

On 6 August 2009, the Archbishop of Kenya, the Most Rev Dr Eliud Wabukala, issued a Pastoral Letter to his Province concerning ‘Our Environment’. The text of the letter is given below.

To: All Dioceses; all Parishes; all Congregations; all Stakeholders

Dear Friends, dear Brothers and Sisters

I greet each of you in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

1. Introduction

I am sending you this Pastoral Letter 06/08/09 focusing on one urgent concern — **our environment**. It has been our personal experience in this region, that our seasons have become more and more uncertain year after year. The droughts have become longer and more severe. The seasonal rains come too early or too late. The rains are too much or too little every season. Our crops can no longer produce the harvests we expect, and our livestock farming is more difficult than ever before.

Our rivers are drying up, and our water supply is no longer adequate both in rural and urban areas. Our river-based electricity is no longer reliable, because the water level on our dams goes down before the next seasonal rains are due. People spend much time, effort and money bothering about water for domestic use. Our industries have to reduce production because of water and power cuts. The experts have warned that these experiences will continue. They challenge us to take responsibility for our environment, in order to help ourselves, other people, other creatures and future generations. They warn us that prolonged heavy rains [El Nino] will come this year during the October – December season. Now is the time for each of us to prepare for these long rains, and for other seasons afterwards. During this challenging time, our faith as Christians can give us hope. This is the message I wish to share with you now, as a matter of urgency for each of us.

2. The Earth Belongs to God; We are part of the Earth.

“The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation.” (Psalm 24:1-5).

The earth is God's household. We who dwell in it must take care for the earth in order for it to care for us. If we destroy our environment, we shall have nowhere else to live. We have seen examples where our environment has been destroyed through deforestation, soil erosion, overgrazing and farming without using manure. It is our responsibility to restore our degraded environment, beginning with our homesteads, our church compounds, our schools and our other centres. This is a matter of urgency for each of us. Our children and their grandchildren will depend on our action now. The land does not belong to us as people. Instead, we belong to the land. We came from the earth and to the earth we will return. We are not living on the earth; we form part of the land and we live from the earth for the flourishing of the earth. The well-being of the earth transcends all of us because it is something bigger than our own personal interests.

3. God has entrusted the land and all its natural resources to all people to care for, as individuals and as communities. Jesus promises us life in abundance (John 10:10). Such abundant life can best be realized in sustainable communities, whose members ought to be:

- Working together as community especially in our congregations, parishes and dioceses;
- Participating in decision-making forums where we can share our insights with others;
- Contributing our efforts, insights, experience and expertise for the common good;
- Promoting the constructive traditional wisdom that is inclusive, participatory and consultative;
- Utilizing the public resources made available through Government initiatives such as CDF, Kazi kwa Vijana, Local Authority Transfer Fund (LATF), etc;
- Promoting harmonious co-existence within our congregations, parishes and dioceses;
- Promoting harmonious co-existence among all stakeholders;
- Providing responsible leadership in our sponsored educational institutions so that they may become places for the younger generation to acquire positive and constructive attitudes, norms, principles, values and virtues to guide them as adult citizens.
- Sharing with others the ways and means towards self-reliance through responsible management of our natural and cultural resources;
- Encouraging public institutions to focus on long-term public needs more than individual self-centered interests.
- Putting in place structures and mechanisms that will ensure the provision of a community's daily needs;
- Recognizing and utilizing people's indigenous knowledge and skills;
- Worshipping God together with others in harmony, hope and courage.

4. The land does not belong to itself. Ultimately, it belongs to its Creator, the One who sustains the Earth, and who will finally restore it. In the light of these considerations we are challenged to respond in the following ways:

- We CONFESS that we as human beings have not always allowed the earth and its creatures to flourish. We have too often abused and brought death to the land. We confess that we, especially as churches, have often been indifferent to environmental degradation and that, as a result, we have participated in the destruction of the environment.
- We ACKNOWLEDGE our responsibility, especially as churches, to keep the land and to care for it as the land cares for us.
- We COMMIT ourselves, especially as churches, to promote relationships that strengthen and do not undermine sustainable communities. Therefore, as a matter of urgency we commit ourselves:
- To promote the harvesting of rain water, especially at home and in small community projects in all areas – on roofs, river valleys, streams, gulleys, farms and grazing grounds. Every drop of God's gift as rain water should be harvested and stored for our future use.
- To help ensure food security for all, especially through indigenous means of food production, and to avoid dependence on external means of agricultural production;

- To promote practices that enhance the fertility of the soil, especially soil conservation through contoured terracing; natural compost; fallow farming and mixed cropping with staple foods appropriate for each specific zone. No grain of our fertile soil should be eroded into our dams and rivers. Instead, we must cover our soils with vegetation.
- To resist all forms of deforestation and to promote tree-planting with indigenous plants for food, timber, fuel, shade, water catchment and beauty.
- To protect all our wetlands, especially the natural springs, river courses, steep slopes and hill-tops.
- To restore all the indigenous forests, groves and shrines which have been degraded.
- To keep our environments clean, at home, church, school on roads and market places. Each of us deserves a clean environment.
- To seek appropriate forms of waste management and to resist the careless disposal of toxic and other forms of waste.
- To promote the use of new and renewable sources of energy.
- To promote participatory and inclusive forms of decision-making.
- To ensure the full participation of all, especially youth and women, in programmes for long-term sustainability.
- To participate in the re-education and re-orientation of our communities.
- To promote technologies that add to natural resources and that do not only extract from nature. Where technologies do extract from nature, ways of replenishing such resources must be sought.
- We CALL upon leaders and members of Christian churches, of other faith communities and in various levels of government, in our region and elsewhere in the world: to promote the well-being of the land and all its creatures; and to resist the temptation of pursuing self-interest at the expense of the poor and the powerless.
- We PRAY for the healing of the land. God, help us not to destroy the land and to stop fighting over resources that ultimately belong to you. God graciously hear us. AMEN.

"He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness." (2 Cor. 9: 10) AMEN.

Yours sincerely

The Most Rev Dr Eliud Wabukala
Archbishop of Kenya & Bishop of All Saints Cathedral Diocese