

A COMBONI COMMITMENT FOR THE JUBILEE The Campaign of Religious Congregations for Climate Justice

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Introduction

This presentation takes the move from some charismatic considerations concerning three historical events:

1. The year **2024, the warmest on record** globally, marked a significant milestone in the climate crisis. It was the first calendar year that the average global temperature exceeded 1.5°C above its pre-industrial level, a threshold that the Paris Climate Agreement aimed to avoid. January 2025 further intensified this trend, marking the warmest month on record. The urgency of the global warming crisis cannot be overstated. We are witnessing increasingly severe impacts, particularly affecting people with low and middle incomes in both developing and developed countries. The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are reaching us with increasing intensity. In particular, as Comboni missionaries, heirs to the sensitivity and charism of St. Daniel Comboni, we feel personally called to respond to this cry.
2. **COP30** is the planned conference of the UN on climate change, which will take place in Belém (Brazil) in November 2025. The COP30 presidency is inviting the international community to join in a global “mutirão” (an ancestral practice of coming together to work on a shared task) against climate change in a collaborative effort among peoples for the progress of humanity. COP30 can be the turning point in climate action, guided by the principle of climate justice, away from the current trends that are leading the world towards an abyss. The Comboni charism is particularly attuned to the call for integral liberation (RL 61), embracing a ministry of evangelization that is committed to liberation from sin, including social sin crystallized in oppressive structures and destructive tendencies—such as those the COP seeks to overcome.
3. This year 2025 we celebrate an ordinary **Jubilee** that focuses on Hope. In the first place, we find hope in God’s grace, that we experience in God’s mercy and forgiveness. But we are also called to discover hope in responding to eco-social injustice. For example, *Spes non confundit* – “Hope does not disappoint”, the Bull of indiction of the Jubilee 2025 – makes some specific appeals of hope, namely:
 - = Hunger is a scandal, an open wound on the body of our humanity, therefore it summons all of us to a serious examination of conscience (SNC 16) and to take concrete steps towards its eradication.
 - = The ecological debt of affluent nations calls for their recognition of the gravity of so many of their past decisions and determine to forgive the debts of countries that will never be able to repay them. More than a question of generosity, this is a matter of justice, in consideration of commercial imbalances with effects on the environment and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time.

The Jubilee calls for reparations, in order to prepare **a path to peace** in our world. That is an appeal to commit ourselves to remedying the remote causes of injustice, settling unjust and unpayable debts, and feeding the hungry. (SNC 16)

Throughout his ministry, Saint Daniel Comboni understood the proclamation of the Gospel as a force for liberation from sin and from the structures of sin, such as slavery and human trafficking. He was a prophetic voice, tireless in defending the African people and human rights, even appealing to the highest civil and political authorities of his time. With clear-eyed realism, he recognized that it was not enough to free the enslaved; one must also build an alternative society—more just, fraternal, and sustainable—as exemplified by the experience of the agricultural community of Malbes. Otherwise, the freedom gained would soon be lost.

In the context of his time, Saint Daniel Comboni knew how to make common cause with African peoples, sharing in their sufferings caused by drought and famine, as well as by the loss of freedom and the slave trade. He spared no effort and engaged on every front to advocate for social justice and the dignity of Africa, directing his appeals to the highest authorities of his time. Comboni denounced both the system of Eastern slave trading and the European colonial ambitions which, under the guise of “civilization,” imposed their dominion over Africa. He, instead, devoted his life to promoting a different kind of civilization—the “civilization of love,” born from the Gospel and destined to flourish through the regeneration of Africa with Africa.

How can we, today, remain indifferent to what is happening in the world?

The Call of the Biblical Jubilee

The Jubilee 2025 invites us to be pilgrims of hope, by taking on also the major challenges of our time, so as to find answers that proclaim the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God to all. If we look at the demands of the Biblical Jubilee,

The Biblical tradition of the Jubilee invites the people of God to conversion by restoring right relationships and an egalitarian society where human dignity and fraternity are respected and promoted. In particular, it envisaged:

- = **Rest for the land** (Lev 25, 11): this meant freedom from systems of accumulation and exploitation, while promoting the sharing of what divine providence provides for the basic needs of all. When the little that is available is shared, there is enough for everyone.
- = **Restoration of land** (Lev 25, 10. 13): properties that had been sold or transferred were returned to their original owners, ensuring that families maintained their source of livelihood and their socio-cultural identity.
- = **Liberation of slaves** (Lev 25, 10): those who had sold themselves into slavery because of debt were freed, reaffirming the dignity and freedom of every person and calling for fraternity within an egalitarian society.
- = **Remission of debts** (Lev 25, 10): in connection with the sabbath year, which was contextual with the Jubilee, debts were canceled, allowing those who had fallen into poverty to start over without the burden of financial obligations (Dt 15, 13-14). This emphasized the importance of mercy and solidarity, offering everyone a chance for a new beginning.

These measures were not only economic but held deep theological meaning: God as the one true owner of the land and liberator of God’s people. Ultimately, it was about returning to God’s dream for humanity; a dream humanity departs from when it builds a society based on the accumulation of wealth and resources, domination, and violence against others, often cloaked in religious justification. In contrast, the Jubilee envisions an alternative society founded on sharing, service, nonviolence, and a relationship with God who hears the cry of the poor.

The Jubilee of the Pilgrims of Hope and the Evangelizing Mission

The Jubilee presents itself as a privileged opportunity to strongly relaunch the Church's evangelizing mission in a time marked by global crises, cultural disorientation, and a thirst for meaning. In a world scarred by wars, inequalities, and existential insecurities, Christian hope becomes a prophetic proclamation, capable of speaking to the heart of humanity. It is not a vague optimism, but a certainty rooted in the presence of the Risen One, who continues to act in history and transform lives. From its biblical origins, the Jubilee is intrinsically linked to the themes of liberation, forgiveness, and the possibility of starting anew. In this sense, the Jubilee is not merely a celebration, but a favorable time to proclaim the Good News and make God's mercy visible.

The Jubilee, therefore, represents an opportunity to involve the entire People of God in a renewed missionary momentum. It is not confined to Rome, but calls every local community to become a place of hope, initiating paths of encounter, evangelization, and social transformation. The symbolic power of the Jubilee can also attract those who are distant from the faith: the fundamental themes of the restitution of land and rest for the land; of liberation from every form of economic and productive slavery, and of debt remission are highly relevant and timely for the poor and excluded around the world. These can become gateways through which the Church offers a meaningful and credible proposal. In a time threatened by cynicism and resignation, the Jubilee invites the Church to proclaim, with humility and courage, that hope is possible—and it has a name: Jesus Christ.

The dream of the 19th General Chapter deeply resonates with all of this: "We dream of a missionary style more deeply rooted in the realities of the peoples we accompany towards the Kingdom, capable of responding to the cry of the Earth and of the impoverished" (CA 2022, 28). This is to be realized—in response to the challenges of the epochal change we are living through and in light of the Word of God—by embracing Integral Ecology as a fundamental axis of our mission (AC 2022, 30).

Significance of the Jubilee in the Current Geopolitical Scenario

Today the world is facing a "polycrisis", namely, the presence of mutually influencing diverse crises. For instance, on one hand, we have the climate crisis, with devastating impacts; on the other hand we are in a situation that pope Francis defined as a piecemeal 3rd World War. There seems to remain no red-lines to contain conflicts, and the arms race has peaked up to unprecedented levels, creating more debt and diverting resources from social services and from mitigation, adaptation and reparation in relation to climate change. The multilateral, diplomatic approach to solving global problems and conflicts has waned, and the world has entered a phase in which the logic of "might is right" (or of the law of force instead of the of the force of law – FT 174), extermination and impunity prevail. Human and peoples' rights are neglected or trampled upon, and inequalities continue to grow, as a result of unjust economic structures, pushing ever more people below the poverty line and the Planet beyond its own regenerative capacity.

Against such a backdrop, the call of the Biblical Jubilee is very relevant and meaningful: it is a call to reparation for an unjust, unsustainable, and sinful socio-economic and political system. *Laudate Deum* called for a pilgrimage of reconciliation with the world that is our home (LD 69), building peace with Creation and among peoples.

Turning Hope into Action in Today's World

When we talk of systemic change we mean a radical transformation of social structures and of the mentality, of the culture, that underpins them. We need not be disheartened because of the magnitude and complexity of the crisis we are facing. But, as *Laudate Deum* (LD 36) underscored,

“it continues to be regrettable that global crises are being squandered when they could be the occasions to bring about beneficial changes. This is what happened in the 2007-2008 financial crisis and again in the Covid-19 crisis.”

and that

For there to be solid and lasting advances, I would insist that, “preference should be given to multilateral agreements between States”. (LD 34)

True, the multilateral approach in recent years has come to a paralysis, therefore the current challenge is to reconfigure and recreate it, taking into account the new world situation.

Despite all limitations and shortcomings, there is still a place where this can happen, namely, the annual Conferences of Parties on Climate Change, or COPs. The Parties are the States who signed the climate agreements, such as the Paris Agreement (2015), currently they are 197 plus the European Union. Every year we see how slow and disappointing is the progress made. Conflicting, selfish interests of Parties easily block a process that is based on consensus. Above all, the elephant in the room is that unless we change the current model of development, which is based on an extractive economy aiming at maximizing profits, at the expense of social and environmental considerations, there is no solution to the climate crisis. The current challenge, therefore, is to reconfigure and recreate this space, taking into account the new world situation (LD 37). Pope Francis, in fact, advocated for a new model of multilateralism, one which recognizes that “many groups and organizations within civil society help to compensate for the shortcomings of the international community, its lack of coordination in complex situations, and its lack of attention to fundamental human rights” (LD 37). Civil society organizations and indigenous peoples already can participate as observers in COPs. Religious Congregations are called to journey along with them in advocating for climate justice. And since all is interconnected, as the encyclical *Laudato Si'* insisted, it happens that when dealing with the climate crisis at COPs, indigenous people, civil society and faith-based organizations bring into the conversation also the socio-economic and conflict crises ravaging societies and eco-systems.

The Call for Climate Justice and the Common Home

The climate crisis has reached a dangerous point, fuelled by global warming. In 2024, the Earth's average temperature went above 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels—the limit set by the Paris Agreement (2015) to prevent the worst climate impacts. People across the world, especially the poor and vulnerable, are already suffering from more extreme heatwaves, floods, and droughts. Inspired by both *Laudato Si'* and Pope Leo XIV's call to live an integral ecology with justice, the episcopal conferences and councils of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (ECAALAC) have issued a message on occasion of COP30, addressed to government leaders, urging them to work for an ambitious implementation of the Paris Agreement for the benefit of people and planet. They raise a prophetic voice calling for peace through an ecological conversion that transforms the current model of development based on extractivism, technocracy and the commodification of nature. In line with the Bishops' position, Catholic Religious Congregations are raising their voices for

climate justice and calling on governments to act boldly at the UN climate meeting that will take place in Brazil (from 10th to 21st November 2025), also known as COP30.

Religious Congregations' Advocacy Campaign for COP30

With reference to the ongoing negotiations, Catholic religious groups have four key demands in order to respond to the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth for climate justice:

1. Cancel the debts of Countries “that will never be able to repay them” (SNC 16)

As *Spes non confundit* – the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee Year 2025 – put it, it is more a question on justice rather than generosity. Such a theme is made all the more serious today by a new form of injustice which we increasingly recognize, namely, that a true “ecological debt” exists, particularly between the global North and South, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time.

The Bishops of the global South invite a historic coalition of actors from both the Global South and North, committed to ethics and justice, to address the issue of debt. Therefore, Catholic Religious Congregations, in consideration of many poor countries trapped in unfair debts, making it hard for them to invest in protecting people from climate disasters, call for finding just ways to cancel their debts to allow them to spend money on health, education, and climate action instead of debt servicing and repayments. This calls goes along the Jubilee demand for the remission of debts.

2. Strengthen the Loss and Damage Fund

This is an initiative agreed at COP 27 (Sharm El Sheikh, 2022) to channel financial resources to developing countries suffering from loss and damage due to climate change. It has been established a matter of climate justice, since the countries who contributed the least to climate change are often those experiencing the hardest impacts. The following year, at COP 28 (Dubai, 2023) it has been set up with initial pledges totaling around \$700 million, which is far below the estimated needs (which run into billions annually). As *Laudate Deum* (2023) noted,

at least it marked a step forward in consolidating a system for financing “loss and damage” in countries most affected by climate disasters. This would seem to give a new voice and a greater role to developing countries. Yet here too, many points remained imprecise, above all the concrete responsibility of the countries that have to contribute. (LD 51)

ECAALAC demand that rich countries recognize and assume their social and ecological debt as the main historical actors responsible for extracting natural resources and emitting greenhouse gases; and commit to fair, accessible and effective climate finance that does not generate more debt, in order to recover existing losses and damages in the Global South.

Climate change causes loss and damage that poor countries cannot avoid. Catholic Religious Congregations call for a Loss&Damage fund that provides quick, adequate and fair financial help without creating more debt, allowing affected countries to rebuild and recover. All that resonates with the Biblical call to restore the means of survival of impoverished people.

3. Establish targets for a just energy transition

Transitioning away from fossil fuels toward renewable energy like solar, wind, and other sustainable sources is essential for a climate-safe future. Fossil fuels, in fact, are responsible for over 80% of global warming. After decades of climate negotiations, fossil fuels have finally been dragged centre stage. Despite this, many governments are still approving new coal, oil and gas projects — threatening our chances of limiting warming to 1.5°C.

Religious Congregations call for a concrete, binding plan to end the expansion of new coal, oil and gas projects and manage a global transition away from fossil fuels. A fair phase out requires an equitable plan for winding down existing fossil fuel production, where nations with the capacity and historical responsibility for emissions transition fastest, providing support to others around the world. Fossil fuel subsidies should end, and countries should set clear goals for switching to renewable energy without leaving behind any worker, community or country. This call resonates with the Biblical Jubilee demand for the rest of the land, in order to grant freedom from systems of accumulation and exploitation.

The bishops of the global South also call for a halt to all expansion of the oil frontier and fossil fuels. And they urge to abandon the fossil fuel based economic model. Instead, they propose to support sustainable, decentralised alternatives that respect the territories and peoples that have historically been sacrificed. The bishops' declaration underscores that

the idea of a “just energy transition”, although presented as a solution to the environmental crisis, often perpetuates the current [development] model benefiting large corporations and countries in the Global North while imposing disproportionate costs on the Global South. Energy projects currently underway frequently displace communities and destroy ecosystems, exacerbating inequalities, furthermore, the growing rhetoric that the solution lies in expanding mining, especially for the extraction of minerals considered “critical” and rare earths, is ecologically unsustainable, unjust and predatory. It reinforces colonial extractivism, transforms entire territories into sacrifice zones, violates human rights and devastates nature in the name of false sustainability. It is urgent to abandon an economic model that proposes infinite growth on a finite planet and, to this end, exploits people and resources without a limit.

A just transition, in fact, must respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, many of whom live in ancestral lands where a good deal of extraction of minerals for clean energy sources is going on. Already *Laudato Si'* (2015) had warned about such a trend leading to environmental decay:

It is “a certain way of understanding human life and activity [that] has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us” [LS 101]. Deep down, it consists in thinking “as if reality, goodness and truth automatically flow from technological and economic power as such” [LS 105]. As a logical consequence, it then becomes easy “to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology” [LS 106]. (LD 20).

In other words, a just transition is not simply a matter of switching to renewable energy, but also to live within the planetary limits, by changing life styles and modes of production and consumption. Here the Biblical Jubilee's call to let the land rest becomes utterly relevant. The assumption that with the combined power of finance

and technology all problems can be solved and profits made – without questioning the fundamentally flawed model of development that has caused the climate crisis, with its extractivist approach and intensive use of fossil fuels (LS 23) – is blatantly false. As *Laudato Si* put it,

Technology, which, linked to business interests, is presented as the only way of solving these problems, in fact proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others. (LS 20)

4. **Set concrete goals to develop a global food sovereignty system based on agroecological practices**

Industrial farming harms nature and the climate. Catholic Religious Congregations call for supporting small and medium farmers—especially women—who practice agroecology. That will help create sustainable food systems that protect the environment and provide healthy food, promoting culturally adapted methods of production, transformation, distribution, and food consumption. All that also resonates with ECAALAC support to family farming, which accounts for most of the food produced in their countries. They insist that the work of millions of families needs to be protected and promoted, with cooperation on sustainable water and soil management and prioritising the restoration of degraded land.

Such a call resonates with the Biblical Jubilee's calls to restoration of the land and liberation from enslaved labour, which today is the product of exploitative working relationships that hold hostage people who lack their own means for survival.

Laudato Si' strongly supports sustainable, small-scale, diversified farming systems that respect nature and promote justice for the poor. It criticizes the dominant, industrial model of agriculture for its environmental and social impacts. This critique aligns with agroecology's opposition to monocultures, chemical dependency, and agribusiness domination. The encyclical also affirms the importance of family farming and traditional knowledge, which are central to agroecological practice (LS 129):

In order to continue providing employment, it is imperative to promote an economy which favours productive diversity and business creativity. For example, there is a great variety of small-scale food production systems which feed the greater part of the world's peoples, using a modest amount of land and producing less waste (...). Economies of scale, especially in the agricultural sector, end up forcing smallholders to sell their land or to abandon their traditional crops. Their attempts to move to other, more diversified, means of production prove fruitless because of the difficulty of linkage with regional and global markets, or because the infrastructure for sales and transport is geared to larger businesses. Civil authorities have the right and duty to adopt clear and firm measures in support of small producers and differentiated production.

How to Take Part in the Campaign

We are all invited to take part in this campaign, in view of COP30, to put pressure on governments around the world for effective, timely, and globally scaled climate action. An online petition campaign has been launched for this purpose, with two key components: collecting signatures in support of the religious leaders' statement to give visibility to our stance on the necessary measures to address the climate crisis; and sending the statement to

the negotiators of one's own country, to press them to prioritize the common good over selfish interests. Without strong grassroots momentum, it is unlikely that the COP will yield results that meet the urgency of the situation.

The campaign will continue throughout the **Season of Creation** (September 1 – October 4), and as Comboni missionaries, we embrace it as a concrete Jubilee commitment.

Taking part is very simple: by visiting <https://www.ecojesuit.com/ndcs-for-cop30/>, you'll find an interface where you can enter your details to sign the petition and indicate which government to send it to.

Conclusion

These calls relate closely to the discussions that will take place at COP30 in Belém (10-21 November 2025). Religious Orders and Congregations, inspired by the Social Teaching of the Church, invite all people of goodwill— other religious groups and communities, civil society groups, and individuals—to join this campaign for climate justice. Together, our shared efforts can help protect our planet, defend the most vulnerable and ensure a hopeful future for generations to come. As Pope Francis stated at the end of *Laudate Deum* (LD 60):

May those taking part in the Conference be strategists capable of considering the common good and the future of their children, more than the short-term interests of certain countries or businesses. In this way, may they demonstrate the nobility of politics and not its shame. To the powerful, I can only repeat this question: “What would induce anyone, at this stage, to hold on to power, only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so?”