

**Climate Justice and Environmental Protection as a Challenge to Churches in Asia,
Africa and Europe**

*How Eco-justice and Climate Spirituality Became a Priority for Members of the United
Evangelical Mission*

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Building awareness of climate justice in Germany, Africa and Asia – Climate Justice Campaign Exhibition and International Youth Climate Action Day
3. Advocacy on climate justice and environmental protection – Addressing land grabbing, deforestation and other devastating consequences of the production of biofuels such as palm oil
4. Climate advising for churches in Africa and Asia
5. Project support on environmental protection and sustainable development
6. Climate/environmental responsibility in the UEM's own operations and policies
7. Ecumenical learning and networking in cooperation with the WCC
8. Climate justice and human rights
9. Outlook

1. Introduction

The United Evangelical Mission (UEM) is an international communion of churches, with 36 members in Africa, Asia and Germany. The UEM member churches and one diaconic member institution are located in DR Congo, Tanzania, Botswana, Namibia, Cameroon, Rwanda, Indonesia, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Germany. When the international UEM was founded in 1996, its members committed themselves in its constitution to strive for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. The UEM General Assembly adopted a “Statement on Corporate Identity” in 2008 that states, in part: “We believe that human beings are created in the image of God and therefore have inalienable dignity and rights. Therefore we promote and defend human rights ... we strive for the protection of the environment.” At the same general assembly, the churches of the UEM discussed the issue of climate change and decided to give climate justice and environmental protection special attention and to establish this issue as a programmatic priority within the UEM. In the statement and decision, the delegates expressed the urgent need for action:

“In Genesis 8:22, God promised His people that ‘as long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease’.”

The delegates, themselves beneficiaries of this promise, remain concerned about the effects of climate change and the increase in average temperatures that has already become reality in certain regions. This development, a product of the human race, will have a major impact on the lives of billions of people and represents a challenge to the promise given by God, who is Lord of all creation.

While industrialized countries are most at fault for global warming, a result of carbon dioxide emissions, the most life-threatening consequences will hit the poorest of the poor in the less developed countries of the global South. If these groups are no longer able to trust in seedtime and harvest, if cyclones and hurricanes destroy their livelihoods, if their access to clean water is cut off, if their environment is destroyed, they risk losing their human rights: the conditions necessary for economic survival could disappear for billions of people.

As stewards of Gods creation, Christians must act immediately to stop global warming and to pressure the governments of the countries with the most responsibility for climate change to take effective and speedy measures to prevent further adverse consequences from rising temperatures.

As members of the UEM, we also see our own responsibility to protect and care for Gods creation and to promote good stewardship in our regions and countries. This is why we have started and continue to promote the use of renewable energy sources and sustainable agriculture and forestry to protect the environment and combat extreme poverty. The immediate action needed to stop global warming has made “climate and environment” a special priority for the UEM for the next four years. The UEM has been asked to support member churches in developing and implementing programmes and projects that address global warming and climate change in their own context and regions.

Decisions:

- Climate change and global warming will become a special programmatic priority for the UEM during the next four years.
- The UEM is tasked with developing adequate methods and providing necessary sources to support churches in addressing global warming and climate change through information-sharing, awareness-building, project support and programme-related staff exchanges.

From 2008 onward, the UEM has broadened its approach to address climate justice and environmental protection and has developed activities, programmes and initiatives in the following areas:

- Awareness-building
- Advocacy
- Climate consulting
- Project support
- Climate/environmental responsibility in the UEMs own operations and policies
- Networking
- Climate justice and human rights
- Theology and spirituality

2. Building awareness of climate justice in Germany, Africa and Asia – Climate Justice Campaign Exhibition and International Youth Climate Action Day

In 2008 the UEM launched an exhibition for congregations and churches in Germany, called “Climate of Justice”, that demonstrated the impact of climate change on vulnerable people in Africa and Asia. The exhibition aimed to raise awareness among people in Germany that the CO₂ emissions caused by Western lifestyles and industry affect people who have not contributed at all to these emissions, but who still have to face the bitter consequences of increasing droughts and flooding, whose food security and basic social and economic human rights are in danger.

Awareness-building with the same objective has also been done through publications, seminars, films and other materials and actions, such as the annual International Youth Climate Action Day, when youth initiatives in different parts of the world are interconnected through Facebook, Skype and the Internet. A special highlight of 2012 was the event at the Protestant School of College Evangelique de New Bell in Cameroon, where many children and young people took advantage of the opportunity to learn more about solar energy. The radio programme following this event reached thousands of listeners. The event was complemented by a concert and a writing workshop in which 300 children and youths from 16 different schools participated.

3. Advocacy on climate justice and environmental protection – Addressing land grabbing, deforestation and other devastating consequences of the production of biofuels such as palm oil

3.1. Advocacy work with western governments and in European societies

Since 2008, the UEM has joined or taken part in the establishment of several networks and platforms, such as the Climate Platform of Churches and the Climate Alliance of Churches and other civil society groups, in order to lobby Germany and the European Union to make significant and binding commitments to decrease their CO₂ emissions. These commitments include limiting the rise of temperatures to no more than two degrees Celsius and taking strong responsibility to assist countries in the global South with their efforts towards adaptation and mitigation.

In view of the upcoming Conference of Parties in Paris in December 2015, and based on the decision by the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches to start a Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace, the German Platform of Churches on Climate Justice has initiated the planning process for a pilgrimage that will start in northern Germany and move towards Paris.

The pilgrimage is to include the area in western Germany where various UEM member churches and the UEM Central Office are located. Pilgrims will be hosted by congregations and church people on their way and will take part in worship services and meditations. Local actions will take place to raise awareness. One stopping point for pilgrims will be the UEM in Wuppertal, the home of the UEM Central Office and the international conference centre On the Holy Mountain.

3.2. Advocacy for marginalized people

In its advocacy work, the UEM strongly supports churches who are allies of those who have become victims of environmental destruction and the exploitation of natural resources. One such church is in North Sumatra, where indigenous farmers risk losing their forests because of operations by the Toba Pulp Lestari factory.

The pulp and paper company originally known as PT Inti Indorayon Utama started operations in North Sumatra in 1989, and people in the region have been protesting against the pollution from the mill ever since. Although it was closed by the government in 1998, the company reopened some years later under the new name of Toba Pulp Lestari. In 2009, the company announced the expansion of its pulp and paper production from 165,000 tonnes to 300,000 tonnes per year. This meant that new forests had to be cleared and prepared for industrial tree plantations. Some of the affected rainforests are located in Sipituhuta and Pandumaan, where indigenous communities have farmed resin from benzoin trees in an area of about 4,100 hectares for more than 300 years. In 2013, 31 villagers who had been protesting against the company were arrested. NGOs and church leaders called upon the government to release the prisoners and expressed their solidarity with the affected communities. The UEM supported these churches in their advocacy work and the legal assistance they provided to the farmers who had been detained. Although all of them have since been released, the general threat to people and their livelihoods remains, a result of companies that profit from exploiting natural resources. The UEM international ecumenical team expressed its solidarity with the people in Pandumaan and Sipituhuta through a visit in 2012 (see section 6). The team gave recommendations and discussed these with church leaders in the region, who later on were able to work together to assist the communities when the arrests took place. Staff members of the UEM and church leaders visited the farmers in prison during their detention.

3.3. Addressing the negative effects of palm oil production on people and the environment

Together with Bread for the World, the church-development agency of the protestant churches, the UEM has published studies and fact sheets on palm oil and the *Jatropha* plant that indicate the risks of the increasing global demand (including in Europe) for food and biofuels. Such demand threatens forests, nature and people in countries such as Indonesia.

For many years, Bread for the World and the UEM have partnered to call attention to the destruction of precious ecosystems and the violent social conflicts caused by the rapidly expanding cultivation of oil palms. Together these two organizations have taken a stand to ensure that the rights of farmers and indigenous people are being respected and protected. Most of those affected cannot expect any help from the state. In many countries the situation is influenced by conflicting laws, overlapping and uncertain common law, illegal operations, corruption and a lack of legal certainty. Human rights obligations are often insufficiently enforced or end up having no effect on the ground.

Bread for the World and the UEM have produced research based on these findings that asks whether voluntary agreements on sustainability between producers, retailers and palm oil processors, such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), will be effective at addressing the aforementioned problems. Their study shows that there are severe shortcomings in the present RSPO system. Without significant improvement in elements such as monitoring and complaints systems and sanctions, standards like the RSPO will not ensure sustainability or protect human rights. Although the development of international agreements on sustainability between private producers and national as well as international companies is better than nothing, it is obvious that such kinds of agreements can only become effective within a national framework where the rule of law is enforced and governments fully comply with international human rights standards.

4. Climate advising for churches in Africa and Asia

When climate justice and environmental protection became a priority in the work of the UEM in 2008, churches in Africa and Asia immediately expressed a need for further advice, information, networking and advice on the issue. The UEM therefore established two posts in 2010 that would provide climate consulting for Africa and Asia. Two experts have been appointed, one from each of the regions, and have started advising churches on climate and environmental concerns, project planning, monitoring and implementation, networking and awareness-building. The consultants have implemented a series of regional programmes in Asia and Africa in order to strengthen the capacity of churches to address the issue of climate

change and environmental protection through their own project planning, theological reflections and networking. Both consultants have also conducted programmes with congregations and churches in Germany in order to share their experiences from the global South. Experiences from the work of the climate consultants have shown that churches are often willing and interested in starting and implementing projects and initiatives to protect the environment and the climate. Many times there is a need for churches to improve planning, monitoring and evaluation in order to approach foreign church agencies for funding. The climate consultants have contributed in a myriad of ways to empowering and professionalizing churches to manage complex communication and project applications with church-related agencies abroad. The consultants have also encouraged the churches to strengthen their cooperation and networking with NGOs and civil society in their respective local, national and regional contexts so as to make use of available resources, know-how, information and to avoid the unnecessary duplication of work and even counterproductive competition.

5. Project support on environmental protection and sustainable development

The work of the climate consultants in Africa and Asia has encouraged churches to initiate and implement concrete projects in the areas of climate and environmental protection. Between 2012 and 2014, the UEM provided financial support to more than 30 such projects, including stoves to enable people to reduce consumption of firewood, reforestation projects, alternative-energy projects such as solar lamps, biogas and micro-hydropower plants and initiatives on alternative farming and biofertilizers. In recent years it has become clear that the climate issue cannot really be separated from the environmental concern. In many places, heavy rainfall has induced flash floods, washing away houses and even killing people. One cause is global climate change, but other factors can contribute and worsen the devastating damage from these floods, including soil erosion from local deforestation and the construction of buildings on former farmland or forest areas that prevent water from draining off properly.

6. Climate/environmental responsibility in the UEM's own operations and policies

In recent years the UEM has tried to adapt and change its administrative policies to take climate and environmental criteria into account in its operations and management. The UEM has included such calculations in all business travel for the last four years, including trips taken by the members of its governing bodies and all participants in the UEM international consultations, seminars and workshops. Fifty thousand euros have been spent every year since

2013 to offset the CO₂ emissions. This compensation is done through different projects implemented by an institution called Climate Collection. In the meantime, the UEM has started to initiate its own Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) project within the Anglican Church in Rwanda. Local communities will receive carbon-friendly stoves which will reduce the consumption of firewood and CO₂ emissions by up to 70 per cent.

Furthermore, the UEM has begun adapting its operations in the field of real estate and transport, for example by purchasing cars with low fuel consumption or purely electric engines and renovating the UEM-owned buildings by installing new heating technologies, insulation and solar panels.

7. Ecumenical learning and networking in cooperation with the WCC

7.1. Sharing experiences of ecumenical church partnerships and UEM action towards climate justice at the Peace Convocation of the WCC in Kingston, Jamaica in 2011

It has already been mentioned that the UEM, in the process of addressing climate justice and environmental protection, has become a member of several networks. As a communion of churches, the UEM is an associated member of the WCC. This provided an opportunity five years ago for the UEM to become a member of the WCC Working Group on Climate Change. A UEM team was actively involved in the International Peace Convocation of the World Council of Churches in Jamaica that took place from 17 to 26 May 2011. Supported by representatives from its member churches, the UEM conducted two workshops at the convocation, one on impunity and one on climate justice. Together with the Protestant Churches in Germany (EKD), the UEM produced a film for the convocation that documented how UEM churches in Germany, Sumatra, Java and Papua are striving to protect the integrity of creation by promoting rainforest protection, biogas production and solar lamps. One of the examples featured in the film reflected on the cooperative partnership of a church circuit of the Westphalian Church (EKvW) in Germany with a church circuit of the Protestant Church in West Papua / Indonesia (GKI): Young people in Germany started a project to manufacture solar lamps, the costs of which were covered by donations from members of congregations in Germany. The lamps were then shipped to Papua, giving people in the highlands living without electricity, including young students, the chance to light their houses in the evening. A workshop was later established in Jayapura, the capital of the province, where broken lamps could be taken for repair. On the one hand, this ecumenical cooperation enabled pupils

in particular to continue studying after dark, while also saving on costs for petrol. But what is even more important is that young people in Germany could gain an understanding of what it means to live without electricity and could then reflect on the privileges of their own lifestyles. They were able to reach out to people far away in West Papua who might be experiencing the consequences of climate change, even though the Papuans themselves had hardly contributed to CO₂ emissions at all in their entire lives.

7.2. Conducting international ecumenical team visits to "Peace with the Earth" in Indonesia in 2012 – Sharing results and findings at the General Assembly of the WCC in Busan in 2013

As a continuation of one of the core themes of the consultation "Peace with the Earth", the UEM invited representatives of its member churches from Africa, Asia and Germany to conduct team visits to UEM member churches in Papua and Sumatra from 1 to 13 May 2012. The teams had the opportunity to see the impact of mining, palm oil production, urban pollution and deforestation on the environment and the local communities and could share and discuss these challenges with church leaders from the regions.

In Papua, for example, one of the ecumenical teams met with indigenous people in the area of Merauke. Nomadic communities living there for centuries had already sold their land to the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate in West Papua (MIFE), a company that was founded to serve the demand for land of domestic agribusiness conglomerates. There are plans to convert 1.2 million hectares into mega plantations. In response to pressure from a branch of MIFE that intended to produce sugar cane, Papuans leased the company thousands of hectares of land, including the resting places of their ancestors, at a fraction of the current market rate. The deal divided communities, showing what an important role churches – which are present even in rural and remote areas – could play by warning people in time of the consequences of losing their land, before it is too late and irreversible, legally binding decisions have been taken.

Church leaders and experts shared their experiences and discussed the results of the aforementioned international team visit at the General Assembly of the WCC in Busan, South Korea in November 2013 and at a Madang workshop. The speakers urged the WCC to take up climate and eco-justice as a key priority for the coming years.

7.3. Starting a Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace with the WCC Working Group on Climate Change in Germany in 2014

Half a year after Busan, in May 2014, the UEM hosted a meeting of the WCC Working Group on Climate Change at its conference centre in Wuppertal, Germany. In addition to attending the internal meeting of the group, the 30 participants started planning for a Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace by visiting the Evangelical Church of Westphalia and the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland. The visit gave them a chance to become acquainted with the climate justice programmes within these two big German Protestant churches, as well as to share their own experiences with representatives from the leadership of these churches. Participants also visited a huge soft coal open-pit mine in the Rhineland. The coal used for energy production contributes significantly to Germany's high CO₂ emissions. The group visited a congregation in the same area, where church members had renovated their church building to be carbon-neutral and use very little energy. All of the energy needed for electricity and heating is generated by the building and its solar panel installations, while the insulation of external walls has reduced energy consumption drastically.

8. Climate justice and human rights

On 10 December 2008 and 2011, the UN-declared Human Rights Day, the UEM launched campaigns addressing climate change and land-grabbing as human rights violations. The campaign motto in 2011 was a verse from Leviticus 25:19, "The land will give its fruit, and you will have all you want to eat and will live in safety". In recent years, the commodity of "land" has developed into an object of investment and speculation, highly sought after by states, international and national corporations, banks and investors. The growth in the global population and the rising demand among industrialized and developing countries for food and biofuels, along with other raw materials, has led to a run on the last huge tracts of land that can still be bought or leased cheaply. As part of the campaign, the UEM informed churchgoers in Germany about the efforts of churches in West Papua, Indonesia and Tanzania to raise awareness among the indigenous peoples and peasants who risk losing their land because they have been lured with false promises into giving their land away to investors, who then convert the forest into plantations.

From the beginning, the UEM has addressed climate justice and environmental protection as a human rights issue, because it understands that climate justice is closely related to human

rights. When people lose all of their food because of flooding or drought and may even have to leave their lands or lose their homes, basic human rights are being threatened.

The UEM published a study on climate and human rights in 2013 in collaboration with the WCC to try to call more attention to international human rights standards and to mechanisms for protecting them. Churches were encouraged to make use of their presence, locally and globally and to amplify the voices of victims of climate change from a human rights perspective. This seems to be urgently needed, since the main international forum to address and negotiate climate protection – the Conference of Parties (COPs) – has not yet demonstrated any real progress. It is obvious that climate protection – at least the human rights aspect – will not be achieved through mutual voluntary commitments by states to limit the consequences of climate change based on their mutual interests. States have an obligation to act to protect victims. This obligation of the state not only comprises actions towards its own citizens, but includes an extraterritorial dimension if one country's CO₂ emissions contribute to the negative impacts of climate change elsewhere. A human rights-based approach should become much more of a priority in order to hold states accountable for immediate action. Such action should be monitored by adequate international human rights mechanisms within a human rights legal framework that must be developed.

9. Theology and spirituality

Climate change and environmental destruction is a serious challenge to church life rooted in biblical tradition. The integrity of creation has become a major concern for UEM member churches over the last six years. In 2009, the UEM started a process to collect songs, liturgies and biblical reflections from its member churches, with their various cultural backgrounds in Africa, Asia and Europe. This content was compiled into a booklet on climate and spirituality that was published in 2013 in five different languages, making these materials available for churches to use in worship and church life. Further materials have been collected and presented on the UEM homepage. This project could only be realized because the churches in the UEM had already begun to reflect on creation theology in their respective cultural contexts. Climate and nature have become a matter of biblical reflection, theological debate, spiritual life, prayer and action.

In 2014, the UEM joined the project by Bread for the World and the World Council of Churches to conduct a global survey on Ecotheology, Climate Justice and Food Security (ETCF) in theological education and Christian leadership development. This project will

highlight and make visible the contributions, resources and perspectives of eco-theology, climate justice and food security, especially from churches in the global South. Ecotheology, climate justice and food security shall become an integral part of theological education and ecumenical formation at all levels and international exchange and networking on this issue shall be enhanced and promoted.

10. Outlook

It has been greatly encouraging to see how far churches in the UEM have come since 2008 in addressing the issue of climate justice and environmental protection in all its dimensions. In the coming years the UEM will continue to strengthen its members in its efforts to bring these concerns to the grass roots and to integrate them into the spiritual life and diaconic action of its congregations. At the same time, the UEM will support churches that are continuing or even have already started on advocacy work to put a stop to land-grabbing and the exploitation of natural resources in places where biodiversity and people's livelihoods are endangered.

It is also obvious that what has been achieved since 2008 would not have been possible if implemented in an exclusive way. Cooperation, sharing and networking with other ecumenical bodies and communities, especially with the World Council of Churches, has been key to the success of this process.

The member churches in the UEM are glad to join the Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace of the WCC and to be part of the global church action and advocacy. Governments must be urged to make binding global commitments to reduce CO₂ emissions, and soon, so that climate change can be stopped before it is too late.

Bibliography

Felschen, Christina. *People and the Environment at risk. UEM teams from Africa, Asia, and Germany visit partner churches in Papua and Sumatra*. Wuppertal: United Evangelical Mission, 2012.

Hütz-Adams, Friedel & Voge, Ann-Kathrin. *Palmöl. Entwicklungen und Gefahren eines boomenden Marktes*. Berlin: Brot für die Welt, 2011.

Hütz-Adams, Friedel.. *Jatropha. Wunderpflanze oder Bedrohung für die Armen Tansanias*. Berlin: Brot für die Welt, 2012.

Kürschner-Pelkmann, Frank & Motte, Jochen.. *Climate of Justice. Exhibition*. Wuppertal: United Evangelical Mission, 2008.

Local v., Brunhild & Sandner, Christian. *Climate Spirituality: A collection of biblical reflection, theological debate, spiritual life, prayer and action from UEM members*. Wuppertal: United Evangelical Mission, 2012.

Motte, Jochen & Rathgeber, Theodor. *Peace with the Earth. Documentation of the UEM international team visits to Papua and Sumatra, Indonesia, May 7-13, 2012*. Hannover: foedus-verlag, 2012.

Rathgeber, Theodor. *Climate Justice, Human Rights and the Role of Churches*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012.

Voge, Ann-Kathrin & Hütz-Adams, Friedel. *Sustainable Palm Oil: Aspiration or Reality. The potential and limitations of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)*. Wuppertal: United Evangelical Mission, 2014.

Notes on Contributor

Jochen Motte, born in 1962, is an ordained minister of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland and holds a doctorate in systematic theology from the Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal in Germany. He is currently serving as Executive Secretary for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation at the United Evangelical Mission – A Communion of Churches in Three Continents.