

MESSAGE
By His All-Holiness
Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

To the United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP 24)
(Poland, December 3-14, 2018)

Dear and distinguished friends,

We are pleased to send this brief greeting of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the members of the United Nations Conference of the Parties and to all people of good will assembling in Poland this year to reflect on the impact of climate change and the urgency of addressing its implications.

We also welcome this opportunity to engage with and endorse implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals with a view to fostering collaborative and concerted action toward this purpose for all people and for the entire planet. We believe that it is the responsibility of faith communities to remind their respective governments of this mandate.

Nevertheless, we are convinced that the time for reflection and deliberation is long gone. We wonder when the leaders of our world will realize how late we have left our response to the climate crisis. A few years ago, we wrote of reaching a point of no return. This was neither euphemism nor exaggeration. Scientists have long warned – and most recently in Inchon, Korea, they forcefully reaffirmed – that we have reached several tipping points; governments seem reluctant to respond, preferring to delay.

Of course, as a religious leader, we profess that God's grace offers forgiveness and opportunities – indeed, many chances – for reconciliation. But Scripture also underlines that the time will come when we are obliged to face the consequences of our actions. The Gospel of Matthew describes a judgment where we will not be asked about our success and prosperity, but about our response to suffering and poverty. Indeed, in a parable of the same gospel, the rich man ignored the poor Lazarus and, upon pleading forgiveness, was told it was too late.

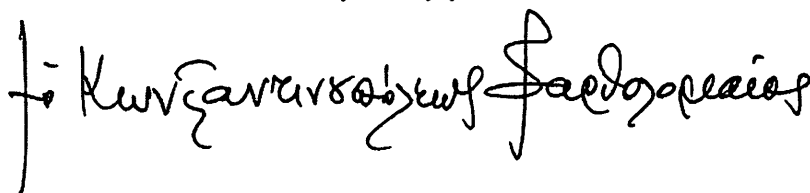
This is why, for the last thirty years, we have declared the intimate connection between the way we treat the earth and the way we treat our fellow human beings, especially the poor. At our symposium held in Athens this past June, entitled *Toward a Greener Attica for a Sustainable Environment: Preserving the Planet and Protecting its People*, we highlighted the religious and spiritual roots of the ecological crisis, while emphasizing that the necessary spiritual transformation of human beings and their attitude toward creation requires the collaboration of all social sectors and scientific disciplines.

In our understanding, the way we relate to nature as creation directly reflects the way we relate to God as Creator. There can be no distinction between concern for human welfare, protection of the environment, and care for our salvation. In order to restore the planet, we need a spirituality that brings humility and respect with regard to our attitudes and actions, our life choices and lifestyles. It should be abundantly clear by now that we must direct our focus away from what we want to what the planet needs.

Dear friends, we must of course remain optimistic – confident in the love of God and hopeful in the response of humankind. But when will we understand how important it is to leave as light a footprint as possible on this planet for the sake of future generations? The truth is that we can no longer afford to wait; indecision and inaction are not options. Faith makes it clear that we have a choice. The time to choose is now.

At the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the 10th of December, 2018

Prayerfully yours,

A handwritten signature in Greek script, which reads "Βαρθολομαῖος" (Bartholomew). The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally below the text "Prayerfully yours,".

✠ **BARTHOLOMEW**
Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome
and Ecumenical Patriarch