

Care for the Environment – A Divine Mandate

By The Rt. Rev. A. Qiliho

The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia

Introduction

Dear co-workers in God's mission, I warmly greet you in the Grace and Peace of the Risen Lord. In a special way, I bring greetings from the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia.

Our sincere thanks to the ACEN in bringing us together to discern God's voice in our hearts and to share with each other the best possible way forward to protect the natural environment. We thank the Anglican Diocese of Peru for extending your peace and love as host to our Anglican family this week.

I believe that the issue of resettlement of many of our Pacific people due to climate change requires moral courage, imagination and skill to help us address it. While I do not subscribe to a worldview that throws the fate of humanity and the environment to impersonal forces to determine, I do recognise that like Moses, the Prophets and St. Paul, we must face the challenges of our times with courage in the belief in God's promise that He will not abandon us. But to get there, we need to appreciate why we need to be courageous and to clearly understand the foundation upon which our moral courage needs to be built. My presentation is about why we should care.

Personal story

As a boy growing up in the village, the unwritten rituals for planting, harvesting and fishing became intrinsic to me as part of the ritual of life. From the elders, I learned about the season for planting and harvesting root crops, the season for certain foods to bear, the best times for fishing - night or day. I learned to watch out for signs of stormy or calm weather. I also learned about religiously significant trees, pieces of land, animals and sea mammals. These are part and parcel of a life that has deep religious significance. My ancestors' fate was dependent on the turn of the wind, on a certain sea current, and on the fertility of the soil. These were represented by deities. Hence, if the crops failed or the breadfruit did not bear or the fish stock decreased, it might be the result of the failure to adhere to the planting or harvesting or fishing seasonal rituals, which angered the gods.

The point is that these rituals instilled in me a sense of respect and awe towards the natural environment.

The Care for the Environment: A Divine Mandate

Surprisingly, as I considered this title a little I realised that this was already part of the Lambeth Conference 1998 Resolution 1.8 Statement on Creation. To quote, "that we as Christians have a God-given mandate to care for, look after and protect God's creation." Unquote.

Immediately after Resolution 1.8 I came to Resolution 1.9 on Ecology. The call here includes all ecumenical partners and other faith communities, governments and transnational companies to work for sustainable society in a sustainable world; to recognise the dignity and rights of all people and the sanctity of all life, especially the rights of future generations; to ensure the responsible use and re-cycling of natural resources; to bring about economic

reforms which will establish a just and fair trading system both for people and for the environment.

That was in 1998. The Bishops agreed it was urgent then. In my own reading about 1998 there was something else that was afforded more urgency and a lot of our energy was directed towards it. It was Resolution 1.10 on Human Sexuality.

In no other sphere of current concern has there been a more religious tone to public awareness than in dealing with issues concerning the natural environment. For it is here that we come face to face with the fundamental question of our place in the universe and our responsibilities for it; with the destructive potential of our human intervention on the one hand, and on the other, the awe-inspiring beauties of so many life forms now at risk due to climate change.

The Scriptures, according to John Passmore, are a key source of ecological awareness. Few passages in the Scriptures have had a deeper influence on our view of nature than Genesis chapter 1 with its momentous vision of the universe coming into being as the work of God. Humankind, the last and the greatest of God's creations, is given dominion over nature: "be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it." There is a sense of wonder here at the smallness yet uniqueness of mankind, vulnerable but also unique in his ability to shape the environment.

We do not own the natural environment. We are its trustees on behalf of God for the sake of future generations. Life forms are not inventions but discoveries. They are I believe God's loan to us, entrusted to our collective care. Not only do we not own nature but we are duty bound to respect its integrity. Samson Raphael Hirsch the 19th century commentator puts this rather well in an original interpretation of the phrase in Genesis chapter one, to quote, "Let us make man in our image after our own likeness."

I believe many interpretations have been made of this, for at that stage, prior to the creation of man, God was alone. But the 'us' says Hirsch, refers to the rest of creation. Because man alone would develop the capacity to change and possibly endanger the natural world, nature itself was consulted as to whether it approves of such a being.

I believe the implied condition is that we would use nature in such a way so as to be faithful to the Creator's purpose. Hence, the mandate to exercise dominion is not technical but **moral** and is limited by the obligation to protect and conserve. The famous Genesis story in chapters 2 and 3: the eating of forbidden fruit and man's subsequent exile from Eden - seems to make just this point. Not everything is permitted; there are limits to what we can do, and when these limits are ignored, disaster follows. Moreover, the Book of Genesis **gives** a view of nature which is not human-centred but God-centred. Sure, humanity with its unique capacity for moral choices is the focus of its concerns. But the medieval Rabbi Moses Maimonides warns us against an anthropocentric view of reality. He says, "The universe does not exist for man's sake, but each being exists for each own sake and not because of some other thing." That is seen in the prophetic literature and the creation Psalms, for example, Psalm 104:10-14. Creation has its own dignity as God's masterpiece, and though we have the mandate to use it, we have none to destroy it.

In that respect, I come here to reaffirm on behalf of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia the call that we as Christians have a God-given mandate to care for, look after and protect God's creation.

The Environment initiative in the Province includes:

1. Uphold as urgent the 5th mark of Mission. The Province is guided by this mark, "To protect the integrity of the earth, stewardship and to sustain and renew the life of the earth."
2. **Diocesan Level**
 - Various dioceses have their environment initiatives.
 - Vision Network Position Paper – "Why Christians must care for the earth."
 - Diocese of Wellington – "Care of Creation Activities in the Diocese."
 - Diocese of Polynesia – "Moana Leadership concept incorporates the Environment." The setting up of the 'Vanua' (land) Institute for Environment and Rural Ministry.
3. **Parish Level**
 1. Youth (and local congregation) involvement in H.O.P.E (Help Our Polluted Environment). Assist in local Council & local Ministry of Environment initiatives to decrease human impact on environment degradation; help with environment education & advocacy; help with local clean up campaigns.
4. **Partnership with other Organisations**
 2. Pacific Conference of Churches – "Environment Policy." Climate Change and Resettlement and Adaptation.
 3. Pacific Theological College and South Pacific Association of Theological Schools
5. **Liturgical & Educational Resources**
 - New Zealand Prayer Book is a wonderful Liturgical Resource (please go to the Aotearoa/NZ/Polynesia website, www.ang.org.nz)
 - ECREA website – www.ecrea.org.fj
 - PCC website – www.pcc.org.fj
 - PTC website – www.ptc.ac.fj (local theologians)

There are serious concerns still there with us in the Province.

- The change in weather patterns affects the whole.
- Storm and rising in sea level is a serious challenge in our various Pacific Island Nations.(Kiribati, Tuvalu, Nauru, Fiji and others).
- Poor quality and shortage of water.
- Eroded and impoverished soil.
- Forest destruction.
- Plant and animal extinction.
- Damage of our marine life.
- Other local concerns – on the list.

I am deeply concerned about what is happening to us in the Province and to our Pacific Ocean, our islands and our people. The possibility of our brothers and sisters in the islands leaving their beloved countries is very real. The challenge about resettlement will become a serious issue then.

Our Mission

I believe that our Christian hope is born in the belief that the source of action lies within us. We need a moral framework that situates the source of responsibility for ourselves, the environment and for the future within us and not outside of us. We need one that attempts to minimise the awesome complexity of the decisions governments, corporations, and individuals have to take. But complexity can sometimes be an excuse for ignoring the moral dimension; and if we do that, we are lost.

Freedom means restraint. It means not doing everything we could do, nor doing something on the grounds that if we do not, someone else will. Without a moral vision, we will fail. And that vision can only emerge from conversation or dialogue, and from talking and listening from each other as we are going to do this week.

We hope in the knowledge that we have the power and the freedom to choose, that we can learn from our mistakes and act differently the next time. This is the basis of my hope and prayer for us this week as we discern together.

The questions put to us by climate change require answers that will be costly and painful. The tasks are not easy.

Recommendations

- 1. We need to repent and have a change of heart, that we have failed God.**
- 2. As people of a God-given mandate, we need to recover our vision.**
- 3. Radically to bring our lifestyle into line with our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ.**
- 4. As Anglicans/Christians our task is not to try ourselves to carry the responsibility for changing the world, for this is God's world. But we are called to play our part in serving it and protecting it.**
- 5. We are called to bear witness to the truth about God's world and our human calling at every level. And our witness needs to be seen in our local churches and in our local lifestyle.**

Conclusion

What is remarkable and real, I believe, is the glory of the created world, its astonishing diversity and multiplicity, revealing the beauty and glimpses of God. In most of these, if we listen carefully, we will hear the voice of God telling us something we need to know. It is for us to discern God's voice in the silence of our hearts and in the stillness of our minds. We seriously need to find our way back to God.

Vinaka vakalevu for listening and may God Bless us all in our deliberations this week.

Apimeleki Qiliho (Bishop)

Appendices: various interesting notes from different sources.

**Pacific Church Leaders Meeting Statement on Resettlement as a direct consequence of
climate induced calamities**

Our Oikos – a new consciousness on climate change and our call to action

"Moana Declaration", Tanoa International Hotel, 24 April 2009

On the occasion of the Church Leaders Meeting on Resettlement as a direct consequence of climate induced calamities, Pacific Church Leaders issue the following statement on climate change and the imminent threat of forced relocation and displacement faced by Pacific peoples.

Mindful of the impacts on food and water security; our way of life; our culture; our community; our overall health and well being; the ecological systems on which we depend; other creatures with whom we share Gods creation.

Led by our faith traditions and the life of Jesus Christ, we stand on behalf of the poor, those who have little power and with those throughout history who have acted for justice,

We the Church Leaders from Pacific Island Countries (PICs) present at this meeting call upon the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), affected states and the international community of states to:

1. **Ensure** that all persons and communities affected by climate induced catastrophes in the Pacific as well as other affected world regions, in particular those who are forced to flee their homes and lands, are afforded the respect and protection of the full spectrum of rights enshrined within the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and subsequent human rights treaties;
2. **Develop** local, national, sub-regional, regional and international plans to ensure respect for and protection of the rights of forced climate migrants;
3. **Develop** the framework for a new Convention or Protocol on Resettlement to cater for the specific and unique situation of persons, communities and states affected by climatic induced catastrophes.
4. **Undertake** immediate measures to identify available land and other appropriate resources for the purposes of relocating and resettling all forced climate migrants, both those displaced internally as well as those likely to seek resettlement in other countries;
5. **Carry out** intensive public consultations with Pacific communities affected and will be affected by rising sea levels or other consequences of climate change, with a view to developing viable and practical plans to protect the rights of forced climate migrants, in particular their housing, land and property and related rights;
6. **Develop** in a proactive way, in full partnership, cooperation and consultation with vulnerable people and communities affected by climate, policies, strategies and practical programmes that mitigate the worst effects and consequences of climate change on affected populations, and enable and empower such populations to adapt to changing environmental factors;
7. **Devote**, where mitigation and adaptation responses are likely to be insufficient per se, adequate resources, in particular financial resources, to practical measures designed to assist forced climate migrants to relocate and resettle in a manner consistent with their

- rights and in ways that secure for them an adequate standard of living and sustainable livelihoods;
8. **Explore** creative and innovative methods of identifying long-term relocation and resettlement options for forced climate migrants, consistent with their housing, land, property and related rights, whilst preserving their dignity as human beings;
 9. **Develop** and support projects that demonstrate an alternative economic model reflecting faith based values of: justice, equity, and sustainability – in challenge to the values inherent in the neo-liberal economic model dominant in the world today;
 10. **Ensure** the rights of other populations affected by the forced displacement of climate change migrants, such as host or receiving communities in areas where climate change migrants are settled, are fully and adequately protected;
 11. **Call** on the peoples of the Pacific and the international community of states, to act toward exhausting all avenues available toward the realization of the critical issues in this Moana Declaration;
 12. **Reaffirm** the prophetic role of the church and its responsibility to recognize and speak out against the injustices wrought on by climate change and call on all persons, communities and states to act now.

24 April 2009, Nadi, Fiji.

Appendix 2



Pacific Conference of Churches

“THE CRY TO SING THE LORD’S SONG IN OCEANIA”¹

**The Oceania [Pacific] Churches’ Declaration August 6th-13th 2010
Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand**

PREAMBLE

On the occasion of the Fourth Pacific Church Leaders Meeting, held in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, we the Leaders of the Pacific Conference of Churches acknowledge the hospitality of Te Aka Puaho (Maori Synod) and the Pacific Islands Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, the generosity of the Pacific Leadership Programme and the contributions of other delegates including the representatives of the Global Ecumenical Network on Migration.

The time has come for the Churches in Oceania to “sing a new song”; to discern and proclaim afresh of God to ourselves, our people, our *whenua*² and our governments. We looked at migration as our main theme from the perspectives of ecumenism,

¹ Psalm 137. The term “Oceania” was first used in 1831. Its most substantial meaning was Rev. Dr. Tuwere’s definition in the document *“The Call to Reflection and Action to the Churches in Oceania”* by the Ecumenical Pioneers and the Youth in April 2010, in Oceania. It is used here to refer to the context and people of the region of the word commonly known as the Pacific. This shift from Pacific to Oceania is made to indicate identity and selfhood of people and nations in this region of the world and their commitment to be actively engaged in the work of the worldwide ecumenical movement.

² This is the Maori term for “house”. The corresponding terms in Oceania include *fale* and *vale*.

climate change, governance and human rights, HIV and AIDS, and women and youth. We the church leaders hereby reemphasise Christian teachings about family.

Our *whare*,³ the household of God in Oceania, has four main pillars:

1. An acknowledgement that God has called us to this moment in our ecumenical history to discover anew what God is saying to us and to our people in Oceania.
2. A call to all in Oceania – churches, civil societies and governments - to reform and strengthen the bonds of solidarity and fellowship.
3. Our moral and ethical responsibility to shape the region of Oceania to be more and more what God wants it to be.
4. The need for us as Churches to recapture our regional responsibility to partner and accompany political leaders on key moral and ethical issues that underpin the changes that our region of Oceania faces today.

As church leaders of the Pacific Conference of Churches, our call is basically one: for churches, civil society groups, traditional communities, traditional leaders and governments to revisit our identity as peoples of Oceania.

We the Church Leaders:

1. Acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ even before we are called into being; it is for this reason that we as church leaders met in these past few days to discern and discuss the key issues our region faces;
2. Hear and feel the cry of the Maori people in Aotearoa New Zealand for greater connection and association with Oceania as a basis of our common identity as people of Oceania. As the *Tangata Whenua* (Maori People) struggle to sing their own song of justice, we call on our churches in Oceania to ensure the meaningful participation of and solidarity action on the needs of the Te Aka Puaho (Maori Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand).
3. Call for a fundamental and urgent rethinking of who we are in Oceania on the following key areas:
 - 3.1 The ecumenical vision taking into account a redefinition of ecumenism in our Oceania and key aspects of sufficiency, wholeness, inclusivity and reconciliation.
 - 3.2 Development models, driven by a ‘more is better’ principle that gives rise to poverty and inequality, exploitation and devastation of the environment and natural resources.
 - 3.3 Governance and leadership models that give rise to corruption, division and unhealthy competition among people of Oceania.⁴
4. Call for a renewed focus on the notion of self-determination as a key human rights issue in our region of Oceania. We recognise the overarching nature of human rights in Oceanic societies and we understand that human rights need to take account of religious and moral values that we hold as churches, and the cultural norms that govern our people over centuries.
5. Stand in solidarity with all migrant communities from Oceania, recognising the socio-cultural and economic challenges they face. We therefore call for greater

³ This refers to traditions, land and culture of the Maori people in Aotearoa. Its corresponding terms in Oceania include *Vanua* and *Fenua*.

⁴ Health issues are also part of the need to rethink the governance and leadership models operating in Oceania today.

recognition and protection of migrant communities in Oceania, Australia and Aotearoa. Furthermore, we call for the Pacific Conference of Churches Secretariat to coordinate and facilitate research and advocacy initiatives on these issues at national, regional and international levels.

6. Call on our churches and governments in Oceania to address the resettlement of populations, as a pressing moral and ethical issue where the church, traditional and political leaders need to take responsibility and leadership. We reaffirm the calls made in the 2009 Moana Declaration that we:
 - 6.1 Reaffirm the issue of resettlement of populations due to climate change as a critical issue of our time;
 - 6.2 Engage in dialogue and discussions between churches, traditional leaders and governments on resettlement;
 - 6.3 Network and advocate for a regional and international agreement on resettlement for the protection of the rights of ‘forced climate migrants’;
 - 6.4 Forge partnerships between churches, traditional leaders and governments on mitigation and adaptation needs of our communities.
7. Mindful of the cultural and traditional values of Oceania, we call for the inclusion of gender policies in our Churches in Oceania and recognise that such policies must be premised on the religious, moral values of our communities.
8. Recognise that God’s mission includes women and youth and therefore, we call on our communities of faith to allow more meaningful and active participation of women and youth in the mission of the church. We endorse and commit to the statement; ‘Call to Reflection and Action’ to the churches in Oceania of the intergenerational encounter between the ecumenical pioneers and youth.
9. Encourage our churches and the PCC secretariat to ensure that youths of migrant churches, particularly those in Aotearoa and Australia are included in regional youth activities that foster ecumenical relations, share and deepen historical memory and foster our regional identity as people of Oceania.
10. Affirm that our response to the HIV and AIDS pandemic lies in the heart at what it means to be a Christian. We acknowledge the statement in the report of the Commission on AIDS in the Pacific calling for the continued partnership of churches with all stakeholders, especially at the national level.
11. Affirm our commitments to the 2004 Nadi Declaration, at the 2007 PCLM, to implement the SPATS⁵ curriculum on HIV and AIDS and in the Resolution of the 9th PCC General Assembly, for a concerted response to HIV and AIDS in Oceania. We commit ourselves to equipping our ministers to engage meaningfully and practically with this issue. We accept our Christian responsibility to share hope and love through our acceptance and care of people living with HIV and AIDS.
12. Commit to the aforementioned responsibilities and to ensure their careful and effective implementation in our churches.

August 13, 2010
Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand

⁵ South Pacific Association of Theological Schools

New York Times Op-Ed Contributor

On Nauru, a Sinking Feeling

By MARCUS STEPHEN

Published: July 18, 2011

Yaren, Nauru

I FORGIVE you if you have never heard of my country.

At just 8 square miles, about a third of the size of Manhattan, and located in the southern Pacific Ocean, Nauru appears as merely a pinpoint on most maps — if it is not missing entirely in a vast expanse of blue.

But make no mistake; we are a sovereign nation, with our own language, customs and history dating back 3,000 years. Nauru is worth a quick Internet search, I assure you, for not only will you discover a fascinating country that is often overlooked, you will find an indispensable cautionary tale about life in a place with hard ecological limits.

Phosphate mining, first by foreign companies and later our own, cleared the lush tropical rainforest that once covered our island's interior, scarring the land and leaving only a thin strip of coastline for us to live on. The legacy of exploitation left us with few economic alternatives and one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, and led previous governments to make unwise investments that ultimately squandered our country's savings.

I am not looking for sympathy, but rather warning you what can happen when a country runs out of options. The world is headed down a similar path with the relentless burning of coal and oil, which is altering the planet's climate, melting ice caps, making oceans more acidic and edging us ever closer to a day when no one will be able to take clean water, fertile soil or abundant food for granted.

Climate change also threatens the very existence of many countries in the Pacific, where the sea level is projected to rise three feet or more by the end of the century. Already, Nauru's coast, the only habitable area, is steadily eroding, and communities in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands have been forced to flee their homes to escape record tides. The low-lying nations of Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands may vanish entirely within our grandchildren's lifetimes.

Similar climate stories are playing out on nearly every continent, where a steady onslaught of droughts, floods and heat waves, which are expected to become even more frequent and intense with climate change, have displaced millions of people and led to widespread food shortages.

The changes have already heightened competition over scarce resources, and could foreshadow life in a world where conflicts are increasingly driven by environmental catastrophes.

Yet the international community has not begun to prepare for the strain they will put on humanitarian organizations or their implications for political stability around the world.

In 2009, an initiative by the Pacific Small Island Developing States, of which I am chairman, prompted the United Nations General Assembly to recognize the link between climate change and security. But two years later, no concrete action has been taken.

So I was pleased to learn that the United Nations Security Council will take up the issue tomorrow in an open debate, in which I will have the opportunity to address the body and reiterate my organization's proposals.

First, the Security Council should join the General Assembly in recognizing climate change as a threat to international peace and security. It is a threat as great as nuclear proliferation or global terrorism. Second, a special representative on climate and security should be appointed. Third, we must assess whether the United Nations system is itself capable of responding to a crisis of this magnitude.

The stakes are too high to implement these measures only after a disaster is already upon us. Negotiations to reduce emissions should remain the primary forum for reaching an international agreement. We are not asking for blue helmets to intervene; we are simply asking the international community to plan for the biggest environmental and humanitarian challenge of our time.

Nauru has begun an intensive program to restore the damage done by mining, and my administration has put environmental sustainability at the center of our policymaking. Making our island whole again will be a long and difficult process, but it is our home and we cannot leave it for another one.

I forgive you if you have never heard of Nauru — but you will not forgive yourselves if you ignore our story.

Marcus Stephen is the president of Nauru.

A version of this op-ed appeared in print on July 19, 2011, on page A23 of the New York edition with the headline: On Nauru, a Sinking Feeling.