

Not to be published before 19th November, 11 am CET (Brussels & Berlin time)

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[Address]

6 November 2020

RE: Letter on the occasion of the postponed COP 26

Dear President of the African Union, Cyril Ramaphosa,
Dear President of the Council of the European Union, Angela Merkel,
Dear President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen,

We are religious leaders of the Catholic religious order, the Jesuits. We represent not only Jesuits in Britain, but also Jesuits in Africa and Jesuit mission and development organisations working widely across Africa, Asia and Latin America. We are committed to following Pope Francis's teaching as set out in *Laudato Si* (May 2015) and to promoting an "ecological conversion".

The 26th session of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 26) was originally scheduled to be held in Glasgow from 9-19 November 2020. It was postponed on account of the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic which is again resurgent across much of the globe. We are concerned that the absence of this conference in 2020, which was to be the first "Global Stock-take" of the progress of state parties towards their commitments under the Paris Agreement, will lure governments into diverting attention and resources away from climate change towards the immediate needs of addressing the ongoing global pandemic.

While we are mindful that COVID-19 remains a danger to the peoples of the world, not least in Africa and Europe, we want to take this opportunity to reiterate that climate change is no less of a crisis for our respective continents. We are mindful of Pope Francis's admonition in his 2015 encyclical on care for our common home *Laudato Si*, "Everything is connected." Not only is the global pandemic exacerbating the climate crisis, but the social and economic harms that COVID-19 has unleashed have pushed back progress in efforts to eradicate poverty and encourage sustainable development. The post-pandemic world will be one that is poorer, sicker, and no less threatened by climate change than it was at the beginning of 2020.

Moreover, not only is everything connected, but *everybody* is connected. The peoples of Africa and Europe share a powerfully intimate, albeit at times troubled, history. What happens in one region will invariably affect the other. COVID-19 has been a sharp reminder of how many of the crises we face today have no regard for national borders, and how tackling them calls for coordinated, multilateral responses. Climate change is the prime example of just such a crisis.

Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar https://www.jesuits.africa/	Xavier Network https://xavier.network/
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On the occasion of what should have been the opening of COP 26, we are called to write two separate letters to voice our concerns. First, one directed to UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, as host of COP 26, to offer our thoughts on what his role should be in setting the global agenda on climate change in the coming year. The second directed to you, as the leaders of the African Union and the European Union, to continue to make action on climate change a priority for Africa and Europe on both a national and international level, and to take tangible steps in the coming year to deepen your common commitment to combating climate change.

In March 2020, the European Commission issued a joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council entitled *Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa*, of which action on climate change is a part. This needs to be a key focus of the next EU-AU summit. At the same time, we point out that Africa has problems unparalleled to the EU: In 2015, the AU committed itself in *Agenda 2063: The Africa we Want* to a sustainable development with full cooperation for international efforts to mitigate climate change, but, at the same time with a clear focus on poverty eradication. For Africa, poverty eradication and sustainable development are priorities to a much different degree than they are for those in the EU.

The recognition that Africa and Europe are coming at the problem from two very different starting points is a key for any common path ahead on climate change. While Europe has been the beneficiary of centuries of carbon emissions and pollution, resulting in an advanced state of industrialization and economic development, Africa is being asked to bear the burden of a climate crisis it played little part in creating, at the same time that it is struggling to eradicate poverty and strengthen civil society. From those different starting points we have to form a framework for future collaboration:

1. Global Justice Concerns – The Need for a Global Governance Approach

The Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are inadequate for addressing environmental degradation at the speed required. They demand far too little from the affluent, and the efforts they do demand are not enough to meet the challenge at hand. The Paris Agreement places too much emphasis on what happens within national borders, encouraging states to take a domestic, rather than regional or global, approach to reducing emissions. Thus, highly industrialized states, such as those in Europe, are considered to have made progress when goods consumed are now imported so that the pollution associated with their manufacture now takes place in poorer, less-developed areas of the world. Serious issues of environmental justice are implicated when more affluent countries are given credit for reducing carbon emissions within their borders simply by shifting production to less-developed areas. This also requires examination of the regime of state and export credits, and how banks and governments in the industrialized world incentivize the shifting of polluting activity to areas primarily in the Global South. States must be held accountable for the worldwide impact of what their governments, corporations, financial institutions and citizens do, and not merely for what happens within their national borders.

2. The African Debt Crisis – Everything is Interconnected

In order to be an effective partner in the struggle against climate change, Africa needs the institutional assistance of Europe to resolve its debt crisis. Budgets which were already on the precipice on account of sovereign debt obligations, now were suddenly stretched further to ad-

dress the COVID-19 global pandemic, placing many African governments in the precarious position of having to decide between servicing their debt and directing scarce resources towards saving lives. Africa can pay its creditors or it can help invest in a sustainable, green future – it cannot do both. As key stakeholders in international financial organizations, including the World Bank and IMF, EU member states can use their influence to press for resolution of Africa’s debt crisis.

3. The EU’s Green Deal – An Avenue for African-European Collaboration

The European Green Deal provides an action plan to boost the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy and restore biodiversity and cut pollution. The EU aims to be climate neutral in 2050. As Europe embarks on this path, it should collaborate and coordinate with Africa to the greatest extent possible since global success on combating climate change will depend on Africa being able to effectively contribute. For example, Africa continues to face the problem of millions having no access, or unreliable access, to electricity. Europe can assist with African development of renewable energy sources, encouraging the move away from fossil-based sources. This implies the transfer not only of money and investment, but also technology.

4. Regional Collaboration on Nationally Determined Contributions

The Paris Agreement requires each Party to prepare, communicate and maintain successive nationally determined contributions (NDCs) that it intends to achieve and that are consistent with limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C. We are concerned that for 2020 only *14 countries* have submitted an NDC, representing 3.8% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Our regions must do better and we call upon you to press your respective member states not only to issue NDCs, but to make sure that those plans are ambitious as well as verifiable enough to meet the present crisis. This is an area where the AU and EU can collaborate to press for a renewal of negotiations around a common transparency framework and for finalization and approval of the Paris Rulebook, particularly addressing carbon trading.

5. Financing the Necessary Programs – A Call for European Boldness

The stress in any African intervention to mitigate climate change is on building resilience and adaptation, especially because its limited adaptive capacity.

At the COP 21 and the Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa in July 2015, European countries pledged to support developing countries to finance climate action. Europe needs to renew this commitment not the least due to the commitment arising from the Principle of Ability to Pay and the Principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibility. This implies commitments to improve assistance and cooperation when it comes to stem Illicit Financial Flows and Domestic Resource Mobilization.

We call upon the leaders and citizens of the EU to insist on making values like social justice, fairness, solidarity and shared responsibility central to any cooperation with Africa. African countries need revenue to finance climate change and development. This raises the difficult question of restorative justice in assessing the past, present, and future relationship between Africa and Europe, particularly the legacy of colonialism. We owe it to future generations to be honest with one another on justice issues. The longer we put off this discussion, the less able we will be to move forward together on climate issues.

Finally, we would like to publish this letter on 19th November, the day when COP 26 was due to close, and would be happy if we could include your response.

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In closing, we draw your attention to our letter to Prime Minister Johnson, calling upon you as the leaders of the African Union and the European Union to also ensure that climate change remain at the top of your domestic and international agendas in the coming year.

Yours sincerely,



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Encl.

1. Letter to Prime Minister Boris Johnson
2. Detailed paper backing up our argument