

Vatican official calls for 'new thinking' to address climate change

COPENHAGEN, Denmark - The world must confront its current moral crises, ranging from hunger to environmental destruction, with "discernment and new thinking," said the head of the Vatican delegation to the United Nations climate change conference.

Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Vatican's nuncio to the U.N., invited delegates during a plenary session Dec. 17 to "a new and deeper reflection on the meaning of the economy and its purposes, and a profound and far-reaching revision of the model for development, to correct the malfunctions and distortions."

The archbishop's address in Copenhagen came as negotiations slowed on a climate change pact to build upon the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which obligated industrialized countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by a specific amount every year through 2012. No agreement had been reached by midday Dec. 18, the conference's final day.

"With realism, trust and hope we must assume the new responsibilities which call us to the scene of a world in need of a deep cultural renewal and a rediscovery of fundamental values on which to build a better future," Archbishop Migliore said.

He called attention to efforts being made to reduce energy consumption around the globe. He said efforts should not only revolve around scientific and technical solutions, but must include changes in personal habits and lifestyle.

"The wisest and most effective programs focus on information, education and the formation of the sense of responsibility in children and adults toward environmentally sound patterns of development and stewardship of creation," he said.

To help stress his point, the archbishop briefly reviewed steps taken by the Vatican to incorporate renewable energy into daily activity as a way to reduce its emissions of carbon dioxide, which scientists have said is a leading cause of climate change.

He also cited efforts at Catholic schools and universities to raise awareness of environmental concerns.

“These efforts are about working on lifestyles, as the current dominant models of consumption and production are often unsustainable from the point of view of social, environmental, economic and even moral analysis,” he said.

“We must safeguard creation – soil, water and air – as a gift entrusted to everyone, but we must also and above all prevent mankind from destroying itself,” he said.

Archbishop Migliore also cited Pope Benedict XVI’s recent encyclical “*Caritas in Veritate*” (“Charity in Truth”) and his 2010 World Peace Day message, both of which addressed the need for future generations to respect the environment and for world leaders to adopt laws and policies that respect the lives of all people.

“There is an inseparable link between the protection of creation, education and an ethical approach to the economy and development,” he told the delegates. “The Holy See hopes that the process in question can ever more appreciate this link and, with this outlook, continues to give its full cooperation.”