

**A Statement by the International Conference on Faith and Ecology
Land, Water, Air: People Struggling for Life in a Globalising Economy
December, 10-15, 2001, Bangalore, India**

The concern for people and their sustainable livelihoods brought forty people from ten countries in four continents and from different faith communities to the Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore, India from 10-15 December 2001. The participants shared stories of people struggling for life. These stories inspired reflection on the impact of the present form of economic globalisation on life and survival of people. The conference was jointly organised by the National Council of Churches in India, the Indian Network on Ethics and Climate Change and the World Council of Churches.

Land does not belong to us – we belong to the land.

Water is not a commodity - water sustains life.

Nobody can claim possession of the air - it is to be shared by everyone.

We struggle for land, water, air, for people and their livelihoods.

We struggle for Life.

In the centre of the conference were the stories of people struggling for sustainable livelihoods. Participants shared their experience about:

- defending the land of Indigenous Peoples against mining corporations in Orissa (India) and Papua New Guinea;
- struggling against water pollution at the Pulikat Lake near Chennai in Madras (India) and against the privatisation of water in South Africa;
- suffering from the consequences of the Bhopal gas-leak tragedy (India) and the impact of global warming on Kenya.

A number of the international participants had visited communities in Orissa and at the Pulikat Lake before the conference started. They also shared their impressions and perspectives, highlighting the global dimension of the local struggles and similarities with their own situation. Other contributions provided analytical background information on the impact of economic globalisation on the life of marginalised communities and on the environment.

The conference was enriched by ethical and theological reflections that drew upon the rich biblical heritage and resources of many communities of faith. The God of Life calls human beings to care for the common household of life and our neighbours. Without justice not only human communities but land, water and air suffer, are polluted and destroyed. The struggle for protection of the very sources of life is at the same time the struggle for the livelihood of peoples.

The participants of the conference stated:

Land, Water, Air and People are one, they belong together in one earth community, the community of life.

This conviction is deeply rooted in the spirituality of tribal communities in India and other Indigenous Peoples, and is re-discovered in different faith traditions. Such a spirituality of life affirms justice, equality, participation and accountability in decision making, sharing and solidarity among all peoples who struggle to defend their livelihoods. It inspires the search for alternatives to the destructive impact of the globalising economy.

To deprive the poor of their land, water and forests, is to deny them the means of their very survival and a right to their identity, spirituality and being. Given the close link between the environment and the livelihood of the poor, land alienation for mining and other projects, water privatisation, and the industrial pollution of land, water, and air have greater impact on the poor than on the middle class and the rich.

The deterioration of land, water, and air is often caused to the infringement of the basic survival rights of people and by careless and merciless exploitation. Based on profit alone and without a really democratic view of the globe centred on the importance of each human community, the present form of economic globalisation increases the pressure on local communities and their livelihoods.

Though characterised by the domination of the financial global markets and trade, globalisation goes beyond it to political and cultural monopoly and when necessary even to military control. The economic forces of a few rich countries of the global North impose their will on the countries of the South, in collaboration with their elite. The poor become poorer and even the very sources of their survival are taken away as in the case of the life struggles shared at the conference.

In their search for alternatives to dehumanisation and growing poverty, the communities reject an economy based exclusively on the profit motive, but affirm a set of values that support their right to a life with dignity in sustainable communities and the right to develop their own survival strategies. It is dissent from which alternatives emerge. The act of struggle must be affirmed as an act of transformation. People find their identity and reason for living a humanised existence in community. Some communities have already designed sustainable alternatives such as small industries and development projects that are just, where power is shared and decisions are taken in a participatory way.

The conference itself was a step to form alliances between people searching for alternatives and to strengthen their voice against economic globalisation. Faith based organisations and churches in particular have a role to play in the alliances in favour of the poor. They must re-discover their vision and mission for justice and life. Churches, National Council of Churches, Regional Ecumenical Organisations and the World Council of Churches have a role to play in a process of intentional networking, linking the local and the global.

Defending the earth is not a project, defending the earth is a way of life!