

**ADDRESS BY H. E. MSGR MIGUEL ÁNGEL AYUSO GUIXOT,  
SECRETARY OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR  
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

Synod Hall, 7 March 2019

*Eminences,*

*Excellences,*

*Distinguished Religious Leaders,*

*United Nations Representatives*

*Guests and Experts from all over the world,*

On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue it is my great pleasure to welcome you at this Conference on *Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*.

The goal of this three-day meeting is to bring together representatives of the world religions with agents of the United Nations Offices to present and exchange break-through ideas helping to assess the fulfilment of the SDGs with regard to People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership in the context of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

*1. The cry of the poor*

As it is stated in the “*Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*”, signed by pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al Azhar Ahmad el Tayyeb in Abu Dhabi last month, the “moral deterioration that influences international action and a weakening of spiritual values and responsibility” leads

many “to fall either into a vortex of atheistic, agnostic or religious extremism, or into blind and fanatic extremism.” “Major political crises, situations of injustice and lack of equitable distribution of natural resources – which only a rich minority benefit from, to the detriment of the majority of the peoples of the earth – have generated, and continue to generate, vast numbers of poor, infirm and deceased persons. This leads to catastrophic crises that various countries have fallen victim to despite their natural resources and the resourcefulness of young people which characterize these nations. In the face of such crises that result in the deaths of millions of children – wasted away from poverty and hunger – there is an unacceptable silence”.

## *2. The key role of Religious Communities for Development*

Today, a wide majority of people worldwide identify with some specific religious or spiritual communities and cultural traditions which influence how these people see and treat the world around them:

what they eat and drink;

when they work and have children;

where they live and travel or even when they select a particular course of education and pass time.

Religious values and practices are deeply entangled in the fabric of daily lives, and the leaders of religious communities play an important role in shaping attitudes, opinions, and behaviors for management and use of the environment and natural resources and for sustainable development overall.

We thank you representing various religious traditions from around the world for answering our invitation to join in this Conference in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Religious practise as an expression of culture is both an enabler and a driver of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

The social cohesion and wellbeing of many cultures face common threats from, for example: urbanization and relocation, which impact traditional ways of life and livelihoods; well-intended but misguided development initiatives threaten the human rights and sustainable practices.

It is, therefore, so important to understand all aspects of people's religions and cultures – not just the economics or logistics, but the beliefs and spiritual practices. Diversity must be promoted, while respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

In the spirit of the *Document on Human fraternity* religious leaders shall rediscover and spread “the values of peace, justice, goodness, beauty, human fraternity and coexistence”. There is a need for continued dialogue on environment, culture and religion in order to overcome the crises of the modern world due to a “desensitized human conscience, a distancing from religious values and a prevailing individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies”. This shall be done to address the implementation of the 2030 sustainable development agenda.

Also, in the spirit of the “International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures” that the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed for the period 2013-2022, four main areas of intervention can be detected, that demand a deep involvement of Religious Leaders at any level:

- 1) Promoting mutual understanding and reciprocal knowledge of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity;
- 2) Building a pluralist framework for commonly shared values;
- 3) Disseminating the principles and tools of intercultural dialogue through quality education and the media;

- 4) Fostering dialogue for sustainable development and its ethical, social and cultural dimensions.

When respectful relationships are built among peoples, sustainable management of their resources can enhance national and global action on climate change, as well as significantly contribute to conservation, sustainable use and the equitable sharing of benefits arising from biodiversity.

The role of religion and culture in the implementation of the sustainable development goals; the role of different value systems and cultural diversity as resources for conservation, climate justice action, bridging between science and other knowledge systems. More attention shall be paid to issues of education, traditional knowledge, rights of indigenous peoples, peace building, gender, sustainability and economics, participation, civil mobilization.

### *3. Some achievements by religious communities*

Some of you here present will prove that the sustainable development goals on people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership are central to all faiths and are interrelated in order to leave no one behind and reach those furthest behind first.

Through integrating environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda, religious and cultural communities are already promoting strong, inclusive, green, sustainable and transformative economies, based on circularity, sharing and collaboration, and alternative measures of growth and wellbeing. They are instrumental in educating for more sustainable lifestyles and behaviours to achieve sustainable consumption and production, and in considering the impact of their actions on others.

They are significantly contributing to ending extreme poverty, leaving no one behind when addressing multi-dimensional poverty and related challenges

such as the rights of women, youth and minorities, and access for all to basic services.

They are promoting innovative nature-based solutions, respect for traditional knowledge and cultural diversity, teaching how to exercise environmental stewardship and duty of care, build an ethic of global and local citizenship, promote good governance, tolerance, and reconciliation, and promote safe, inclusive and peaceful societies.

#### *4. More can be done through awakening of awareness*

It has become more urgent than ever to promote and spread morals, values, behaviours and creative solutions conducive to attaining the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

This universal agenda, and the emerging understanding of the points of religious agreement in environmental ethics, can be the corner stones for a common vision that enhances the role of religion and culture in achieving sustainability.

Inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue can converge on creation as our common home, and the rights of mother Earth. Religious communities can take significant actions to address climate change, biodiversity and ecosystem loss, pollution, deforestation, desertification and unsustainable land and water use, and other urgent issues identified in a shared vision by all nations in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

#### *5. A Call for Action*

It is hoped that the Call for Action that this Conference will produce may provide new opportunities for building a global partnership for addressing the

crucial challenges of our era, both for humanity today as well as for future generations.

It is recommended that all religious and cultural leaders and organizations should actively engage in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs in their communities, on their own footprints, and in cooperation with each other. In so doing, they should use the considerable financial, moral and ethical influence at their disposal.

We all should continue to engage in dialogue with the scientific community to progressively evolve religious thinking and scientific discovery. Governments should firmly embrace the notion of unity in diversity, and introduce new policies, laws and financial incentives, that lay the foundation for achieving the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

Critical action is needed by the international community to address urgent and increasing environmental degradation, and related challenges of social and economic unsustainability.

Stronger partnerships should be strengthened, binding the religious, cultural and secular communities for a collective effort to combine wisdom, and find lasting solutions for sustainable development.

Dear Participants to this Conference, I am sure that this meeting will gather fruitful and effective results for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals thanks to the variety of the contribution that each of you will offer to one another.

It will depend on all of us how this wealth will be shared and circulated in order to live in a better world.

Thank you for your attention.