

Why is DEVELOPMENT & PEACE Focusing on Issues of Ecological Justice?

DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE, as the international development and solidarity movement of the Catholic Church in Canada, has the mission to work for integral human development, that is, the economic, political, social and spiritual well being of every person. With our 2011-2016 program, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE recognizes explicitly that ecological justice is an essential dimension of its mission. For some, this may seem a departure from the organization's past work. It is not.

In 1988, the Philippine bishops wrote the world's first pastoral letter on the ecological crisis: *What is happening to our beautiful land?* The bishops, alert to the signs of the times, could see that their Eden-like country had suffered a catastrophic natural degradation within their own lifetimes:

Within a few short years brown, eroded hills have replaced luxuriant forests in many parts of the country.

We see dried up river beds where, not so long ago, streams flowed throughout the year. Farmers tell us that, because of erosion and chemical poisoning, the yield from the croplands has fallen substantially. Fishermen and experts on marine life have a similar message. Their fish catches are shrinking in the wake of the extensive destruction of coral reefs and mangrove forests. The picture which is emerging in every province of the country is clear and bleak.

The terrible reality that the bishops observed is not limited to the Philippines. Few places in the world, whether they be countries, forests, oceans or lakes have escaped ecological degradation. An important additional realization that the bishops came to, however, is that the destruction of the natural world has a direct link to human poverty and hardship.

With a globalized market economy that is often left to the not so tender mercies of profit-seekers scandalously exploiting the planet, there is increasing evidence of the close link between the environmental situation and the social phenomenon of impoverishment and exclusion. Poverty and "ecological misery" are ultimately inseparable.

The Canadian Catholic Bishops observed the same pattern and expressed it this way: "The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are one. Ecological harmony cannot exist in a world of unjust social structures; nor can the extreme social inequalities of our current world order result in ecological sustainability." (*You Love All That Exists*, CCCB, 2003)

The relationship between ecological deterioration and poverty has become obvious. So obvious that it can be said without any doubt that working for ecological justice is consistent with the type of work that DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE has always done: fighting against the root causes of poverty. In fact, during the past decade more and more of DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE's education and action campaigns have taken on an ecological dimension.

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- John 10:10

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Our *Life Before Profit* campaigns that focused on water and other resources are good examples. At the same time, many of our partner organizations have begun to create alternative models of development that support the indisputable link between ecological justice and a full and abundant life for all.

Not only does recent Catholic Social Teaching insist on this link, scripture does as well. The Bible tells us that God created this world (Gen. 1:1) and that God loves the world and is pleased with it (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25 and 31). God, who created our world, loves life and wishes for the poor to benefit from the gifts of nature (See Isaiah 41: 17-20). St. John also tells us that Jesus saw His mission in this light: "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." (Jn. 10:10).

Despite these inspirational teachings, it cannot be denied that the earth is facing an upheaval of biospheric proportions, the consequences of which are already being felt by a range of elements – land, water systems,

forests, the oceans, and the climate – and by the most vulnerable populations.

Pope Benedict, in his 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* says: "Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment, just as environmental deterioration in turn upsets relations in society." In this thought is the seed of action for the cause of the earth and the cause of integral human development. We can no longer separate the work of development, peace and ecological justice. All are intertwined for good and for bad. Just as greed leads human beings to disregard or exploit their brothers and sisters, so does it lead to the exploitation and destruction of the Earth. Just as work for ecological justice contributes to a sustainable future, so does it also contribute to the cause of DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE.

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- *You Love All That Exists, CCCB, 2003*



Design: Lillian Chan & Andrew Morinaga



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ED11-E10



In solidarity with the people and with our partners in the Global South, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE believes that the preferential option for the poor can be extended to include a preferential option for the Earth. The greatest impact of the ecological crisis is experienced by the

people of the Global South and reveals the urgent moral need for a new solidarity.

Therefore, guided by scripture and by Catholic Social Teaching, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE's 2011 – 2016 Education and Action campaigns are rooted in the following principles:



Integral Human Development

We wish to promote integral human development. This concerns the well being of every person and the whole of every person in every dimension – economic, political, social and spiritual.

Sacred

The Earth is sacred. Creation has its own intrinsic value. We have a responsibility to protect and to cherish the Earth's ecological diversity, beauty, and life-sustaining processes.

Solidarity

We are one global community. All life is interconnected and interdependent. We must live in solidarity with the whole of creation; holding it in trust for future generations.

Option For The Poor

New models of development are needed, those which prioritize the needs of the world's poor while respecting the ecological health of the Earth. These new models require those of us living in wealthy countries to change our lifestyles and our attitudes towards growth, and to reduce our disproportionate consumption of the world's resources.

Common Good

The ecological health of the Earth and the importance of the Earth's resources to the common good must take priority over commercial interests. The economic and social costs of depleting shared resources should be borne by those who incur them, rather than by those least responsible, or by future generations.