

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by
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The Three Year Climate Safeguard Plan Endorsed by Patriarch Bartholomew

Since the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, many nations have been aware of climate change and have taken initiatives to mitigate this major environmental problem. This document that set plans and goals for each of the nations to achieve, along with other global initiatives, has had a positive impact on climate change. During the past three years, the emissions of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels has leveled off after increasing every year for at least the past hundred years. This leveling off of carbon emissions helped make possible the Paris Agreement in 2015. Although this is really good news, we still have a long way to go.

Christiana Figueres, vice-chair of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, and Convener of Mission 2020, along with an impressive group of colleagues established a plan to be sure that within three years the carbon dioxide emissions will not continue to remain level but, rather, will decrease. It is the only way that the temperature goals set by the Paris Agreement can be met. Mission 2020 developed, along with knowledge leaders, milestones in six different sectors that identify where we need to be within three years.

In the energy sector, Mission 2020 states that no new coal-fired power plants be approved after 2020, and all existing coal-fired power plants be retired as soon as possible.

In the infrastructure sector, cities and states are committed to fully decarbonize buildings and infrastructure by 2050. In the meantime, cities are upgrading 3% of their buildings to zero or near zero emissions each year.

In the transport sector, electric vehicles currently make up only 1% of all global sales but needs to increase to 15% by 2020. In addition, there is a need to double the mass-transit utilization in cities and increase truck fuel efficiency by 20%. The aviation industry is required to decrease greenhouse-gas emissions 20% per kilometer travelled.

There will be new land use policies that will decrease deforestation which currently contribute about 12 % of total emissions. By introducing more afforestation and reforestation by 2030, it will help the net global emissions get to zero. Also, sustainable agriculture practices can help reduce emissions while increasing carbon dioxide sequestration.

Carbon intensive industries like iron and steel, cement, oil and gas are currently emitting about 20% of carbon dioxide and efforts are being made to reduce these emissions by 50% by 2050. All other heavy industry are making plans to increase efficiencies and reduce emissions.

The financial sector is making changes for the redeployment of capital and is planning to invest \$1 trillion per year for climate action. Most will come from the private sector, but more “green bonds” must be issued.

To be sure these milestones are achieved, it is necessary to use science for making decisions, existing solutions must be scaled up as quickly as possible, and we must be optimistic that we will achieve these goals. In addition, the perfect time to commit to this program is at the G20 meeting on July 7-8, 2017 when leaders of 20 of the largest countries meet in Hamburg, Germany.

This three-year climate safeguard plan has been endorsed by world leaders who all share a mission to improve people’s lives, the planet and the global economy. This list of global leaders includes Patriarch Bartholomew, the spiritual leader of 300 million Eastern Orthodox Christians around the world. He has been dedicated to protecting the environment for over 25 years and thus earned the title of “Green Patriarch” by Al Gore.

You can read more details on this three year plan to going to the current issue of Nature <http://www.nature.com/news/three-years-to-safeguard-our-climate-1.22201> .