

Vatican Issues Major Report on Science of Climate Change



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A working group of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, one of the oldest scientific institutes in the world, has issued a sobering report on the implications for humankind of the melting of glaciers from human-induced climate change.

In their declaration, the working group calls, “on all people and nations **to recognize the serious and potentially irreversible impacts of global warming** caused by the anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants, and by changes in forests, wetlands, grasslands, and other land uses.” They echoed Pope Benedict XVI’s 2010 World Day of Peace Message saying, “...if we want justice and peace, we must protect the habitat that sustains us.”

The report, which now brings the moral authority of the Vatican to bear on this important debate, focuses on the global retreat of mountain glaciers which results from human activity and warns that, “Failure to mitigate climate change will violate our duty to the vulnerable of the Earth, including those dependent on the water supply of mountain glaciers, and those facing rising sea level and stronger storm surges.

Our duty includes the duty to help vulnerable communities adapt to changes that cannot be mitigated. All nations must ensure that their actions are strong enough and prompt enough to address the increasing impacts and growing risk of climate change and to avoid catastrophic irreversible consequences.”

The working group recommends three measures to reduce the threat of climate change and its impacts:

1. “Reduce worldwide carbon dioxide emissions without delay, using all means possible to meet ambitious international global warming targets and ensure the long-term stability of the climate system. All nations must focus on a rapid transition to renewable energy sources and other strategies to

reduce CO2 emissions. Nations should also avoid removal of carbon sinks by stopping deforestation, and should strengthen carbon sinks by reforestation of degraded lands. They also need to develop and deploy technologies that draw down excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. These actions must be accomplished within a few decades.

2. “Reduce the concentrations of warming air pollutants (dark soot, methane, lower atmosphere ozone, and hydrofluorocarbons) by as much as 50%, to slow down climate change during this century while preventing millions of premature deaths from respiratory disease and millions of tons of crop damages every year.

3. “Prepare to adapt to the climatic changes, both chronic and abrupt, that society will be unable to mitigate. In particular, we call for a global capacity building initiative to assess the natural and social impacts of climate change in mountain systems and related watersheds.”

Catholic Climate Covenant