

# VOICES FROM THE SOUTH

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## Striving Together for Climate Justice

*As social movements and churches from around the world come together in the struggle against climate change, movements in the Global South offer a crucial voice: They often represent the vulnerable communities who are already living the devastating effects of climate change, yet they have contributed the least to the perpetuation of the present crises. In this month's "Voices from the South," Dr. Guillermo Kerber of the World Council of Churches reflects on the impacts on the victims of climate change, and how movements across the world need to look to the human faces beyond statistics in our joint struggle for climate justice.*

**By Dr. Guillermo Kerber**

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The struggle for climate justice has become a relatively new arena for many social movements in the South. For many years climate was seen as an environmental issue far from the social justice concerns. Only recently have environmental movements and social movements joined hands to address the problematic.

Indeed, extreme weather events and changing climate are affecting more and more often in various parts of the world. Once limited mainly to some especially vulnerable areas where we were used to learn about tropical storms, typhoons, cyclones or hurricanes in the past few decades they have become a reality all over the world.

Climate change has already implied alterations in rainfall patterns in regions

like West Africa affecting food security of populations and provoking climate induced migration. Sea level rise in the Pacific is causing resettlement of the inhabitants of low lying coastal areas or states.

Climate change therefore is a matter of justice because those who are and will increasingly be affected are the impoverished and vulnerable communities who do not all have the means to adapt to the challenges posed by climate change. They are primarily those who have contributed the least to the present crises, mainly provoked by the exponential increase of CO2 emissions and a development paradigm which proclaims infinite growth and overconsumption.

As climate justice movements from the South continue to proclaim, climate change is not solely a matter of the environment. The most vulnerable are suffering the worst consequences of the climate crisis. These victims' voices



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Founded in 1985, the Karibu Foundation is an independent foundation that supports voices from the Global South who provide alternatives to the dominant paradigms of power, distribution, and development.

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To learn more about the WCC, and their Climate Justice campaigns, visit:

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change>

For more case studies of the impacts of climate change, visit <http://www.climatejusticeonline.org>



Photos: Courtesy of Marcelo Schneider/WCC (front) and <http://www.climatejusticeonline.org> (back)



and stories offer a human face to the real impact of climate change beyond statistics.

But why are churches and the ecumenical movement at large struggling for climate justice? Because they see this struggle as an ethical and spiritual stance based on biblical and theological grounds. What used to be a conviction for a few now has become mainstreamed in many denominations. Caring for the whole creation is a biblical imperative.

On the global level, the World Council of Churches has been addressing the root causes and the consequences of climate change since the late 80's through the process of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.

These movements and initiatives are now seen emerging across the Global South.

The recent General Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches in March 2013, for example, ratified the priority to work on climate change and its relationships with human rights and resettlement. Climate displaced peoples are a reality affecting countries in the Pacific such as Tuvalu and Kiribati, but this is also occurring in the Maldives, in Bangladesh, and in West

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Africa.

In Nairobi in June 2011, taking into account the threats of climate change, Christian, Muslim and African traditional religious leaders issued a statement on “Climate Justice and Sustainable Peace in Africa”. In this statement, the inter-religious group acknowledged that “climate change has greatly affected already vulnerable people (such as women, children, the elderly, the poor and the disabled).” In addition to this, the effects of climate change “worsens existing inequalities and that this places an obligation on faith groups to stand in solidarity with the victims of climate change disasters, showing care, compassion and love”.

In the ecumenical understanding, climate justice is part of eco-justice, as ecological and economic justice are intertwined and are based on the principle that both the poor and the earth cry out for justice.

Actions by churches have been from the local level, supporting adaptation strat-

egies of local communities to the national and international levels, advocating for climate justice in policy frameworks in close cooperation with other civil society actors through various campaigns and alliances.

Capacity building is now a priority for many communities in the Global South; groups and churches need to adequately respond to the climate threat. Despite dramatic situations in many places, communities offer concrete experiences of resilience, solidarity and joy that inspire movements and coalitions.

The next step will be an articulation between popular mobilization and effective advocacy at the international level, which is urgently needed to make climate justice a reality for vulnerable communities who suffer from climate change already today.

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