

## Churches set to go Green

(News report published in the New Indian Express on the National consultation on Global Warming)

By Mathew A Thomas

Chennai, February 12: Preachings of the church in India is likely to get an add-on over its prime concern of humanity's salvation in days ahead, as the powerful entity is all set to go Green. Waking up to address the enormity of the global ecological crisis and resultant climatic changes, the church is gearing up for a campaign to encourage people to refrain from abuse of Nature's resources.

A National Consultation on Global Warming, which commenced here today under the auspices of the Church of South India (CSI), in association with the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Program (SAEPP), has suggested to encourage parishes to incorporate eco-concerns in the Order of Worship, with the objective to create ground for the faithful and the society at large to return to an eco-friendly life style.

The Ecological Concerns Committee of the CSI, which has been pioneering efforts in the environment arena for long has broadened its horizons on a concept level and took it across the representatives of 21 dioceses under its fold in South India in the three day conclave, which was also attended by the delegates' from the Syrian Orthodox and Marthoma churches and Lutheran, Presbyterian and Chaldean churches. The mainstream Catholic church and other denominations are also being looked upon as active participants in the initiative, which is likely to present an altogether new face for the Indian church on a whole.

The whole exercise was based on presentations on climatic changes and global warming by experts with particular reference on the impact upon countries like India as well as reflections from the point of view of grass-roots level fallout on the one hand and setting a new mission for the church to be on the vanguard of a people's movement on the other.

Presiding over the inaugural session, Rev Thomas Samuel, chairman, Synod ECC and Madhya Kerala diocese bishop, said that Christians have a vision of the world, men and environment, specific to the faith in God the Creator. The church must realise that in addition to preaching humanity's salvation, it must also tell the story of redemption of all creation.

Exhorting to consider planting trees as a celebration of an Eucharist, the bishop called upon members of the community to establish a right partnership with Nature and translate it through measures like adopting an ecological architecture if a new church building is built and also use similar parameters in the construction of houses. The SECC has already given a call for all its members to plant one tree each in June, 2009 in an attempt to contribute their might to mitigate the effect of Global Warming. The committee has also asked members to dig one pit each to store rain water falling from roof tops. ``The Christian churches should address environment issues as a

challenge and give leadership in mitigating Global Warming. We have to think globally and act locally on this score”, he affirmed.

Inaugurating the event, Dr A Ramachandran, Director, Centre for Climatic Change and Adaptation Research, Anna university, Chennai felt that it is time for the church and other organisations to realise the gravity of eco-issues and step in to provide their collective strength to undo the damage in various ways, eventually presenting viable and futuristic models for the whole society, especially in developing nations.

“ That massive climatic changes are taking place owing to the large emission of green house gases, mostly from developed nations, is a truth. And the impact of it will be mostly felt in third world and developing countries aggravates the problem. Remedial measures should be evolved from a local perspective to prevent a disaster”, he reminded. “The impact will be astounding such as depleting agricultural productivity, fish wealth and recurring natural calamities .But it also provides a scope for capacity building at the instance of various organisations and through the involvement of potential victims. Looking at alternatives through greening of the environment using appropriate technology and integration of indigenous knowledge, apart from making use of globally available funds through mechanisms like the Kyoto protocol is also bright”, he pointed out.

Dr Mathew Koshy Punnackadu, general convenor, CSI SECC welcomed the gathering. Rev Dr Issac Mar Phelixinos, executive committee member, World Council of churches and bishop of Chennai diocese of Marthoma church, Rev Fredy De Alwis, secretary, Christian Conference of Asia, Thailand and CSI general secretary Rev Moses Jayakumar offered felicitations. NCCI secretary Rev Azir Ebenezer proposed a vote of thanks.

The meet was noted for paper presentation sessions on related topics of the focal theme of the conclave. The meet will continue tomorrow.

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## **Analysing climate changes: Concerns of marginalised lot stressed**

Chennai, February 13: The burning issue of massive climatic changes including global warming should be addressed from the point of view of climate injustice, considering the abnormal level of green house gases emitted mostly by the USA and other developed countries, observed the ongoing National Consultation on Global Warming, here today. Any analysis of the issue and remedial measures should come from the angle of the poor and the marginalised, as a people’s perspective, the meet felt.

The brainstorming sessions of the national conclave, being held under the aegis of the Church of South India (CSI), in partnership with the National Council of Churches in India and South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Program (SAEPP), noted that the impact of climatic changes will disproportionately fall upon the poor and the marginalised in developing nations and the dalits and tribals will bear the brunt of the problem as their forests' and agriculture dependent livelihood will be hit badly.

Stressing the need to identify those who are really contributing to climate injustice and who is oppressing whom, the meet also felt strongly that the church and the Christian community should respond effectively on this score, supported with concrete action. Though there is also a view that all are victims of climatic changes and no nation could be singularly blamed for being the perpetrators, the pronounced opinion based on facts was that it is the US which is the main culprit, the meet was told.

Unveiling a Biblical perspective on fighting against exploitation and misuse of the Nature, while standing by the poorest among the poor in the society, Dr Sam P Mathew said that it is also important that the church addressed life-style questions on their own and subjected themselves for an environment audit in various activities.

Dr Sudip Mitra, Lead Fellow and faculty member in the School of Environment Sciences, JNU pointed out that though climate change studies was started as a science, it has ended as politics now. Any successful conduct of climate change issues is dependent on bringing some policies which will prove as a detriment in the emission of green house gases, he suggested. "It is remarkable for the Indian Parliament and democracy that the topic was discussed in detail by the houses for more than two weeks at a stretch recently", he said.

Pointing out that a natural hazard like earthquake, which is unavoidable, becomes a disaster when there comes an anthropogenic factor, Dr Sudip said that changing views on climate and disasters, leads to the fact that environmental changes is not only a scientific phenomenon but a personal experience. Also, the affected people does not see any difference between climate change and disaster management, though it is being dealt separately by policy makers at present.

Since climate changes cannot be avoided totally and it may be even rapid and pronounced, anticipatory adaptation of prevention strategies and capacity enhancement of stake-holders is more effective than a reactive approach. Keeping in mind that climate change issues have economic, social and ecological dimensions, an Integrated Climate Risk Management should be followed and for more positive results, the rich may be hit if they are contributing immensely for the damage of the environment, he said. Targetting the student community with eco-awareness and safety programmes will also produce good results, he added.

Co-relating health issues with global warming, Dr George Chandy, former director, CMC, Vellore affirmed that depletion of stratosphere ozone and increased ultraviolet radiation is occurring due to the latter phenomenon, leading to the high incidence of cancer and infectious diseases. The regulatory mechanisms of the life system stands to lose more and more in the present scenario, leading to decrease in the body immunity, which is evident through a four fold increase in the incidence of malaria ,in

the past five years, leave other communicable diseases. Creating adequate awareness on the acuteness of the issue is of paramount importance and policy makers should also be prevailed upon for effecting necessary changes, he said.

The day was also noted for leads from various church denominations, to translate their concern for the environment in realistic terms. On behalf of the CSI, Dr Mathew Koshy Punnackadu, who is also the general convenor of the organising committee presented an ambitious plan of the diocese to promote vetiver cultivation and mangroves in a big way by the side of various water courses, throughout the South.

He pointed out that though vetiver is a highly water conserving and effective soil erosion-resistant plant and which has a recorded origin in Tamilnadu, the value of it was realised only by countries like China, Japan, Vietnam and Thailand, which had ventured into strengthening river banks in a cost-effective, long term and environment-friendly way. He also gave a broad view of eco activities taken up in institutions under the CSI Madhya Kerala diocese in the past few years.

While a Malayalam short film titled 'rain dreams', brought out by students of the Orthodox church seminary, Kottayam in a simple format caught the attention of the conclave, the Marthoma church's attempt to Green itself was presented through small initiatives taken up like awareness building exercises for both the clergy and the laity, earmarking the second Sunday of July as Green Sunday every year and promotion of environment-friendly parsonages (rpt .....parsonages).

For most of other participants in the meet, representing the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran church, Council of Baptist Churches in North-East, United Evangelical Lutheran Church, Mennonite Brethren Churches of India, Good Samaritan Evangelical Lutheran church etc., the initiatives of the bigger churches in the group were an eye-opener on two counts- redefining their activities with thrust on protection of the whole Creation and a true ecumenical order in a different milieu, in the changing world.

## **Addressing eco issues, ensuring climate justice**

### **Protestant, Orthodox churches nod for inter-religious initiatives**

Chennai, February 14: The protestant and orthodox churches in India, coming under the fold of the National Council of Churches, have resolved themselves to engage in a mission to take up the challenges that would ensure the sustainable development and 'just' natural resources management, and thereby respond to the environmental crises including climate change and global warming, on a war-footing. In this regard, the churches have decided to come out of its shell and broadbase its activities in association with other faiths and religions, and also work in liaison with the government and other agencies to combat the threats and go in for adaptive measures including creating awareness to change lifestyles and the value of alternative energy sources and contribute to the slowdown of emission of green house gases. All the proposed pro-active initiatives of the church on 'climate justice' will be essentially

based from a victim's perspective and focussed on the vulnerable sections of the society.

A statement brought out today at the end of the three day National Consultation on Global Warming, organized here by the Church of South India (CSI) in partnership with National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and South Asia Ecumenical Partnership Programme (SAEPP) has called upon all concerned to address the grave need that is posed by the pertinent issue of global warming, with due urgency, since it is a key determining factor in present and future global dynamics.

Affirming that it is evident that Global Warming is causing profound climate changes and is affecting the very survival of God's creation, especially in the developing countries which is experienced in rising sea levels, reduced yield in crops, spread of diseases, etc., the statement also reiterated that the phenomenon affects climate related disasters, causes imbalances in sharing of natural resources, has the capacity to create tensions among communities, affects socio-economic, cultural and political justice, increases the vulnerability of marginalised communities and women, and hits at the root of meeting the basic survival needs.

The statement has detailed a mission agenda for various church denominations to follow and propagate:

1. Promote Ecumenical Green Movements,
2. Adopt alternative energy sources,
3. Create awareness at all levels,
4. Review vision and mission statements from an eco-perspective,
5. View environmental problems from a victims' perspective,
6. Engage proactively on Climate Justice,
7. Ensure the rights of the vulnerable communities ,
8. Associating with other faiths and religions to address eco issues,
9. Liaison with government and networking with movements to combat issues/ practices that perpetuate global warming, and
- 10: Mobilise and influence public opinion on relevant policy changes.

Bishop Rev Thomas Samuel, chairman, CSI Synod Ecological Concerns Committee gave the concluding address. He stressed that concerns on climatic changes should have a matching action plan in a time-bound manner, apart from evolving a global and inter-religious perspective.

Rev Fredy De Alwis, secretary, Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and Michael Angeliouse, vice president, NCCI spoke. Dr Mathew Koshy Punnackadu, general convenor, proposed a vote of thanks.

Earlier in the day, Prof Sudhir Chella Rajan, IIT, Chennai and Dr Sudip Mitra, JNU, New Delhi dealt with connected topics of the theme of the conference.