

Faith leaders help to forge historic climate deal



United Nations secretary-general Ban Ki-moon has acknowledged the contribution of faiths to last weekend's accord between 195 countries to stem carbon emissions and set the world on a more sustainable environmental path.

He included "faith leaders" in his list of civil society climate campaigners who have "come together under one banner and brought forth this moment of hope".

Last Sunday, Pope Francis called the climate-change agreement signed in Paris "historic", urging the international community swiftly to implement it. Speaking after the Angelus, he said: "I exhort the whole international community to proceed on the path undertaken in the name of an ever more effective solidarity." Many climate scientists have acknowledged the power of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato si'*, earlier this year, calling global warming a moral issue, and also paid tribute to an energised interfaith community of climate campaigners. There have even been reports that Pope Francis personally intervened to push the deal through. According to claims reported by the BBC, Francis telephoned the president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, to convince him to sign the agreement.

Christiana Figueres, executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, also acknowledged the dramatic impact of the various walking and cycling pilgrimages to Paris. Just before the talks started, she received a faiths petition calling for climate justice with 1,780,528 signatures gathered internationally, with Cardinal Cláudio Hummes of Brazil saying at the event that "we ask for drastic cuts in carbon emissions below the damage threshold of 1.5°C and we must put an end to the fossil fuel era by 2050". The following day saw the largest climate mobilisation in history, with significant numbers of people of faith among over 785,000 people participating in 2,300 events in 175 countries. Last Thursday, the faiths petition was presented to the French president, François Hollande, at his presidential palace by faith-based groups. Auxiliary Bishop Leonardo Steiner of Brasilia, secretary general of the Brazilian Bishops' Conference, told him that "as people of faith, we are extremely pleased to meet you today to deliver these petition signatures and demand climate justice". The Catholic component of the petition was just over 900,000 signatures, organised by the Global Catholic Climate Movement.

The concern of the Vatican in the summit was evidenced by the seniority of the cardinals it sent to Paris. Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, said we “cannot remain blind to the grave damage done to the planet, nor can we remain indifferent to the plight of the millions of people who most bear the burden of such destruction”. Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin said it was necessary to adopt a “clear ethical orientation” on climate change; to transmit “clear signs to guide the behaviour of governments, local authorities, the world of business, the scientific community and civil society”; and to have a “long-term perspective” that provided for “the revision of commitments and dynamic follow-ups”.

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