

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE 4TH ANNIVERSARY OF
LAUDATO SI, AND 7TH ANNIVERSARY OF CYNESA**

Venue: UNEP - Nairobi

Dates: 15th - 16th July 2019

Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa (CYNESA) organized a two-day meeting to discuss the environment. The meeting was held at the offices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It brought together young leaders to explore how to fight climate change and biodiversity loss. The theme of the two-day meeting was “Laudato si, generation; young people caring for our common home”.

The conference was attended by over 350 young leaders from 50 countries around the world. Speakers at the conference included, Joyce Msuya Deputy Executive Director, UNEP, Iyad Abungoli Principal Coordinator Faith for Earth, UNEP, Allan Ottaro Founding Executive Director, CYNESA. Gray Lewis UN Environment Director of Policy and Programme Division. The keynote address and official opening was delivered by His Eminence Cardinal Peter Turkson.

The speakers stressed the fact that, climate change is a defining issue of our time. Climate change represents one of the challenges on our planet and that God’s creation needs our action. Joyce Msuya said that we are experiencing the 7th year in a row of high temperatures. One million species are at risk of extinction but there is hope from the young people campaigning for change in the way we do things. She called on the young people to speak up.

In His keynote address, Eminence Cardinal Peter Turkson congratulated CYNESA for caring for environment and climate crisis and biodiversity, saying that climate change is a state of emergency and that the cry of the earth is the cry of the poor. He further said that the Paris agreement says there will be catastrophic if we cross the 1.5°C which is a critical physical threshold. But we also have a moral threshold and also a religious challenge as far as our planet is concerned. Time is running out and we do not have the luxury of waiting. The time to address biodiversity is now. The indigenous people are only 5% of the population but looking after 22% of the biodiversity. Nature is a manifestation by which God speaks to us. Africa is joyful, but climate change is devastating the continent. Young people are giving us hope and everyone’s talent is needed to save God’s creation.

Young people representing different regions shared their experiences on climate change. Experiences were shared from Beira in Mozambique, The Pacific, India, Puerto Rico and Northern Germany. They all emphasized on the fact that climate change was a global problem that does not recognize any boundaries. They further said that we all need sustainable living and called on all to act as if a house is on fire and that the innovation of the young and the wisdom of the old will make it happen. The capitalistic mind needs to change and young people demand change. They called upon the UN to involve young people in decision making and said that climate justice is an international issue and a matter of faith; it is about the present and the future of our common home.

The Director of Policy and Programme Division, Gray Lewis shared the scientific view saying that our atmosphere is already very thin, with more particles in the atmosphere that can trap heat. The oceans are warming faster than expected. We are now faced with runaway climate change. The consequences are floods, storms, drought, heatwaves, wildfires and sea level rise. During panel

discussion it was suggested that by 2030, we must cut emissions by half and must not go beyond the 1.5°C . By 2050 we should have zero emissions. This demands a faith response, the Faith Based organizations should consider where to direct investment such as food, forests, learning and advocacy. The Pope has blended faith and science in advocating for the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss.

Faith Based organizations made presentations on success stories with a call to move away from tree planting to tree growing. Sister Pratibha from the Brahma Kumaris made a presentation on the solar energy project and yogic farming practices. In her presentation she said that the Brahma Kumaris organization has been actively involved in research and development of alternative renewable energy as part of an expression of respect for the natural resources and providing sustainable energy for the Brahma Kumaris community. On Sustainable Yogic Agriculture she said that, this is a unique form of farming that combines thought-based meditative practices with methods of organic agriculture and is bringing economic and social benefits to small holder agrarian communities in India. she added that spirituality is a lifestyle based on respect for self and nature.

In pictures: Sisters Pratibha and Dorcas with some of the participants.





Sister Pratibha (centre) on stage