



The Vincentian
Partnership for
Social Justice

Working for
social and
economic change
tackling poverty
and exclusion

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The Society of
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JUST.NOW

May 2005 Justice Briefing

Summer is Coming!

Summer time and holiday time are special opportunities to enjoy our beautiful world. However, the beauty which gives us all so much pleasure and recreation is under threat.



This edition of JUST.NOW draws attention to what is happening to our environment and to steps being taken to protect it for the next generation. Each one of us has a part to play, in caring for our beautiful, but overburdened and threatened earth.

*"We stand at a critical moment in the Earth's history,
a time when humanity must choose its future".*

*"See I set before you life and prosperity, death and disaster.
Choose life, then, so that you and your descendents may live".*

Deuteronomy 30. 15. 19

A modern day prophet

Sr. Dorothy Slang, a 74 year old American sister of Notre Dame de Namur, was shot dead on the 12th February 2005. Sr. Dorothy was shot by contract killers in Brazil's Amazon jungle. She had worked for 22 years with local farmers to defend the rain forests from illegal loggers and ranchers. Mourners at her funeral held up saplings to symbolise the jungle she died defending. Shortly before her death she had said, *"I don't want to flee, nor do I want to abandon the battle of these farmers who live without any protection in the forest. They have the sacrosanct right to aspire to a better life on land where they can live and work with dignity while respecting the environment".*

Climate Change in Ireland

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has identified some of the signals of climate change already observed in Ireland:

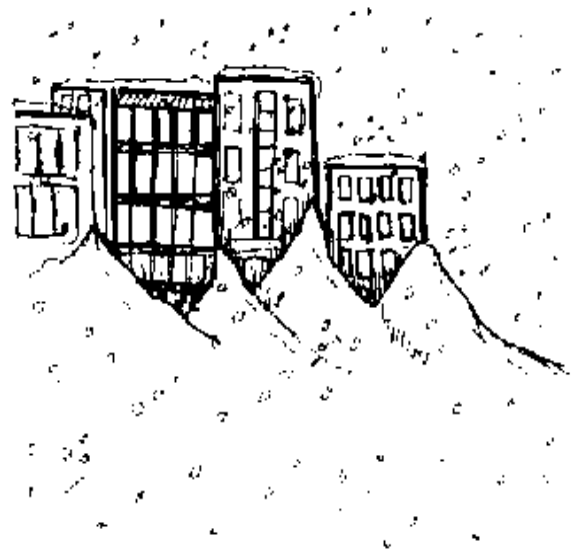
- An increase in winter maximum and minimum temperatures
- A reduction in the number of frost days
- An increase in the number of hot days
- A significant rainfall increase in the north and west
- The lengthening of the growing seasons

Other Effects of Climate Change

Warmer does not mean summer. Warmer summers could mean that rainfall in the south and east of Ireland could decrease by 40%. This would result in widespread water shortages. There would be wetter winters, more storms, and flooding in the west of Ireland. Rising sea levels would affect cities and towns on the coast. Waterford and Dublin are already vulnerable to coastal flooding.

Why this Climate Change?

In the past, weather patterns changed as a result of natural causes but in our times dangerous changes are taking place as a result of human activity particularly the burning of fossil fuels - oil, gas, coal, timber and turf. These fuels emit carbon dioxide. Enormous amounts are emitted from vehicles, houses, factories and power stations. Over the past 200 years, the levels of green house gases have increased by almost a third and are set to double in this century if the rate of growth continues. The effect is like making the glass in a green house thicker. Because less heat is escaping into space, the earth is warming too much.



Greenland's ice cover is melting at the rate of 10 metres a year. This means that ocean levels could rise by seven metres, flooding poor countries like Bangladesh. Many of the world's largest rivers are fed by snow. If ice caps recede, drought will affect one third of the world's population dependent on these rivers for water essential for food production. The consequences are already severe for animal life. Seals, walruses and polar bears are on their way to extinction as their natural habitats are decreasing with climate change.

What Can We Do

- Raise awareness of this issue
- Cut down on our use of fossil fuels
- Encourage family and parents to plant trees
- Learn more about the beautiful plants and animals which enrich our lives
- Support efforts to develop forests in developing countries.

The Kyoto Agreement

Do you know?

1. In 1992 the UN convened an Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro to enable member countries to draw up a plan of action to ensure a healthy environment for the next and future generations.
2. 172 countries agreed, among other things, to reduce green house gases. These gases are linked with global warming. It was also agreed to develop alternative sources to replace fossil fuels such as coal and oil.
3. While leaders of heavily industrialised countries agreed to reduce the emissions of man-made greenhouse gases, no targets were set.
4. In 1997 in Kyoto, the Kyoto climate change protocol was accepted and the most developed countries agreed to cut greenhouse gas omission by 5% by 2012. Developing countries were excused from the agreement.
5. 35 industrialised countries (e.g. U.S.A., Japan and most E.U. countries), with 20% of the world population, are responsible for 60% of the increase in greenhouse gases.
6. In 2001 the USA, (the world's biggest emitter of green house gases) and Australia decided not to sign up to the Kyoto protocol.
7. The Kyoto protocol on climate change came into effect on 16th February 2005. But most of the countries that signed up to the agreement are lagging behind their Kyoto targets
8. Ireland's target by 2012 is to be no more than 13% above the 1990 levels. At present we are 25% above the 1990 levels.

What is happening to our beautiful world

There could be as many as 14 million plant and animal species on the planet. This diversity enriches our lives in countless ways. 'Biodiversity' relates to the variety of plant and animal on which human beings are dependent for food, shelter and health.

Some species became extinct due to natural processes. However, an enormous number became extinct because of human activity. In 200 years human beings have destroyed half of the rain forest which covered the earth. Our fishing, pollution, and bad management of our rivers and seas have led to the decline of salmon in fresh waters.

More than 80% of Ireland's bogs have been destroyed or damaged. Artificial pesticides and fertilisers wreak havoc on plant and insect biodiversity. These are some of the bad new stories. However there are two good news stories for biodiversity in Ireland. In rural Ireland, increased payments are given to farmers to agree to farm in an environmentally friendly manner. This includes taking measures to increase biodiversity such as preserving hedges, planting trees, creating habitats for animals and birds, and planning orchards with natural varieties. Forest cover in Ireland has increased from 8% to 10% in ten years.



Native American Prayers for the Earth

Earth, Teach Me

Earth teach me quiet ~ as the grasses are still with new light.
Earth teach me suffering ~ as old stones suffer with memory.
Earth teach me humility ~ as blossoms are humble with beginning.
Earth teach me caring ~ as mothers nurture their young.
Earth teach me courage ~ as the tree that stands alone.
Earth teach me limitation ~ as the ant that crawls on the ground.
Earth teach me freedom ~ as the eagle that soars in the sky.
Earth teach me acceptance ~ as the leaves that die each fall.
Earth teach me renewal ~ as the seed that rises in the spring.
Earth teach me to forget myself ~ as melted snow forgets its life.
Earth teach me to remember kindness ~ as dry fields weep with rain.

An Ute Prayer

Thanksgiving

We return thanks to our mother, the earth,
which sustains us.

We return thanks to the rivers and streams,
which supply us with water.

We return thanks to all herbs,
which furnish medicines for the cure of our
diseases.

We return thanks to the moon and stars,
which have given to us their light when the sun
was gone.

We return thanks to the sun,
that has looked upon the earth with a
beneficent eye.

Lastly, we return thanks to the Great Spirit,
in Whom is embodied all goodness,
and Who directs all things for the good of Her
children.

Iroquois

Honor the Ear

Honor the sacred.

Honor the Earth, our Mother.

Honor the Elders.

Honor all with whom we share the
Earth:-

Four-leggeds, two-leggeds, winged
ones,

Swimmers, crawlers, plant and rock
people.

Walk in balance and beauty.

Native American Elder

The Web

Humankind has not woven the
web of life.

We are but one thread within it.

Whatever we do to the web, we
do to ourselves.

All things are bound together.

All things connect.

Chief Seattle, 1854

Illustrations: Helen Mac Mahon

Sources: – Irish Independent INTUITION

– Education for Justice