

A CRITICAL SIX MONTHS FOR GOD'S EARTH AND PEOPLE

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Over the next 6 months, leaders of the world's nations will gather at three United Nations conferences to make decisions critical to our future.

First is the Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 13-16 July. Sorting out how much money might be needed and where the money will come from is the essential first step in the lead up to the UN Summit in September on proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in December.

On the agenda for the third International **Financing for Development Conference** in Addis will be 'new and emerging issues', UN speak for such issues as the decline in overseas aid from the rich countries (including Australia), the links between aid and trade, and the role of new international sources of finance such as the Chinese initiated Asian Investment Bank. In some countries, such as Bangladesh and Philippines, the flow of funds home from workers overseas in the Middle East and elsewhere are greater than the funds received as overseas aid.

At the heart of the Addis conference will be the question: How will the UN system raise the funds necessary to finance renewed efforts to reduce poverty and convert the global economy to a sustainable path to avoid dangerous climate change?

The **Millennium Development Goals** (MDGs) agreed in 2000 set out 8 goals that would contribute to halving global poverty by 2015. Significant progress has been made in many countries around the world. The MDGs success is due to the broad international support for the specific goals with a target date (2015). As the deadline approaches, the World Bank estimates there are still around 1 billion people living in extreme poverty (less than US\$1.25 a day) the majority of whom are women and children.

The international community wants to bring poverty reduction and sustainable development together under a new set of **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs). The new SDGs will be agreed during the **UN Summit** convened in New York during September.

Negotiations have been positive and the agreement has already established around 17 goals and 169 targets - too many for some countries, but few are willing to suggest what should be dropped. Targets under Goal 1, for example, include reducing by at least half the number of people living in poverty and eradicating extreme poverty (less than \$1.25 income a day). Under Goal 5, there is target to eliminate violence against women.

The **UN Climate Change Conference** to be held in Paris from November 30 is the one we are likely to hear most about. More than 40,000 delegates, media representatives and civil society members are expected to attend.

The Secretary General of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), former Costa Rican diplomat Christiania Figueres recently visited Canberra and delivered an inspiring and hopeful public lecture at ANU.

She described her 'increasing optimism' in the lead up to the Paris negotiations, giving four reasons. First, there has been substantial growth in the use of solar energy as the costs of solar have dropped by 80% and the efficiency of solar has increased by 40%. Second, there is increasing confidence in the investment community that renewable energy make sense. Third, countries are realizing that increasing renewable energy increases energy security,

protects health and makes for better land use. Fourth, people are so much more aware of the costs of climate change and opportunities on the renewable path. The agreement between the US and China to act together on Climate Change has given new hope for strong commitments in Paris.

Major challenges still lie ahead. Emissions are increasing in developing countries. Developing countries will need to contribute to reducing emissions in a way that is “fair”. If the international agreement to limit global warming to 2°C above pre-industrial levels is to be achieved, science tells us that we need to keep carbon emissions to less than 450 parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere. Yet, the whole month of April saw CO₂ levels at 450 ppm, the first time in 1 million years. Global emissions are still rising and the Paris meeting will not address the 2050 target.

While there are signs of hope for a successful outcome from these three conferences, they will need solid commitments from Governments, including Australia, and commitments to follow up actions. To borrow from the closing prayer of the Pope’s encyclical: “The poor and the earth are crying out. O Lord, seize us to protect all life, to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace , love and beauty.”

By **Russell Rollason**