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Message of the Holy Father Francis for the launch of the “UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration”

The following is the message sent by the Holy Father Francis for the launch of the “UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration”, to prevent, stop and reverse damage to ecosystems at a global level:

Message of the Holy Father

To Her Excellency Mrs. Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director

and to His Excellency Mr. Qu Dongyu, FAO Director-General

Your Excellencies,

Tomorrow we will celebrate World Environment Day. This annual commemoration encourages us to remember that everything is interconnected. A true «concern for the environment [...] needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society».[1]

Tomorrow’s celebration, however, will have a special significance, as it will take place in the year in which the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration begins. This decade invites us to make ten-year commitments aimed at caring for our common home by «supporting and scaling up efforts to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide and raise awareness of the importance of successful ecosystem restoration».[2]

In the Bible we read that: «The heavens declare the glory of God; / the skies proclaim the work of his hands. / Day after day they pour forth speech; / night after night they reveal knowledge. / They have no speech, they use no words; / no sound is heard from them».[3]

We are all part of this gift of creation. We are a part of nature, not separated from it. This is what the Bible tells

us.

The current environmental situation calls us to act now with urgency to become ever more responsible stewards of creation and to restore the nature that we have been damaging and exploiting for too long. Otherwise, we risk destroying the very basis on which we depend. We risk floods, and hunger and severe consequences for ourselves and for future generations. This is what many scientists tell us.

We need to take care of each other, and of the weakest among us. Continuing down this path of exploitation and destruction – of humans, and of nature – is unjust and unwise. This is what a responsible conscience would tell us.

We have a responsibility to leave a habitable common home for our children and for future generations.

However, when we look around ourselves, what do we see? We see crisis leading to crisis. We see the destruction of nature, as well as a global pandemic leading to the death of millions of people. We see the unjust consequences of some aspects of our current economic systems and numerous catastrophic climate crises that produce grave effects on human societies and even mass extinction of species.

And yet there is hope. «We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral».[4]

We are witnessing new engagement and commitment by several States and non-Governmental actors: local authorities, the private sector, civil society, youth ... efforts aimed at promoting what we can call “integral ecology”, which is a complex and multidimensional concept: it calls for long-term vision; it highlights the inseparability of «concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace».[5] it is aimed at restoring «the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God».[6] It makes each of us aware of our responsibility as human beings, towards ourselves, towards our neighbour, towards creation and towards the Creator.

However, we are warned that we have little time left – scientists say the next ten years, the span of this UN Decade – to restore the ecosystem, which will mean the integral restoration of our relation with nature.

The many “warnings” we are experiencing, among which we can see Covid-19 and global warming, are pushing us to take urgent action. I hope that the COP26 on climate change, to be held in Glasgow next November, will help to give us the right answers to restore ecosystems both through a strengthened climate action and a spread of awareness and consciousness.

We are also impelled to rethink our economies. We require a «further and deeper reflection on the meaning of the economy and its goals, as well as a profound and far-sighted revision of the current model of development, so as to correct its dysfunctions and deviations».[7] Ecosystem degradation is a clear outcome of economic dysfunction.

Restoring the nature we have damaged means, in the first place, restoring ourselves. As we welcome this United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, let us be compassionate, creative and courageous. May we take our proper place as a “Restoration Generation”.

From the Vatican, 27 May 2021

FRANCIS

[1] Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* (24 May 2015), 91.

[2] UNGA Resolution 73/284 adopted on 1 March 2019: "United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), op. 1.

[3] *Psalm* 19: 1-3.

[4] Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* (24 May 2015), 112.

[5] *Ibid.*, 10.

[6] *Ibid.*, 210.

[7] Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter. *Caritas in veritate* (29 June 2009), 32.
