

National Consultation on
ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE AND ECOLOGICAL DEBT:
PERSPECTIVE FROM THE PHILIPPINES

13 August 2009 • Quezon City, Philippines

CLOSING STATEMENT

**Peace and Wholeness of Life for All:
A Call for an 'Eco-Just' World**

We are church leaders, youth, women and representatives from various churches and non-government organisations, people's movements and ecological advocacy groups participating in this national consultation on the issues of ecological justice and ecological debt. We gather also in celebration of Indigenous Peoples' Week, seeking to draw inspiration and wisdom from indigenous communities for whom soil whence life springs is sacred and justice to land and all of creation is the key to liberation and human dignity.

The Biblical imperative for an ecological spirituality

We lament that the dominant Judaeo-Christian theology of creation, which places the human at the summit of the natural order, has led to human disconnectedness from nature and the desacralisation of the natural environment, becoming for humanity's powerful few a biblical injunction for the rape and total subjugation of the natural order. [Gen. 1:28]

Amidst so much poverty and massive violation of human dignity and integrity of creation, we are challenged to nurture an '**ecospirituality**' that sees the human both as having emerged from the earth (*adamah*) and tiller of the earth (*abad*). [Gen. 2:15] We stand on our biblico-theological understanding of human belongingness to creation, not creation belonging to humans, for all of creation—including humans—is God's: "The earth is the Lord's *and all it contains*, the world and those who dwell in it. [Psa. 24:1]

We affirm therefore that all things are *one*: different manifestations but interdependent and inseparable parts of the cosmic whole. Creation is groaning, and longs for its redemption [Rom. 8:20-23]. But our *adamic* consciousness leads us to believe that God's redemptive project does not end with humanity's salvation as phrased in traditional theology, but with the restoration of all of created reality to wholeness.

We reject the notion of nature as 'resource'—inferior to and separate from human, an inert object to be subdued, exploited, abused. We renounce the ideology of neoliberal globalisation that transforms everything and everyone into a commodity for sale at a price, desecrating the human and the environment and sacrificing life at the altar of greed.

We declare that ecological wholeness is inextricably linked to the prophetic vocation to re-order social relations. Reflecting on God's equal justice for all—peoples, the earth itself and all that dwell therein—as symbolised in the biblical celebration of the Sabbath as the climax of creation, the Sabbath Year and the Sabbath Jubilee, reminds us that we cannot achieve social justice if we do not do justice to our natural environment, and that ecological justice cannot be realised without the institution of interhuman justice. There is only justice when there is equitable distribution of social goods, including the requirements for the earth's own regeneration.

Ecological debt in Philippine historical perspective

Our biblico-theological reflections lead us to an understanding that the abuse and overexploitation of the natural environment is tied to human misery and greed, especially imperial greed [Jer. 14:2-5; Hos. 4:1-3; Rom. 8:22], and that it constitutes a debt towards all life forms and to future generations.

We understand Ecological Debt as the debt owed by industrial countries of the North (with its local collaborators in Third World countries) to countries of the South due to ecological damage caused over time by the industrial North's plunder of 'resources' and to the resulting destruction not only of natural environments but also of human societies. While we acknowledge our common responsibility in the destruction of our environment due to our neglect, ignorance and unsustainable lifestyles, we hold as primarily responsible centuries of colonisation and the continuing imposition of the neoliberal economic model upon Philippine society.

The current administration under Gloria Arroyo is even pushing for changes in our Constitution that will eliminate the remaining nationalist economic provisions that impose limits on foreign ownership and control over our country's lands and natural resources. The removal of these constitutional constraints will only perpetuate the resource-intensive growth strategies of globalisation at the expense of our patrimony, the environment, and the future generations of our children's children.

The looting of our environment

The degradation and depletion of our natural riches prove that historical and current implementation of neoliberal policies have plunged our country into a serious ecological crisis:

- Our forest cover has shrunk from 270,000 sq. km. at the end of Spanish colonisation in 1898 (marking the start of American colonisation) to only 8,000 sq. km. in 2006. In the late 1980s, the government stopped issuing logging permits when the Philippines was declared among the most severely deforested countries in Asia. But the current Arroyo administration lifted the log bans and farmed out commercial logging permits in remaining forest and critical watershed areas, covering a total of 1.4 million hectares.
- Our native flora and fauna are under constant threat from severe deforestation and overexploitation. In 1998, Conservation International named the Philippines one of 17 "biodiversity superstars" in the world, being ranked either first or second in biodiversity per unit area. This means many of the world's species of plants and animals are endemic to the Philippines. But CI also declared the Philippines the most urgent biodiversity conservation priority on the planet, being the second or third in fastest rate of species extinction worldwide.
- Our marine and coastal resources are at the brink of depletion because of the government's open access policy for fishing by foreign firms, import-export policy, rampant practice of commercial aquaculture, privatisation and conversion of municipal fishing grounds. Our freshwater resources are also running out; many lakes and rivers are biologically dead due to decades of continuous waste dumping in inland water systems from domestic, industrial and agribusiness wastes as well as impacts of large-scale extractive logging, mining and dam construction.
- Our agricultural lands are diminishing in size and quality. Subservience to globalisation policies on agricultural products and foreign monopoly ownership and control of resources have led to land and land-use conversions that aggravate the innate problem of backward agricultural technology, pollution and degradation.

The poor's greater burden

Global warming and climate change, depletion of mineral resources and fossil fuels, food and water shortages, pollution and other environmental problems are disproportionately affecting the country's poor more than the rich, an inequality made even more unjust by the fact that the consumption patterns of the rich are a primary cause of these problems.

Arroyo's failure to harness our rich renewable energy resources to lessen our country's dependence on fossil fuels, an ecologically unsound and profit-oriented biodiversity program, and other destructive environmental policies make our country more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, further aggravating the plight of our country's poor and marginalised.

- Landslides and flashfloods resulting from deforestation and soil erosion caused by large-scale commercial mining and logging as well as internationally financed dam projects have led to massive displacement of local communities (particularly of indigenous peoples), destroyed livelihoods, and violated human and civil rights. Projects such as the Japanese Rio Tuba Nickel Mining in Palawan, the San Roque Dam Project, Lafayette Mining in Albay, Lepanto Mining in Benguet have been implemented with the collaboration of corrupt local officials with little consideration of their ecological and social impacts.
- Land-grabbing and conversion of arable lands to large-scale plantations and non-agricultural uses, the unhampered operation of foreign trawlers on the country's waters and conversion of traditional fishing grounds for commercial aquaculture have severely limited local community access to natural resources, depriving the people of their sources of livelihood and increasing poverty and food insecurity to crisis levels, especially among farm and coastal communities.
- Environmentally destructive projects, in order to operate, are necessarily accompanied by militarisation for the company's protection and in order to suppress and counteract—often by use of military force—opposition and resistance from affected communities. As of March 2009, under the Arroyo administration, there have been 24 environmental activists summarily killed, two cases of enforced disappearance, and two cases of attempted murder.
- Climate change, the depletion of non-renewable resources, widespread pollution and overall environmental degradation have adversely affected the socio-economic well-being of communities, especially among the poor whose underdevelopment—caused by the very same forces that has driven the world into a global ecological crisis—and continued marginalisation and exploitation limit their capacity to cope and adapt.

Our response and call to action

Ecological justice, that is, the restoration to wholeness of creation, is at the heart of God's redemptive plan, in the cosmo-vision not only of the Judaeo-Christian faith but more so of primal religions. Salvation is an ecological truth, a celebration of God's reign where the values of neighborly concern, love and kinship are extolled and made the norm—and not those of disconnectedness and subjugation and dominion. We need to live out an ecospirituality in which love and caring are the basis of our relationship with one another and with nature.

We share in WCC's vision of an eco-just world. We are in deep agreement with the World Council of Churches whose study process on Poverty, Wealth and Ecology has shaped a vision of a new world founded on a just and moral economy where:

- People—regardless of class, race and gender—are empowered to be involved in making political decisions that affect their lives;
- Public and private institutions and enterprises are made accountable and held responsible for the environmental and social impacts and consequences of their operations; and
- The Earth and the whole created order is treated with utmost respect and reverence rather than exploited and degraded.

We support WCC's position on eco-justice and ecological debt as we challenge the industrialised countries of the North, especially our coloniser country, the USA, and their multinational corporations and partner governments to recognise, pay off and make amends for their ecological debt to the countries of the South. We too call on Northern nations—based on the principles of ecological justice, historical responsibility, and "common but differentiated responsibilities"—to:

1. Adopt a fair, ambitious and binding deal at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP15) in Copenhagen in December, which includes:
 - a) Drastic reduction of greenhouse gas emissions within and beyond the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and according to the fixed timelines set out by the UNFCCC report of 2007; and
 - b) Effective support to vulnerable communities to adapt to the consequences of climate change through adaptation funds and technology transfer.
2. Transfer financial resources to countries of the South, without conditionalities, to pay for the costs of preservation—petroleum, other natural riches and the global commons—and climate change mitigation and adaptation.
3. Cancel the illegitimate financial debts of Southern countries, especially of the poorest nations, as part of social and ecological reparations, not as official development assistance.
4. Reduce overall consumption even as this implies zero growth or, worse, de-growth.
5. Support the capacities of Southern countries to develop sustainable growth paths, including through technology transfers and measures that reinforce and promote local knowledge systems.

In addition, we:

1. Challenge the Philippine government and international financial institutions to take responsibility for their policies that have caused ecological destruction;
2. Call for corporate social accountability within international and national legal frameworks; and
3. Reject all market-based or market-driven solutions to ecological debt repayment such as climate funding and carbon trading.

We urge our churches and faith-based groups and institutions to carry forward and build on the lessons and gains of the environmental ministry begun by the NCCP, grounding it anew on ‘ecospirituality’ and the principles of ecological justice and ecological debt.

To this end, we will explore and undertake the following courses of action:

1. Awareness-building and theological reflection on ecological spirituality, eco-justice and ecological debt, through study and action, and deeper ecumenical and inter-faith engagement.
2. Support and participation in advocacy campaigns by churches and environmental groups around the issues of eco-justice and ecological debt, locally and internationally.
3. Ecological debt audits in partnership with civil society groups, including self-assessment of consumption patterns.
4. Deepening of dialogue and building of alliances among churches, ecumenical and faith-based organisations, advocacy groups and social movements around the issue of ecological debt and ecological justice.
5. Support for community-based sustainable economic activities as well as efforts to build not only adaptation capacities but, importantly, people’s resilience to the harsh socio-economic impacts of environmental destruction, resource depletion and climate change.
6. Development of a course of study on ecological justice and ecospirituality that may be integrated in the curricula of seminaries and church-run educational institutions.
7. Use of existing programs and resources (liturgical and theological) of churches to address the ecological issue
8. Inclusion of ecological justice in the churches’ program thrust; creation of an ecological desk or program arm within the churches
9. Mobilising church members with technical knowledge on environmental problems, alternative livelihoods and technologies, whose expertise may be tapped for investigative/research projects in collaboration with local environmental groups
10. A national gathering of environmental activists, community organisers, church people and technical experts to draw up a unified and systematised action plan that will concretely address the various manifestations of ecological debt and ecological injustice in the Philippine context.

Finally, we lift up and celebrate the wisdom of our fellow Indigenous Peoples, women, peasant and forest communities whose examples and leadership point to alternative ways of thinking and living within creation. From their societies we learn not only traditional and ecologically respectful forms of production and consumption, but importantly the value of caring and sharing, of restoring right relationships. Our common faith impart the ethical traditions we need to pursue the struggle for ecological justice and wholeness.

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