The Katowice Memorandum

A Declaration of the Joint Symposium on Climate Change
"Safeguarding Our Climate, Advancing Our Society"
10 December 2018

The Polish Academy of Sciences, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) convened the joint symposium 'Safeguarding Our Climate, Advancing Our Society' during the 24th UN Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 24) in Katowice, Poland. At the event, eminent researchers, intellectuals and spiritual leaders formulate a joint call for swift and just climate action. This call to action is addressed to all members of the scientific, cultural and spiritual communities and is based on our collective insight - a sober consideration of climate science and an ethical commitment to a viable future for our common home.

There is compelling scientific evidence that (i) the Earth is rapidly warming and is already 1°C warmer than in pre-industrial times; (ii) greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are the dominant driving force of climate change; (iii) many of the impacts so caused are already negative for society at large and increase social vulnerabilities and (iv) there is still a window of opportunity to take full responsibility and avoid an all-out climate crisis. However, this window is rapidly closing (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, AR5).

Should it close completely, human progress across our planet would be thwarted, thus turning the immense historical benefit of fossil fuel use into an outright curse for our civilization. This must not happen.

Already today, we are witnessing species extinction and potentially irreversible transformations of ecosystems. Billions of humans are suffering under intensified extreme weather events, such as heat waves, droughts, or flooding. Without a rapid and profound transformation, sea-level rise, water scarcity and other climate impacts will force more and more people to leave their homes or perish.

Scientific and spiritual leaders have responded to these scientific findings by calling on the ethical responsibility of every person living on this planet, urging us to start now to steer Earth toward our children's future.

The international community gathering at COP 24 needs to heed these appeals and substantiate the pivotal Paris Agreement by creating a set of universal rules for national actions that will ensure that global warming is confined to "well below 2°C". A stable climate is one of the most precious common goods in our shared home; it belongs to and supports all life on Earth. Scientists, spiritual leaders and civil society need to take care of this good together and must mobilize all efforts to avoid climate chaos.

Rapid decarbonisation of all economic sectors is crucial for preserving the environmental conditions that allowed humanity to thrive. The energy sector is critical in this context, since power and heat are still predominantly generated from fossil fuels - and especially from coal, which has damaging effect on the climate and public health. A move towards renewable energy sources is imperative to protect workers and economies, independent of climate change. For the sake of climate stability, this move needs to happen much sooner than sheer market considerations would suggest.

The answers given by our symposium clearly demonstrate the feasibility for such a transition. The phase-out of fossil fuels provides many co-benefits such as improved air quality and the creation of novel jobs in a progressively digitalized world. Public education can form a strong backbone to the required rapid and deep transformation of our economies and lifestyles.

Climate change intensifies existing inequalities. In addition, transition to a climate neutral economy is more challenging for certain regions than for others. It is therefore necessary to strengthen support to the former, and share knowledge, practices, innovations and resources.

We support the European Union's long-term ambition to lead an innovation process that makes the world fossil-free. To this end, the 'carbon law', a plan to halve emissions every decade, provides a scientifically sound and simple roadmap. A crucial step of this roadmap is a rapid and human-centred transition away from the critical coal sector, no later than 2030, which will be instructive to many fossil-fuel dependent and poorer regions of the world. This is a vital step, which will pave the way to safeguard our climate and advance our society.

Done on the 10th of December 2018 during the COP 24 in Katowice, Poland