

**Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bert van Megen  
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to UNEP  
at the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly – UNEA**

*Nairobi, 1 March 2024*

Madam President,

The Holy See takes this opportunity to express its gratitude to UNEP and to the host country, Kenya, for the warm welcome accorded to the participants during this sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

Responding to the triple planetary crisis demands honesty, courage and responsibility. At COP 28 Pope Francis urged world leaders to “choose life! ...to choose the future! ...to be sensitive to the hopes of the young and the dreams of children ...”<sup>1</sup>.

The challenges we are facing are global, and unprecedented. There is no time to lose. Pope Francis urged COP 28: “Let us emerge from the narrowness of self-interest and nationalism [...] Let us embrace [...] an ecological conversion”<sup>2</sup>.

This ecological conversion requires political changes at both national and international levels. We are called to “react with global mechanisms to the environmental, public health, cultural and social challenges, especially in order to consolidate respect for [...] human rights, social rights and the protection of our common home”<sup>3</sup>.

In this regard, the Holy See wishes to underline that the true care of our common home, the true protection of our environment, must begin with the awareness that all of us, as individuals and as communities, are responsible for our “common home”, our earth. We are all rooted in it and dependent on it.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Address delivered to the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28)*, 2 December 2023.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Laudate Deum*, 4 October 2023, 42.

We must acknowledge that we cannot control nature to our liking. For too long we believed in the *technocratic paradigm*, “as if reality, goodness and truth automatically flow from technological and economic power as such”<sup>4</sup>. However, “the world that surrounds us is not an object of exploitation, unbridled use and unlimited ambition”<sup>5</sup>:

The belief in an uncontrolled growth of a linear economy cannot be sustained, since it will inevitably lead to ever greater pressure on our environment, depleting its resources and abusing its creatures.

A balanced interaction between human beings and the environment is necessary for a healthy ecology. This balance was achieved by indigenous cultures for centuries. However, “the technocratic paradigm has destroyed this healthy and harmonious relationship”,<sup>6</sup> leading to the present-day problem. It is important for humanity to reconsider its position and role within the greater reality of the common home. Our “dominion” over the universe should be more properly understood in terms of responsible stewardship, responsibility towards nature and humanity.

The choices are stark: either we move away from an unbridled consumerism towards a more sustainable lifestyle, or we will be forced to do so by nature itself. UNEA 6 should therefore not only be concerned with technical resolutions, but also with the personal commitment and sacrifice of each global citizen, every inhabitant of our common home. Indeed, a new approach is needed that understands and values our common home, which is entrusted to human care.

Thank you, Madam President.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, 25.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Laudate Deum*, 27.