep concern with insurance companies. The growing frequency of natural catastrophes

increases the risks which they are obliged to meet. How long will they be able to cover the damage resulting from weather extremes and other hazards? Basically the insurance business is an attempt at solidarity. The risk of losses is shared among those who pay annual premiums. To be viable, the insurance business has to make a careful assessment of the risks which it is prepared to cover. It cannot shoulder more risks than it is financially capable to cover.

If risks increase it has to raise the premiums. But premiums cannot be raised beyond the financial capacity of those who seek insurance. If premiums cannot be raised, the insurance companies have no other solution than to refuse insuring certain risks. They will have to select their targets.

The consequence is that generally only rich countries and the rich in poor countries have the benefit of insurance. Re-insurance companies such as Swiss-Re have 50% of their business in North America, 30% in Europe and only 20% in the rest of the world. Vast areas of life, especially in poorer countries, remain therefore non-insured. Sober, profit oriented risk assessment leads to an increase of these non-insured areas.

To a certain extent, insurance companies, in particular re-insurance companies, are allies in the struggle against climate change. They are interested in both mitigation of and adaptation to climate change in order to reduce risks. Their careful risk assessment can be of immense help if its results are openly communicated to the wider public.

But at the same time their findings are a further indication of the growing challenge of climate change. In future, more and more hazards will need to be met by spontaneous and generous solidarity with no expectation of 'economic returns'.

CONSEQUENCES FOR RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES

The increase of weather anomalies has, obviously, implications for relief and development agencies. They need to adapt their policies to the new emerging realities.

Generally, relief and development agencies place primary emphasis on self-reliance and development. They seek to enable the recipients of aid to take their own initiatives towards new life conditions. Education, community building and economic self-development are high on their agenda. Clearly, when catastrophes occur, they stand ready to intervene. But as they provide aid, they seek to restore the conditions which allow development activities to resume with as little delay as possible.

For a long time environmental issues had no prominence in development work; and even today policy statements do not necessarily explicitly refer to the need for action against ecological destruction. Inevitably, however, the consequences of climate change will loom larger on the work of relief and development agencies. The following aspects need to be considered in this connection:

a) Increased emphasis on emergency help

As natural catastrophes occur more frequently, the need for immediate short-term aid will increase. Normally, catastrophes draw a spontaneous and generous response. Pictures of destruction and human misery strike emotions and induce the public to provide financial support. Often, in case of catastrophe more means are made available than can be transmitted. There is the question, however, for how long such generosity will last. When intervals between catastro-

phes become shorter and shorter, the readiness to help can easily diminish. If they hit again and again the same country, the conclusion may be drawn that financial help is useless and that such countries are to be abandoned.

Much depends on the media in this respect. As long as natural catastrophes are reported and strike the imagination of people, solidarity is likely to continue. As soon as the media begin to loose interest, we have to reckon with public indifference.

b) Relief and dependence

In principle, emergency aid should be temporary. People of an area hit by disaster must not become aid dependent. The ultimate aim of emergency aid is the restoration of self-reliance. People must be enabled to resume their activities and to secure their own living. The process of rehabilitation may take less or more time. If aid operations last for too long, human dignity will be affected and the sense of civil responsibility can easily diminish.

Rehabilitation work will draw less public attention. Funds are therefore not readily available. To make sure that rehabilitation programmes can be carried out, it is advisable to include in emergency appeals a certain percentage for follow up work.

c) Adaptation

More and more attention will need to be given to 'disaster preparedness'. Where climate change is likely to cause repeated disasters, measures need to be taken to provide as much protection as possible against the impact of future catastrophes. Inescapably, adaptation becomes an integral part of the agenda of relief and development

agencies. Adaptation can take many forms, e.g. building dams against recurring floods, improving the conditions for agriculture in arid areas, securing safer homes in areas likely to be hit by storms, developing health programmes, etc. More and more, it will also include the task of resettling refugees whose homes can no longer be inhabited.

d) Adaptation and development

In the light of these considerations the concept of development may need to be re-thought. The basic idea connected with the notion of development is a gradual improvement of life conditions. In order to achieve this goal, every effort must be directed to long-term planning. In this concept, natural catastrophes are seen as a turbulence whose impact needs to be overcome for development to resume its course in as close a future as possible. Destruction is seen as an interruption of the development process.

More and more, the intensity of natural catastrophes will challenge this view. The impact of disasters may be such that the status quo can no longer fully be restored. Areas and perhaps whole countries may become more vulnerable. Development cannot be seen as a linear process of improvement. More and more, the capacity of survival will acquire a central place in development activities.

Adaptation measures are an integral part of development. The very first definition of a 'sustainable society' offered by the World Council of Churches (1974) spoke of the need of 'robust' society. The adjective is appropriate as an expression of the need for disaster preparedness. But clearly, financial needs for adaptation measures may block means which otherwise would have been available for 'development programmes'.

e) Risk assessment

Adaptation presupposes careful risk assessment. How are countries and people going to be affected by climate change? What is the likelihood of catastrophes? What are the prospects of catastrophe prone areas? Much is uncertain in this respect but much can be learned from the efforts of climatologists, engineers and sociologists, in particular, as we have seen, from the statistics and calculations established by the insurance business.

Relief and development agencies have to share in the effort of risk assessment. A clear perception of risks is an important element in establishing general policies and in defining programmes for particular countries.

An accurate assessment of existing risks is essential for a constructive relationship with the constituencies of agencies and with the wider public. Sometimes, for the sake of eliciting aid, risks are exaggerated with damaging effects on credibility; more often, risks are underestimated by the public. Only as credible information is consistently communicated, an enduring response can be expected.

f) Agencies and climate change negotiations

Relief and development agencies have a vital interest in continuing efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They are affected in their work by the climate change which is now occurring. As greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere increase, they will face an even more overwhelming task.

Their experience places them in a privileged position of advocacy. More than most other 'actors' in society, they can point with competence to the disastrous implications of climate change for the future

of the planet. They have a double task. On the one hand, they can intervene with governments and press for a new round of negotiations. But awareness building in society will be even more important. Campaigns of relief and development agencies must include this dimension. It is part of their witness to sensitise their constituencies and to promote a more responsible life style, e.g. with regard to energy consumption or motorised mobility.

The WCC Consultation on Solidarity with Victims of Climate Change decided to suggest to relief and development agencies that they issue a common statement urging both national governments and the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to initiate without delay the next stage of negotiations. For a first suggestion of such a statement cf. the appendix.

CLIMATE CHANGE AS A SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE

The response to climate change cannot be limited to technical considerations. Spiritual resources are required. The tasks cannot therefore be 'delegated' to agencies. They need to involve the churches as a whole. Churches have a responsibility to speak out in public, to name the threats and to prepare people for an adequate response.

Churches must call into question the dynamics of the present economic systems. They need to point to the contradictions in which society finds itself, despite clear analyses of the threats endangering the future of humankind. Churches should resist the tendency to get engaged in a suicidal course and especially against the trend among the powerful to accept unreasonable risks for the weak. In the book of Proverbs, we find a moving passage about the rejection of wisdom. Wisdom, represented as a woman, says: "Happy is the man who listens to me … for he who finds me, finds life and obtains favour from the Lord; but he who misses me, injures himself; all who hate me, love death (Prov.8: 34–36)." There is in today's society an element of love of death which needs to be clearly denounced. The vision of human beings independent from the stringencies of nature seems to be irresistibly attractive. For the illusion of freedom almost every price is paid.

Resistance implies the readiness for change. But the change which is required will perhaps not entail ever-improving life conditions. The struggle is not for the realisation of the perfect society. The hope for a world above contradictions entertained in the past by so many revolutionaries has lost much of its credibility. Rather, the struggle is against the degradation of the world. When after September 11, 2001, people in New York said: "The city will never be the same",

Mayor Giuliani retorted: "Yes, not the same but a much better place". Though this may be true for New York, it will not apply to other places in the world. Development is not a constant upward movement. We have to be content if we succeed in containing the process of degradation and maintain a sense of solidarity among the nations and their people.

Solidarity must be practised to be a living force. It requires committed communities. Resistance to the values governing the present course must be rooted in groups – which are committed to their cause and at the same time prepared to engage with others in concerted witness and action.

There is no guarantee that resistance will be crowned by success. The future is unknown. There is the distinct possibility that 'love will grow cold' (Matt. 24:12). It is essential that our love does not depend on the assurance of success. Faith, hope and love abide, says Paul. Love transcends the limits of this life. The hope for God's 'absolute future' is the ultimate motivation of love.

APPENDIX

A very *first and preliminary* draft for a statement of relief and development agencies to be released at an appropriate moment.

How long will Solidarity last?

The scientific world is becoming more and more affirmative: climate change is already a reality and the prospects for the future are likely to be more devastating than was anticipated.

The negotiations on targets of reduction in the context of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Convention have so far produced only minimal results. The fact that the Kyoto Protocol was adopted is to be welcomed as a promising first step in the direction of more substantial reductions of greenhouse emissions. But there can be no illusion: with the defection of the United States and all concessions made in the course of the negotiations, the impact of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change will be small. The Kyoto Protocol will need to be followed-up by much stronger efforts.

Weather extremes will become more frequent. Floods and droughts will multiply. Sea levels will rise. The number of victims of climate change is bound to increase. The consequences of climate change will accentuate the deep injustice already existing between industrialised and developing countries. Weather anomalies will primarily hit the large majority of the world population which is not the main source of the problem and which has little means to protect itself against the impact of changed climate conditions.

A recent study speaks of annual damage of up to US$ 300 billion. The number of environmental refugees is bound to increase.

These prospects for the future pose a challenge to relief and development agencies. For how long will they be in a position to provide aid when emergencies arise? There is the distinct danger that the motivation and resources to respond to unexpected events and developments will no longer be available. Repeated disasters, sometimes destroying the results of years of development work, can easily have a paralysing effect. The magnitude of the tasks ahead is a source of deep concern.

We join therefore in a double appeal:

- to the international community and national governments to ratify the Kyoto Protocol without delay and to engage in new negotiations with a view to reach an adequate response to the likely impact of climate change;
- to churches and all people with a sense of responsibility to resist indifference and to equip agencies to give expression to the solidarity with the victims of climate change – providing emergency aid, assisting refugees to find a permanent home and facilitating measures of adaptation to changed climate conditions.

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