

In Copenhagen, religious leaders urge solutions that slow climate change: "Time for climate justice"

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Bells pealed as a warning on climate change after the archbishop of Canterbury told a church service in Copenhagen, attended by people from major faiths and Christian denominations, that humanity can show love to all only by making the earth safe from the ravages of an altered atmosphere.

Archbishop Rowan Williams, the spiritual leader of the 77-million-member Anglican Communion, preached the main sermon before Danish royalty, Denmark's prime minister and religious leaders in a packed Church of Our Lady, Copenhagen's Lutheran cathedral.

"We cannot show the right kind of love for our fellow humans unless we also work at keeping the earth as a place that is a secure home for all people," Williams said at the December 13 service, described as "an ecumenical celebration for creation."

Regardless of what agreements were reached behind closed doors by government officials and experts, the countless numbers of faith-based organizers present testified to religious concerns about the environment.

The service marked the midpoint of United Nations-organized talks on limiting emissions held responsible for causing climate change. The Danish monarch, Queen Margrethe II, attended the service.

"We have to flesh out in our lives that fundamental biblical conviction that when God looks on the world he finds it good," Williams told worshipers. "We have to show in our lives some echo of the delight God finds in creation."

As candle-bearing congregants lit one another's candles, Anders Gadegaard, the dean of Copenhagen Cathedral, intoned, "Let us bring this sign of hope with us into the world."

That was the signal for the cathedral to chime its bells 350 times, joined by other churches in Denmark, Scandinavia and the rest of central Europe. Indeed, churches worldwide had been invited to ring bells and other instruments 350 times at 3 p.m. local time in solidarity with the service in Copenhagen.

The number 350 represents the particles per million that is the acceptable level of carbon dioxide emission, according to the UN.

Delegations from 192 countries in Copenhagen had the task of trying to agree what should follow the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol, a UN-brokered agreement aimed at limiting emissions of greenhouse gases that lead to climate change. The protocol expires at the end of 2012.

Lister Cheung, an environmentalist from Hong Kong, spoke to young people in a YMCA delegation at nearby University of Malmo about the importance of the UN gathering, called the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP 15). Cheung's message was simple: "If we want COP 15 to be a success, all of us need to act. No action is too small; it could be one of these small actions that triggers a major change."

Echoing her words in an interview, Setri Nyomi, general secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, said that he sent a message to WARC members inviting them to engage in prayer and actions that will have an impact on the COP 15 outcome. "We ask that our member churches commit to encouraging lifestyle changes that will reverse this trend [of climate change]."

Shortly before the Lutheran cathedral service on December 13, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu enthralled thousands who braved the cold as he helped hand over a petition with 512,894 signatures at Copenhagen City Hall to Yvo de Boer, the UN's top climate official.

"Here we are today marching and demonstrating the injustice of climate change—500,000 thousand have signed—half a million signatures—that is fantastic," enthused Tutu, dressed in a heavy overcoat. "Persuade [world leaders] to be smart like you," he told De Boer, who in turn urged the crowd of a few thousand: "Let your voices be heard."

[In the crowd was Meghan Roth, 23, a student at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, who said she was "extremely moved" by the ceremony. Also a director on the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, Roth called the scene in the

Danish city and Tutu's eloquence "a life-changing experience," according to the United Methodist News Service.]

The day before, not far from the same spot, a group of church-led protestors had gathered in front of the cathedral. Taking to the streets that day was a crowd that police estimated at 30,000 but which organizers put at 100,000.

Some demonstrators wore suits emblazoned with a ticking clock with the DanChurchAid (DCA) slogan, "Time for climate justice."

DCA, which has an office adjacent to the cathedral, seeks to alleviate poverty. The agency says that any deal reached at Copenhagen must heed the UN's 2015 Millennium Development Goals of eradicating hunger and extreme poverty. *-Peter Kenny, Ecumenical News International*