



# Missionary Society of St. Columban

JUSTICE, PEACE, AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION

## 2021 Climate Change Statement

**The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all....it is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life.**

Pope Francis: *Laudato Si'*: On Care for our Common Home (par. 23)

**All of us can play a part in changing our collective response to the unprecedented threat of climate change and environmental degradation. Caring for God's creation is a spiritual commission requiring a response of commitment.**

Joint statement on climate change by the  
Archbishop of Canterbury, Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch, September 2021

**The sixth Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report (2021) is a 'code red for humanity...the alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable: greenhouse gases emissions from fossil fuel burning and deforestation are choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk'.**

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres

## Introduction

In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis unambiguously accepts the scientific consensus that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system due to the vastly increased concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. He also unambiguously accepts that these gases are released mainly as a result of human activity.

***Columban Missionaries stand in solidarity with, and are evangelized by the poor, marginalized and the wounded earth.***<sup>1</sup> We are called to both safeguard ecological biodiversity as revelation of God and to listen to Creation as it speaks to us through ecological crises such as Climate Change.

Christian tradition, Scripture, Catholic Social Teaching, and science impel us to seek ways to restore right relationships with all of Creation. The reality of the catastrophic threats of Climate Change challenges us to ongoing personal and communal ecological conversion which leads to both personal lifestyle and structural change.

As a result of insights gained from creation-centered theology, we realize that ethical behavior must no longer be confined solely to our relationship with God and other human beings. It must also extend and include our relationship with all Creation.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts of the General Assembly of the Missionary Society of St. Columban 2018, *Transitioning for Columban Mission*, p. 4



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## **Columban Concerns**

Human induced Climate Change is the most serious and pressing ecological challenge facing the world today with far reaching impacts on both the human and natural world. Climate Change raises serious moral and ethical concerns about the distribution and use of our planet's finite resources and the destruction of biodiversity and the web of life.

All of Creation is under threat as a result of human induced Climate Change created largely by an over consumption of and dependence on fossil fuels which is driven by an economic model that places profits over the common good. The following are major Columban concerns:

### ***Failure to see Climate Change as a moral issue***

The threatening reality of Climate Change - which is advancing and will bring pain, suffering and death to millions of humans and other creatures, which are facing huge levels of extinction particularly due to habitat loss - has yet to impinge seriously on our church communities worldwide. Political and economic decision makers and church leaders hardly grasp the extent to which the insatiable demands of our global economy are thoroughly tearing apart the web of life, with disastrous consequences for future generations.

### ***Loss of Biodiversity***

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) 2019 Report<sup>2</sup> states that global goals relating to food, water, energy, human health and well-being, and mitigation of and adaptation to climate change can be achieved while conserving biodiversity. However, structural change is needed at all levels to achieve this global public good. This commitment should be a critical goal for the world's community in the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development (2020-2030).

Columbans offered policy recommendations to the First Draft of the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework, which reflect the voices of the communities where we live and serve. Columban offered these recommendations hoping that the cry of the earth and the cries of the people will be heard in negotiations and that decisions will be made to bring our common home into greater health and well-being.<sup>3</sup>

Columbans are committed to engaging actively in the upcoming United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15) in Kunming, China, and the United Nations Climate Change

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<sup>2</sup> The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, Summary for Policymakers. <https://www.eaere.org/policy/ecosystems-biodiversity/ipbes-2019-global-assessment-report-on-biodiversity-and-ecosystem-services/>

<sup>3</sup> See Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework Statement & Policy Recommendations by the Missionary Society of St. Columban.



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Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, UK.<sup>4</sup> We see these two processes as interrelated opportunities for policy advocacy as well as grassroots education and action.

## ***Extractive Industries***

According to Global Resources Outlook 2019, extractive industries are responsible for half of the world's carbon emissions and 80% of biodiversity loss; in fact, over half of climate impacts can be attributed to resource extraction and processing, even before accounting for any fuel that is burned. In this are also growing inequalities; in rich countries, people consume an average of 9.8 tonnes of resources a year, which is 13 times higher than people in poorer countries.

Columbans are concerned about the impacts on poorer nations and Indigenous communities from extractive industries, including some climate change mitigation projects. The IPBES 2019 Report (Part D) identifies that “mainstreaming biodiversity and sustainability across all extractive and productive sectors” with “bold changes” is required to safeguard the global environment.

## ***A Threat to Peace***

Increasingly communities are in conflict as a result of Climate Change which is a growing threat to global security. Diminished access to basic human rights like clean water, viable food sources, and suitable living conditions, and reduced access to land because of large-scale mining, are all conditions that exacerbate the vulnerability of countless communities around the world which often leads to violence in the struggle for access. These conflicts often cross boundaries of ethnic and religious divide which can lead to even more intense violence and war.

Faced with the climate crisis, and global military expenditure rising to almost US \$2 trillion in 2020, there is a critical need for the military to be included in commitments by states to reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

## ***A Threat to Health***

Medical experts have been warning for decades that climate change poses a huge threat to global health and wellbeing. Climate change contributes to several million deaths from air pollution, cardiovascular mortality and respiratory illnesses due to heatwaves, altered transmission of infectious diseases and malnutrition from crop failures, waterborne diseases among others. A transition to a less carbon-intensive society, meanwhile, would promote health ‘co-benefits’ in a dramatic way.

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<sup>4</sup> See Columban General Council media statements on COP 26 and Convention on Biodiversity COP 15.



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## ***Sustainable Economic Models***

Pope Francis says in *Laudato Si* that the destruction and exploitation of the environment is caused by the reckless pursuit of profits, excessive faith in technology, political shortsightedness and the lie of unlimited growth where the planet is being squeezed dry beyond every limit (LS # 106). Climate Change raises major difficulties for the current neo-liberal economic paradigm which is based on continuing economic growth. Climate Change makes it clear that continuous economic growth in a finite world is not possible without enormous damage to the fabric of life on planet Earth.

## ***Climate Migrants***

Columbans raise concerns about people forced to migrate due to ecosystem degradation and the impacts of climate change, including Indigenous Peoples who rely on local environments for their livelihoods. In other situations where local sources of income are depleted due to environmental degradation, people are forced to move to urban areas where social conflicts increase, leading to violence and disintegration of solidarity networks.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Earth Day report 2021, states: “The climate emergency is the defining crisis of our time, and displacement is one of its most devastating consequences. Entire populations are already suffering the impacts, but vulnerable people living in some of the most fragile and conflict-affected countries are disproportionately affected. Refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), and stateless persons are on the frontlines of the climate emergency. Many people live in climate “hotspots” where they typically lack the resources to adapt to an increasingly inhospitable environment. These are issues of grave concern for the whole international community.

## ***False Energy Solutions***

In a search for additional energy sources, often alternatives such as nuclear, biofuels and fracking are promoted as sustainable and renewable solutions. However, these alternatives raise serious ecological concerns. We would like to see policies towards a rapid transition to a sustainable low carbon energy system, which will put the world economy on an economically sensible and beneficial pathway to meeting Climate Change challenges. Columbans support disinvestment from fossil fuels.

## ***Food and water availability***

Rural communities throughout the world are struggling with changes in the seasons – in some countries the rains are coming at the wrong times to germinate crops, or crops aren’t receiving enough rain to flourish; in other countries pastoralists are having to travel miles to find watering holes for their livestock, and the extent of livestock deaths from dehydration and starvation is often too burdensome for families to continue this way of life. Food and water price rises will hit poorest communities the hardest in rural and urban areas.

## ***Adaptation and Mitigation***



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While all people are impacted by Climate Change, our global sisters and brothers living in poverty and at the margins of society are the most vulnerable and least able to adapt, yet they have contributed the least to the greenhouse gas emissions causing global warming. We believe that those countries and industries which have contributed most to Climate Change have a responsibility to reduce carbon emissions through policy change which prioritizes clean, non-fossil fuel technologies, and making it available to the Global South. Adaptation and mitigation measures which assist economically poor countries to deal with the worst impacts of Climate Change have a place, but the focus should be on addressing root causes of global warming, such as super-development, and unsustainable consumption and lifestyle in the more affluent countries.

## ***Subversive Discourse***

Columbans are concerned about the role subversive discourse like the denial of Climate Change plays in undermining commitment to tackle Climate Change. It is important to be aware that the hijacking of many academic and government institutions and powerful media outlets by the corporate world has meant that corporate interests gain priority over the common good.

## **Columban Response**

Climate Change is an unprecedented issue in recent human history, affecting every aspect of life on Earth. The magnitude, severity, and urgency of Climate Change are difficult to appropriate. Our response to the crisis of Climate Change must be prophetic, that is good news for the poor and the planet. In particular Columbans are committed to and call for the following key responses to restore right relationship with the whole of Creation.

## ***Ecological Conversion***

We believe that our missionary vocation contains within it an ecological vocation to be in solidarity with the poor and with Creation which impels us to continually review and renew our option for a simple lifestyle and make choices that bring us in to right relationship with all of Creation. We recognize that ecological conversion and the creation-centered theology that underpins it is an ongoing commitment that occurs both personally and communally and strive through our actions and spirituality to offer a prophetic witness to the Integrity of Creation respecting the natural cycles of the Earth. The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion (LS #219).

## ***Education***

Columbans strive to help society and particularly the Catholic Church understand the magnitude of the Climate Change issue and its consequences, also its links with other issues. We develop and provide education materials utilizing a See-Judge-Act methodology for Catholic parishes, schools, institutions, and to individuals and families as to what can be done to counteract global warming, grounded in our faith and Catholic Social Teaching. This involves



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awareness raising, promoting advocacy in the political and corporate spheres, lifestyle change and worship ideas. It means challenging false information and bias in the media.

One example of our approach to education is a two season podcast series, “Jubilee for the Earth”. Themes such as biodiversity and a related issue like climate change, economic justice, peace, migration, and other topics related to Catholic Social Teaching are a part of the series. Each episode includes dialogue between Columbans and local community leaders around the world who are working to renew the face of the Earth. The podcast strives to help us all to see how caring for our common home is fundamental to our lives as people of faith and as global citizens. **Download at:** [www.columbancenter.org/jubileepodcast](http://www.columbancenter.org/jubileepodcast)

## ***Advocacy***

We believe that policies and decisions should be informed by the experiences of the people most impacted by those policies and decisions. We advocate for peace and justice, and are guided by the Gospel, Catholic Social Teaching, and the experience of Columban missionaries and the communities we serve. We encourage supporters to contact their elected political representatives in order to influence policies and decisions on the climate crisis. We avail of social media as key tools to promote advocacy, education, and community participation in calls for policy change.

## ***Sustainable Economic Models***

Columbans support sustainable economic models that value the dignity of all life. This involves working towards economic alternatives such as those promoting the circular economy model rather than economic growth as an end in itself. We work towards an economy with energy and material flows kept within sustainable limits, fairer distribution of wealth, reform of the monetary and taxation systems and promotion of social enterprises.

## ***Renewable Energy Sources***

We believe that the natural world by its relational and regenerative nature can teach us how to live sustainably. When we understand our relationship with the natural world as mutually interconnected, we begin to see the elements of life not as resources to use for human consumption but expressions of communion with God. As such, our relationship with Creation becomes one of respect inviting us to seek energy alternatives such as Wind, Solar, Geothermal, Hydro and Wave power that honor the cycles of life and teach us to live with less and in harmony with the natural world. Columbans have integrated renewable and sustainable technology, such as solar panels and water capture systems into our properties where possible.

## ***Inter-Religious Cooperation***

We join with people of other faith traditions in a spirit of respectful dialogue and prophetic witness, knowing that Climate Change has universal impacts. We believe through dialogue with people of other faith traditions including indigenous spirituality, the fullness of God’s story is



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revealed and in that mutual listening we hear the wisdom on truth of other peoples. Currently, people of other faith traditions are working on the issue of Climate Change inspired by the resources of their faith traditions. By working together, the potential of greater effectiveness and a wider awareness leading to joint action could be achieved.

## ***Socially Responsible Investing***

As a Society we are called upon to use the resources entrusted to us for the life of the world<sup>5</sup>. Through the ethically and socially responsible use and investment of financial resources, we commit to a variety of approaches including positive impact investing and the divestment of our financial resources in companies that exploit the natural world and disrespect the dignity of human life, particularly fossil fuel companies, extractive industries, and arms companies. We develop ecumenical and interfaith partnerships so that the voices of people of faith who see Climate Change as a moral issue can be heard. In recent years, fossil-free portfolios have had similar performance to those including fossil fuels, sometimes outperforming them.

## ***Simple Lifestyle***

Our option for the poor and Creation, invites us to live intentionally in relationship with the natural world and communities that are most vulnerable. We are challenged to examine our lifestyle of over consumption and dependency on fossil fuels and opt for a lifestyle that is guided by our ecological vocation to be in right relationship with all of Creation. Aspects include travelling as lightly as possible, supporting organic and fairly traded food over industrial agriculture and reducing electricity use.

## **Conclusion**

For over one hundred years, we as Catholic missionaries have left our homelands to live and work alongside people living in poverty and Indigenous communities around the world. Everyday we see close-up the devastating impacts of the loss of biodiversity, the collapse of ecosystems, and climate change on communities who contribute least to these problems and whose natural resources are exploited and destroyed for the benefit of others.

Columbans are a voice for transformation by providing humanitarian assistance and accompanying communities in their struggle to care for the environment, protect their livelihoods, and participate fully in society. We support people who have been excluded in society to tell their own stories, and through education and advocacy, work for structural change to address the root causes of injustice. Our experience has taught us that an economic and social order that collaborates mutually with creation is necessary for the care and protection of all of life. Pope Francis addressed the United Nations on World Environment Day and the opening of the Decade for Ecosystem Restoration saying, “We cannot pretend to be

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<sup>5</sup> Acts of the General Assembly of the Missionary Society of St Columban 2012, *Called to Communion*, p.17.



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healthy in a world that is sick...The wounds inflicted on our mother earth are wounds that also bleed in us.”

At all levels within the Catholic Church, Columbans contribute to realizing a vision for an integrated response to today’s urgent environmental challenges, as articulated in Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical letter *Laudato Si’*: On Care for our Common Home.

***For more Columban education and advocacy please see:***

## **Australia**

[Columban Mission Centre – Peace, Ecology and Justice Office](#)

Fr. Charles Rue, SSC

Let the Son Shine – An Australian Catholic Response to Climate Change, 2013

Season of Creation Materials

- 7 Days of Creation Scriptural Prayers and Reflections, Year A, Year B
- A Catholic Season of Creation – Sundays of September – Year A, B, C

Lenten Resources

- Laudato Si Stations of the Cross – Lenten Resource
- Grace of the Earth
- Grace of the Forests
- Stations of the Forest

## **Britain**

- [Conflict and Climate Change DVD](#)
- [Stations of the Rainforest](#)

## **Ireland**

Fr. Sean McDonagh, [Climate Change: The Challenge to All of Us](#) and several other titles on faith and ecology.

## **USA**

[Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach](#)

***For additional information contact:***





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