

### ***“Welcoming the other through human development that respect the earth”***

We live in a crucial moment in the history of human development: this blue planet, a beautiful gift from God where life began four billion years ago is now in danger due to a certain way of understanding development in which life, every form of life, is no longer seen as important, and this view is making our planet uninhabitable. Life has been replaced by money and profit, which are contemporary idols, and the need to produce, consume, earn, and profit are the “anti-values” which move our world.

The earth has always been considered the mother of life, a fertile mother which gives us food, water, and oxygen. It is the “*terra mater*” of the Romans and the “*pachamama*” of the Incas. It is “the land where we live and the earth from which we live” because it gives us all that we need to live. We human beings are absolutely dependent on others. We need everything that is around us in order to live. We need other forms of life so that our own lives are possible, but unfortunately, irresponsibly and rapidly we are destroying life which has been evolving throughout billions of years. It has become quite clear that the catastrophe which we are living in due to human responsibility. The logic of harmony and balance has run into the wall of excessive profits and the “bottom line” as the way to understand development, a model which never measures how its production contaminates and kills life. The earth, the air, the water, and the flora and fauna are being affected in an irreversible manner. We see how in the cities and in the areas where natural resources are mined, among other things, the atmosphere itself is becoming thinner, the ozone layer is being perforated, and the natural producers of oxygen in the forests and ocean algae are being destroyed. We are already close to an overall collapse of the ecological system which not only will affect our lives today but also the lives of the most vulnerable and poorest populations as well as future generations who are not responsible at all for the what others have caused. One of the goals of the Millennium which the nations pledged to fulfill by the year 2015 was for sustainable development, but we are nowhere near attaining this goal. It depends on a whole series of interacting variables, among which are the political will of the wealthy nations and that of the large corporations which control development. This is the moment to create alliances in favor of life, of each and every life, if we really believe in the principles which strengthen our faith. There are no strictly individual solutions. It is imperative to achieve a global agreement for a truly human development, one which respects the life of the weakest people now as well as for future generations.

The style of predatory development has always been challenged by our religious traditions: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that it contains”. In the Christian tradition we affirm that everything that exists is part of God’s creation, and the human person, man and woman, have been made in the “divine image and likeness” and are given the mission to protect and care for this work of God. Normally when we talk about the divine

image and likeness, our starting point is that human beings, who possess intelligence and free will. But those qualities make us think that we have a certain superiority over the rest of creation which does not have exactly these same characteristics. But I would like to suggest that there is a much deeper sense in that respect. It says that we are made in the image and likeness of God to the degree that we reflect the Trinity. God is not closed in on the Godself but rather God continues to extend itself, which God gives away without holding onto its divinity, and in becoming incarnate makes us participants in God's own being and life project. God is life and desires life for all. The image and likeness of God is a call to take on fully all that is human and to humanize the other. This ability to encounter and to give of oneself is present not only in personal terms but also in relationships with others because we are a divine reflection to the degree that we are relational creatures; relating to others and to the cosmos itself. The human being is a being in relation. If we do not go out of ourselves towards the "other" and towards creation, we do not reflect the God "in whom we live and move and have our being".

The topic that has brought us together is *"Welcoming the other through human development that respect the earth"* and it invites us to search and to work for a new way of understanding human development and taking care of the planet. The key and the source of this affirmation is life, all life, and the question which comes up is what are we doing to care for life, to watch over it and protect it. Are we really the guardians of life, and especially the most vulnerable life, like the life of Abel, or are we allowing the logic of Cain to destroy life and leaves only suffering and death in its path? We are invited to be the guardians of our most vulnerable and poorest sisters and brothers and of all of the life that will allow them to live a truly human development. Starting from the religious values which we share, we believe that this development model should be changed because it only leads to the destruction of life. As religious leaders we can no longer continue to be simply the privileged witnesses of everything we see but moreover committed actors who propose a necessary paradigm shift.

When we speak about development, we believe that it should be both human and integral, that is, that it covers all of the dimensions of each and every human being, no matter what their condition or situation in this world is. That is the only way that development can be inclusive, sustainable, and practice solidarity. The right to development is a basic human right and has become a keystone of all rights, because it is the right which is related to the right to life in all of its dimensions and for every living being.

We are one human family, both diverse and rich in unity and variety. We can only build up our human family in solidarity on the foundation of the basic values of justice and peace.

What are we doing in our religious communities so that development can be a truly human development which protects creation? We need to work on two levels: *ad intra* and *ad extra*, in our communities and in our society. Within our communities we can work for a growing consciousness of what we are living and the responsibility which stems from the values of the faith we profess. Our efforts will help us to move from consciousness to action. There are many and varied initiatives for the care, conservation, and protection of the planet as an integral part of true development.

Part of this care is to assume a prophetic attitude of denouncing what is currently happening and the commitment to change and/or minimize the negative impacts of current models of development in the life of our communities.

There is an interesting line of advocacy when we meet with authorities and a search for consensus with other social actors who are involved in similar efforts. Many documents call for a more just and harmonious order for the good of all and not only for those who have power. There is a great effort to work on this mission from our common values.

Our effort is for a dialogue in defense of all life on this planet and also to stress our responsibility which is everyone's task at this crucial moment. We are working for a more human and humanizing world in all areas of life and especially for the poor and the excluded. If we do not walk with the poor and excluded, then we are not on the same way as the Gospel of Jesus who came so that we may have life and have it in abundance.

Tenderness, mercy, encounter, and dialogue need to be incorporated into all of our political and economic projects in order to make a more human world possible where all of us will take part and contribute to moving in the same direction.