



Washington Office
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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Post-Copenhagen

Ending the 2009 year was a significant conference where talks occurred regarding climate justice. From December 7-18, world leaders met for the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. The world's faith leaders were also present to remind them that religious traditions command us to be good stewards of the earth.

*Read the ELCA News Release "Lutherans Reflect on Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen".
[<http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Communication-Services/News/Releases.aspx#&&a=4377>]*

Mary Minette, ELCA Director for Environmental Education and Advocacy, attended the conference from Dec. 7-13, as part of the Lutheran World Federation delegation. During her trip she wrote of her experiences and reflections of the conference. We thought you might be interested in reading a recap of her writings.

In 2010, we look for climate change legislation to move forward. Action may be needed soon, so please join the ELCA e-Advocacy Network to receive timely updates.

Posting for December 7, 2009

Long lines and calls for climate justice

Today was the first day of the Copenhagen Climate Summit, also known as COP15 because it's the fifteenth annual meeting of the conference of parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The main purpose of this meeting is to negotiate a successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol, which is set to expire in 2012.

I spent much of the day standing in long lines, waiting to get my credentials as an observer and a member of the Lutheran World Federation's delegation to the meeting. People in the lines talked about the cold, wet weather, about their frustration with the wait, about wanting a cup of hot coffee.

But much of the talk in the lines and in the hallways of this gathering was and is about justice--justice for those living in vulnerable communities around the globe who are already suffering from the impacts of our changing climate and who are least responsible for creating the problem. There are groups of native Alaskans, here to talk about the melting permafrost that threatens centuries-old communities and their traditional way of life. There are citizens of small islands in the Pacific, already seeing their homelands disappearing under rising sea levels, wondering where they will live in twenty years. There are delegates from Africa, suffering under multi-year droughts that prevent them from growing food to feed their families and their communities.

Posting for December 9, 2009

How old will YOU be in 2050?

The year 2050 comes up a lot in the debate over climate change. 2050 is the year by which the scientists on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change say we must reduce global emissions by 80 percent if we are to keep the average temperature of the earth from rising more than 2 degrees Celsius. That two degrees is the difference between changes in weather patterns that are manageable, and overwhelming changes such as widespread drought (and accompanying food and water shortages) and sea level rise that will be difficult to overcome.

One of the amazing things about this UN climate conference is the presence of thousands of young people from around the world (500 from the U.S. alone, I'm told), concerned about their future and the future of our planet, here to speak out to the leaders of the world about their concerns. This morning I saw a group of young women walking through the main hallway of the Bella Center wearing bright blue t-shirts that said "How old will you be in 2050?" This is a very good question for leaders struggling with a problem that will affect young people's future more than our shared present, where the current impacts seem small but the future impacts are staggering.

The energy and passion of the young people in these halls is amazing, and I hope that they keep asking the hard questions and speaking up for justice, not only for those of us here today, but for our children, our grandchildren and for all of God's creation.

So think about it--how old will YOU be in 2050?

But then ask yourself: how old will your children be?

Posting for December 11, 2009

Climategate: is climate change a scientific fraud?

If you've been reading the papers or paying attention to the blogosphere in recent weeks, you may have heard the term "Climategate." Or you may have heard renewed assertions that climate change is a fraud, perpetrated by an elite group of scientists with a political agenda.

One of the benefits of coming to a UN climate change conference is something called "side events" which are workshops put on by a variety of experts on a broad array of issues (as I write this, I'm waiting for the start of a side event on food security and climate change organized by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization). On Tuesday, I was fortunate to arrive early for a side event sponsored by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) so I got a seat (the room was packed!). The IPCC is a panel of scientists from all countries participating in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, including the United States, and they constantly assess the state of science around climate change and periodically issue reports. The last report, issued in 2007, is the subject of "Climategate."

The controversy is this--an unknown person hacked into the computer system at a university in England and made public a number of emails sent by several of the scientists who were involved in the 2007 IPCC report. These emails indicate that the scientists had knowledge of some data that did not support a conclusion that warming temperatures were due to increased levels of carbon dioxide and other gases in the atmosphere and wanted to suppress that data.

The chairman of the IPCC, R.K. Pachauri, began Tuesday's session by addressing Climategate head on. He said that the IPCC has begun to look into the allegations that non-supportive data was suppressed by researchers, and thus far has found that, in fact, the data in question actually was considered by the IPCC as it wrote and issued its report. He emphasized that the IPCC's review of scientific research on climate is comprehensive and how difficult it would be for a small group of scientists at a single institution to change the results. Here's an excerpt from his press statement: "no individual or small group of scientists is in a position to exclude a peer-reviewed paper from an IPCC assessment. Likewise, individuals and small groups have no ability to emphasize a result that is not consistent with a range of studies, investigations, and approaches."

So what does this mean? Basically, that climate change is not a hoax. The reports of the IPCC are based on the work of many institutions and thousands of scientists, all of which are pointing to the fact that increased levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in earth's atmosphere are causing the average temperature of the earth to grow warmer and our climate to change. The apparent misbehavior of a few of the scientists involved in the IPCC's work does not change the overwhelming conclusions of the bulk of the research on climate change.

The rest of Tuesday's panel made clear that the scientists involved in the IPCC are continuing to work together to more fully understand climate change and what is needed to make sure that all people, and all creatures, can continue to live and thrive in God's world. They are working on a new assessment of the situation, which will likely be released within the next two years. They are finding that actual, measurable impacts such as loss of ice in the Arctic and Antarctic and sea level rise are happening as predicted in the 2007 report, giving even greater credence to their modeling of future impacts (and allowing them to refine them even further).

In sum, climate change is real, the science is sound, and our national leaders must act decisively to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Posting for December 13, 2009

Blah, Blah, Blah . . . Act Now!

Over the weekend, as the parties in the Bella Center continued discussions of a new draft document that contains more blank spaces than details but will likely be the basis for whatever agreement emerges from the climate talks, most of the non-governmental delegates who have been in the Bella Center all week took to the streets. On Saturday a protest that the Danish police estimated at about 100,000 people wound its way through downtown Copenhagen, ending in a vigil outside the climate talks. The protest itself was peaceful, with signs demanding climate justice and quick action to reduce emissions and help nations in the Global South adapt (one of the more popular signs said "Blah, Blah, Blah ... Act Now!"); however there were about 900 arrests of demonstrators not connected to the main march around the city.

I marched with a large group of faith representatives from around the world: pastors, aid workers and lay people from Europe, Africa, Asia and North and South America all calling for climate justice for God's people and God's creation.

On Sunday, at a ceremony in front of Copenhagen's city hall, Archbishop Desmond Tutu gave petitions and postcards with half a million signatures to the Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change that demanded action from our leaders on climate change (over 20,000 were from the U.S. and about 3000 of those were from ELCA Lutherans!).

After the ceremony, people of faith gathered for an ecumenical service in Denmark's Lutheran cathedral, led by the Archbishop of Canterbury and with an audience including Denmark's royal family and Prime Minister, and

faith leaders from many traditions and many nations. We prayed for wisdom and vision from our leaders as they begin to meet again on Monday, and that this long-awaited conference ends in strong results and hope for all people--not just more rhetoric that results in nothing.

This weekend concludes my time in Copenhagen, and while I won't be here to see if an agreement is reached, other representatives from the Lutheran World Federation have joined us over the weekend and will continue our advocacy work in the conference. As I return home, I will watch the news and pray for bold action. I urge you to do the same.

Posting for December 22, 2009

It's not perfect, but it's a start

I returned to the U.S. last Monday to watch the last week of the UN climate change conference on the internet and in the press. Other members of the Lutheran World Federation remained in Copenhagen, but after Wednesday they were also forced to watch the proceedings from various locations around the city. The arrival of 115 heads of state caused Danish security to close the talks to most of the non-governmental organization representatives who had gathered for the meeting.

News from the Bella Center on Thursday was not good. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made a strong pledge that the U.S. would contribute to a \$100 billion fund, to be established by 2020, that would help countries in the Global South adapt to the changing climate. Although this was, and is, a major breakthrough, and shows real leadership on the part of the Obama Administration, it looked as if prospects for a deal were growing dimmer by the minute.

President Obama arrived in Copenhagen at 8 a.m. local time on Friday and immediately got to work, meeting with key heads of state including Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in one-on-one and small group discussions, and pushing for action into the early hours of Saturday morning. The agreement that finally emerged from this rare display of direct diplomacy by world leaders falls far short of what many had hoped for, but as President Obama noted, it is "a beginning."

Under the Copenhagen Accord, all major economies, including China, India and Brazil for the first time, have agreed to reduce the emissions that are causing the climate to change and to report their emissions levels. The deal contains a framework to help halt the loss of forests around the world that is contributing to climate change and includes commitments of funding in the short- and medium-term to help countries struggling to adapt to the changing climate.

The Washington Post gives a good breakdown of what the deal does and doesn't do, and discusses the key roles played by both China and the U.S. in the final negotiations.

What Copenhagen has done is set the stage for the United States Senate to pass its own legislation this spring, and for countries to come together in Mexico City in 2010 to create a more permanent (and hopefully legally binding) agreement. What Copenhagen means is that the fight against climate change isn't over yet, and there is much left to do to ensure the long term protection of God's good creation.

- Mary Minette
ELCA Director for Environmental Education and Advocacy