



## How can the State make Ireland a leader in tackling Climate Change?

### Introduction

The Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Citizens' Assembly on how the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change. We also welcome the Irish Government's decision to hold a National Dialogue on Climate Action. Climate Change is the one of the greatest environmental and humanitarian crises of our time. We recognise that, as faith communities, we have been complicit in contributing to climate change by our own consumption patterns and through perpetuating a theology of human rule over the earth. By updating our theology along with a willingness to learn from environmental ethics we recognise that each of us bears a personal responsibility to act for climate justice. We have changed our thinking realising we that we are guests of this planet and believe in the interconnectedness of all of life. Yet taking personal responsibility alone is not sufficient. The Paris Agreement, which Ireland signed, asked each country to plan in order to mitigate global warming<sup>1</sup>. Pope Francis "*urgently appeals, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet.*"<sup>2</sup> Therefore, we in AMRI are calling on those responsible in the Irish State to show leadership and act as a catalyst for sustainable development ensuring that our climate commitments are at the core of government policy. We must act, and the time is now.

### Context

Many of our members working overseas are witnessing the rise in levels of greenhouse gases such as CO<sub>2</sub> which has led to increase temperatures, resulting in typhoons in the Philippines, glaciers melting in Peru and Argentina, and droughts sub-Saharan Africa<sup>3</sup>. We can testify that it is the poor and most vulnerable communities who are most impacted by climate change. If we fail to address it now these impacts are set to increase and climate change will have grave direct and indirect impacts on society, human rights, on the environment and the economy at global, national and local levels.

Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si*, reminds us that climate change is "a result of human activity:" "*Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years.*"<sup>4</sup> This concurs with one of the most reliable scientific studies currently available, the scale of the problems posed by climate change are unprecedented in human history.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://unfccc.int/files/essential\\_background/convention/application/pdf/english\\_paris\\_agreement.pdf](https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> *Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home* (2015) (14).

<sup>3</sup> Over 24 million people are facing malnutrition and the threat of famine across South Sudan, Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia due to prolonged drought: <https://www.trocaire.org/whatwedo/wherewework/east-africa-crisis?gclid=CJ2gievoztUCFYKc7QoduasHpg>.

<sup>4</sup> *Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home* (2015) (53).

## **Our International Commitment**

Ireland along with 195 countries adopted the first ever legally binding global climate deal in December 2015. This agreement comes into effect in 2020 and aims to keep global warming below 2C by 2100. By signing this agreement Governments have agreed to come together every five years to set more ambitious targets and reduce climate change further by reducing global warming to 1.5 C. Pope Francis urges us to live more sustainably “*Reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility.*”<sup>5</sup> On a larger scale, our leaders must be held to account. “*Those who will have to suffer the consequences . . . will not forget this failure of conscience and responsibility.*”<sup>6</sup> Science tells us that in order to keep the warming of global average surface temperatures well below 2°C and as close as possible to a lower 1.5°C target – as committed to by global leaders in the Paris Agreement – decarbonisation of our societies needs to start immediately and unfold extraordinarily rapidly “using all means possible”<sup>7</sup>.

In addition, they also agreed to enhance support to countries who were suffering the effects of climate change.

## **What Ireland needs to do**

### **Energy**

The White Paper on Energy (Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, 2015) envisages Ireland reducing emissions from energy systems up to 95 per cent (based on 1990 levels) by 2050 and zero by 2100. Ireland has to recognise that we need to wean ourselves off the excessive use of fossil fuels. We need to be creative and ambitious to reach this target. A two dimensional approach is need: preventative and remedial. A remedial approach would entail a transition from fossil fuels- coal, oil, gas to alternative energies such as solar, wind. Ireland as an island is well placed to put a plan in place and therefore it is important that the National Mitigation Plan, which forms part of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill, includes specific commitments to promoting renewable energy and moving away from our reliance on fossil fuels.

A preventive measure to ensuring that we keep emissions for preindustrial targets below 1.5C (or 2C) is to focus on preserving and maintaining our forests, wetlands, bogs, oceans and ensuring we keep open spaces for biodiversity, as these are prime sequesters of carbon emissions. Preserving the prime sequesters of carbon together with transitioning from fossil fuels (preventive and remedial) is one way of ensuring healthy living systems- air, water, sun, and soil, which are vital for the health and wellbeing of the whole community of life.

### **Emissions**

The State needs regular climate action plans, setting out clearly how, and by how much, Ireland will reduce emissions over the time-frame of that plan. Ireland faces a challenge in dealing with emissions from the energy supply, transport, agriculture sector, as well as

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<sup>5</sup> *Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home.* (2015) (169).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, (169).

<sup>7</sup> *‘Climate Change and The Common Good’.* Pontifical Academies (2015).

residential waste activities. Our greenhouse gases are on the increase rather than on the decrease due to our failure to tackle the line between economic growth and increased emissions. Efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions would have to increase threefold to be on a pathway to meet the goal of keeping global temperatures below a 2°C rise. The carbon budget available, (i.e. the amount of emissions that can still be made while remaining under the agreed temperature limits), if these limits are not to be exceeded are small and shrinking fast as emissions continue to grow<sup>8</sup>. Increased emissions, from both agriculture and transport, mean Ireland will not reach its target and will be fined as a result. It is a matter of concern that the Environmental Protection Agency continues to warn that current State policies and plans will not even be sufficient to meet Ireland's existing EU climate action targets.<sup>9</sup> We have seen at first hand the changes to our climate, with heavy rainfalls and an increase in storms which have resulted in erosion of our coastline along with destroying homes and farmlands. Upgrading our public transport, promoting car-pooling, using hybrid or electric cars and avoiding diesel vehicles would help to improve emissions from transport. Looking seriously at reducing the national herd and moving away from a reliance on beef products along with investing more in organic food production and increasing forestation would help in reducing emissions from the agriculture sector.

### **Our responsibility for those on the margins**

Climate action will require public investment but one that is subject to careful democratic scrutiny that does not increase poverty and marginalisation within and outside of the island of Ireland.

Vulnerable rural and urban communities, those living in energy poverty and workers whose jobs must inevitably be phased out as we decarbonise are some of the groups in Ireland that must be placed at centre of concern in domestic policy development as we decarbonise. This is essential in order to minimise and mitigate against potential negative impacts on these groups, and maximise potential benefits to them. There is a responsibility on the Government to invest in alternative green energy sources where new jobs can be created in moving from fossil fuels to renewables.

The National Dialogue on Climate Action along with the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals offer major opportunities for us to reassess our national vision for social and economic progress, set in a context of global solidarity and responsible multilateralism.

### **Our global responsibility**

If climate change is not tackled we know there will be more humanitarian disasters, more forced migrations, and potentially more conflicts.<sup>10</sup> We in AMRI have witnessed Ireland's leadership in supporting the eradication of global poverty and therefore, appeal to the

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<sup>8</sup> *'Three Years to Safeguard our Planet'*, Christiana Figueres, Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Gail Whiteman, Johan Rockström, Anthony Hoble, Stefan Rahmstor (2017).

<sup>9</sup> *'Greenhouse gas emissions projected to increase strongly as economic growth takes hold'*. EPA Press Release April 2017.

<sup>10</sup> *'Emissions Gap Report'*, Foreword; Erik Solheim, head of United Nations Environment Programme, and Jacqueline McGlade, UNEP's chief scientist (2016).

Government to ensure that it strengthens its multilateral identity promoting and pursuing reliable increased financing for international poverty-focused climate change action, overseas development aid and humanitarian response.

We call on the Government to establish mechanisms to ensure regular and increasing financial contributions to the UN Green Climate Fund in line with Ireland's fair share of the commitment by developed countries to financing climate action in developing countries.

The Government needs to develop a multi-annual plan with year on year percentage increases in the ODA budget as soon as possible to support the fulfilment of the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At a minimum the Irish Government should renew its commitment to meet the 0.7% target by 2025 and set a clear pathway to achieve this.

### **Conclusion**

Action is needed now not later. Strong leadership and a vision for a sustainable model of development which protects all peoples as well as “our common home” is needed. Scientific knowledge along with the commitments made in the Paris Agreement tell us clearly how much needs to be done. We all need to educate ourselves that ‘less is more’, ‘enough is plenty’. We need a new paradigm whereby we come again to see the earth and its peoples as forming ‘a splendid universal communion’<sup>11</sup> where all beings are valued and respected rather than commodified and exploited. We all need to work together at this crucial time for our planet and its peoples. AMRI welcomes the Citizens Assembly and the forthcoming National Dialogue on Climate Action as a beginning mindful that it will need to be built on in order to have a meaningful effect. We also believe that all national climate action plans should be debated and voted on in the Dáil Éireann.

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<sup>11</sup> *Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home.* (2015) (220).