



COP25, WITH GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Climate change is an inescapable reality. The global sciences and data on the state of the earth's climate are blunt. For example, today we see that Arctic ice last summer reached its historical low of the last 40 years; that the western part of Antarctica collapses breaking ancient masses of ice; that global warming is already 1.1°C compared to the period where there was no burning of oil, coal or natural gas; that the average increase in sea level is positioned at 3 mm per year, and is triple in the regions already most affected now (Pacific Islands); and that the continuous emissions of carbon dioxide every week are moving away from the safety threshold agreed in the Paris Agreement. Not to mention the disappearance of glaciers in mountains, the acidification of the seas and the biological death in them; the progressive increase in extreme weather events, records of heat waves, floods ... and the list goes on.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) number 25 on the climate, or Climate Summit, was to be held in Chile, but due to political unrest in Santiago, it had to be relocated in record time. Canceling a COP with such a climate emergency was not an option. The Kingdom of Spain generously offered to organize the summit. In just 4 weeks of preparation, the United Nations (UN) Secretariat of Climate Change and the governments of Chile and Spain worked against the clock to provide an efficient and successful organization of the COP. We all have set high expectations on the COP25, from governments, businesses, local authorities, NGOs to civil society in general.

We can affirm that the logistics organization for such an international meeting has proved to be a success, where the formal negotiation agendas, official UN meetings and events, parallel events and planned press conferences have been respected. The high expectations of this COP25 stem from the fact that it is the prelude to COP26 that will be held in Glasgow in 2020, the year that closes the deadline established by the Paris Agreement, a document



agreed by all countries during COP21 in 2015 to globally manage the climate crisis.

In the Paris Agreement, countries pledged to lead the world towards sustainable development and limit global warming from 1.5°C to 2°C above pre-industrial levels. It has been five years where each country undertook to outline, with the help of science and its own possibilities, the Nationally Determined Contributions, or Ambitions, which will be climatic actions after 2020, aimed at increasing the capacity to adapt to adverse effects of climate change, promoting climate resilience and the development of low greenhouse gas emissions, so that food production is guaranteed. Countries also agreed to work so that funding flows were consistent with a path to sustainable development, with low greenhouse gas emissions and a resilient climate. In these issues have been set expectations in each COP since 2015. Even today, most countries have not developed ambitions real enough to guarantee the success of these goals; for example, regarding how to reach zero net carbon dioxide emissions by 2050 nationwide.

Even today, the issue of how to deal with losses and damages is not settled. The range of proposals on how to provide financing to vulnerable countries that recover from extreme weather events, or from slow-onset impacts such as sea level rise, is too wide. The positions are extreme between the bloc of the United States and Australia, and that of China and other developing countries. In a nutshell, the United States seems to want to ensure that it is never responsible for losses and damages caused by climate

impacts in vulnerable countries, despite being responsible for almost a third of the gases that now warm up the planet. Finally, even today, it has not been unlocked what the new carbon market system will be like to help countries “decarbonize” their economies at the lowest cost. The rules of the game in this market are waged between a supply and demand space between two countries to trade carbon units, or to establish a regulated market, with taxes and tax punishments, by a centralized governance system, for all countries (system similar to the one that has shown its success in the Montreal Protocol with the Ozone Hole). Depending on how the rules of the game in this market are finally defined, we may think that the Paris Agreement will be achieved with more or less success. Because, both the ambitions of the countries and the inclusion, or not, of companies, on the road to sustainable, climate-friendly development, are still hanging today, like a thread, from the ceiling of this definition. It should be noted that any definition that takes into account the goals of the Paris Agreement will necessarily mean a drastic reduction in the use of fossil fuels as the main energy in the countries. Even today, the planned multinational extraction for the coming years of coal, oil and gas is already enough to largely exceed the 1.5°C target. Countries where fossil fuel production is large, such as in the United States, Australia, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Russia and others (where Argentina is included), seem to work to undermine negotiations that introduce restrictions on the side of the demand, which the Paris Agreement encourages. The way is to go for other alternative energies.

By Eduardo Agosta Scarel, O.Carm.

Climate Change and Health



“For you love all things that are and loathe nothing you have made; for what you hated, you would not have fashioned. And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it; or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you?” (Wisdom 11:24-25)

If society is to stay within the bounds of critical ecological thresholds, it is imperative that environmental laws are widely understood, respected, and enforced and the benefits of environmental protection is enjoyed by people and planet. The United Nations defines rule of law as having three related components. Law should be consistent with fundamental rights; law should be inclusively developed and fairly effectuated; and law should bring forth accountability not just on paper, but in practice – such that the law becomes operative through observance of, or compliance with, the law. These three components are interdependent. Environmental rule of law provides an essential platform underpinning the pillars of sustainable development – economic, social, environmental, and peace.

We need to be concerned with the effects of climate change on the well being of people and the planet. The U.S. Centers for Disease provides several areas of concern. These include; air quality, rainfall and drought, extreme heat, flooding, and disease carrying insects and ticks.

Air Quality: When we burn fossil fuels, such as coal and gas, we release carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide

builds up in the atmosphere and causes Earth’s temperature to rise, much like a blanket traps in heat. This extra-trapped heat disrupts many of the interconnected systems in our environment.

Climate change can also affect human health by making our air less healthy to breathe. Higher temperatures lead to an increase in allergens and harmful air pollutants. Longer warm seasons can mean longer pollen seasons that can increase allergic sensitizations and asthma episodes and diminish productive work and school days. Higher temperatures associated with climate change can also lead to an increase in ozone, a harmful air pollutant.

Ground-level ozone (a key component of smog) is associated with many health problems, including diminished lung function, increased hospital admissions and emergency department visits for asthma, and increases in premature deaths.

More and larger wildfires linked to climate change could also significantly reduce air quality and affect people’s health in a number of ways. Smoke exposure increases acute (or sudden onset) respiratory illness, respiratory and cardiovascular hospitalizations, and medical visits for lung illnesses. The frequency of wildfires is expected to increase as drought conditions become more prevalent.

Rainfall and Drought: Increases in

precipitation extremes, either heavy rainfall or droughts, can impact our health. Warmer temperatures cause more water to evaporate into the air and allow that air to hold more water. This sets the stage for heavier downpours. At the same time, global temperatures influence the way heat and moisture move around the planet, meaning drier conditions will occur in some regions of the world. Floods are one of the deadliest weather-related hazards.

Other hazards can appear after a storm has passed. For example, a damp or flooded building can develop mold. Mold affects indoor air quality. Living with poor air quality and in damp conditions has been shown to increase health problems. These health problems include aggravation of asthma and other upper respiratory tract symptoms such as coughing and wheezing due to mold exposure. Also included are lower respiratory tract infections such as pneumonia.

People living in drought conditions may be more likely to encounter certain dangerous situations. These can range from dust storms to flash floods. Wildfires associated with drought conditions greatly reduce air quality. Poor air quality affects people's health in a number of ways. Wildfire smoke exposure increases respiratory and cardiovascular hospitalizations and medical visits for lung illnesses. It also increases the need for treatments for asthma, bronchitis, and other breathing problems.

Reducing the release of heat-trapping gases such as carbon dioxide can help protect our health and wellbeing by decreasing impacts on our climate system. Land-use planning can reduce the risks associated with floods. Planning can include restricting development in flood-prone areas, and incorporating design elements that better handle storm water run-off, such as permeable paving materials. Communities can create greenways to protect streams and flood plains breathing problems.

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Communities can create greenways to protect streams and flood plains. Storm water that is channeled directly into streams increases the volume of water in the stream, which creates surges in the amount of water flowing through downstream communities and increasing the risk of flooding. When storm water is allowed to spread out and soak into the ground, stream flows become more even and groundwater is stored.

Extreme Heat: Climate change also affects human health by increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme heat events. Increases in the overall temperature of the atmosphere and oceans associated with climate change cause changes in wind, moisture, and heat circulation patterns. These changes contribute to shifts in extreme weather events, including extreme heat events.

Extreme heat events can trigger a variety of heat stress conditions, such as heat stroke. Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related disorder. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature. Body temperature rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails, and the body cannot cool down. This condition can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not given. Small children, the elderly, and certain other groups including people with chronic disease, low-income populations, and outdoor workers have higher risk for heat-related illness.

Higher temperatures and respiratory problems are also linked. One reason is that higher temperatures contribute to the build-up of harmful air pollutants.

Heat alerts serve as triggers for cities to take preventive action, like opening cooling centers where the public can gather for relief from the heat. Heat wave early warning systems can protect people by communicating heat wave risks and suggesting protective actions. These warning systems are much less costly than treating and coping with heat illnesses.

Staying hydrated and avoiding strenuous outdoor exercise during heat alerts can protect individuals from diverse effects of extreme heat.

Providing easy access to public drinking fountains, swimming pools, and spray pads can help keep people cool during periods of extreme heat.

Updating building codes and landscaping laws can increase energy efficiency. It also improves the ability of buildings to provide protection against extreme heat events. For example, green roofs (roofs with plant cover) and strategically located shade trees can reduce indoor temperatures and improve

buildings' energy efficiency. Urban forests, including street trees and wooded areas, can mitigate urban heat islands, reducing local air temperatures by up to 9°F.

Flooding: Climate change also affects human health by impacting the quality and safety of both our water supply and recreational water. As the earth's temperature rises, surface water temperatures in lakes and oceans also rise. Warmer waters create a more hospitable environment for some harmful algae and other microbes to grow. Climate change can also lead to heavier downpours and floods. Floodwaters often contain a variety of contaminants. In some cases, floods can overwhelm a region's drainage or wastewater treatment systems, increasing the risk of exposure to bacteria, parasites, and other unhealthy pollutants.

Certain marine bacteria that make humans sick are more likely to survive and grow as oceans get warmer. *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* is responsible for diarrheal illnesses linked with consuming raw or undercooked oysters. *Vibrio vulnificus* causes vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain in healthy adults. *Vibrio vulnificus* is more severe than *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* and is responsible for most of the seafood-related deaths. Both can also cause serious infection through contact with contaminated water while swimming.

Naegleria fowleri (sometimes referred to as a "brain-eating amoeba") is a microbe that can be present in soil and warm freshwater. It usually infects people when contaminated water enters the body through the nose. Infections are occurring farther north, and warming waters may increase this risk.

Heavy downpours may increase exposures to diseases in drinking and recreational water. Floodwaters can contain disease-causing bacteria. They can also contain parasites and viruses. In addition, they can become contaminated with other harmful pollutants including agricultural waste, chemicals, and raw sewage.

Flooded materials in homes, schools, and businesses can cause mold to grow and be inhaled, contributing to respiratory problems.

Disease-carrying Insects and Ticks: One way climate change might affect human health is by increasing the risk of vector-borne diseases. A vector is any organism, such as fleas, ticks, or mosquitoes that can transmit a pathogen, or infectious agent, from one host to another. Because warmer average temperatures can mean longer warm seasons, earlier spring seasons, shorter and milder winters, and hotter summers, conditions might become more hospitable for many carriers of vector-borne diseases.

West Nile virus is an example of a vector-borne disease that may be influenced by climate change. Preventing people from contracting West Nile virus is important, because there are no medications to treat or vaccines to prevent this virus in humans, and recovery from severe disease may take several weeks or months.

Avoid bug bites by using insect repellent or covering exposed skin with long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and hats.

Coordinate between mosquito control program officers, to predict and pinpoint possible hot spots for insect outbreaks, so that the appropriate measures to protect public health can be taken.

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