

Document: Japan Archbishop Lists National and Global Threats to Life

XUAN LOC, Vietnam – Archbishop Leo Jun Ikenaga of Osaka highlighted natural and human-made threats to life in his report to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) 10th Plenary Assembly as president of the Catholic bishops' Conference of Japan.

The report presented by Archbishop Takami Mitsuaki of Nagasaki to the FABC's Dec. 13 plenary session cited the destruction wrought by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami on Japanese communities and compounding problems the Fukushima Nuclear Plant has inflicted on his people.

Archbishop Ikenaga cautioned against irresponsible use of modern science, specifying dangers of excessive carbon emission and other forms of pollution on human and other lives.

He also elaborated on the bishops' concerns related to euthanasia, optional abortion, and the impact of globalization on values of people and Japanese society.

He reminded fellow Asians they are responsible for the welfare of the whole of humanity. "We must not forget the importance of ethics and spirituality in this regard," Archbishop Ikenaga said.

The full text of his Speech for the FABC Plenary Assembly follows:

March 11, 2011 has become an unforgettable day for Japan. After a long-lasting strong earthquake, a gigantic tsunami of an unprecedented scale hit the Pacific coast of the northeast region of Japan. The tsunami destroyed buildings in the coastal region and swept away countless cars and ships. As of October 24, 2012, 15, 872 people have been confirmed dead and 2,777 people are listed as missing.

On top of that, the Fukushima Nuclear Plant inflicted more serious damage than the earthquake and tsunami. Radioactive contamination has spread extensively, because the tsunami hit the nuclear plant facilities directly. Residents near the plant were forced to evacuate. They cannot return home even now, one year and eight months after the earthquake.

Although people have been making great efforts to improve human life by means of natural science, people fail to recognize the power of nature and to be humble before God, the Infinite who created nature. It seems that people still do not open their eyes wide enough to see the world as a whole, even after suffering from the latest earthquake and tsunami. If this goes on, I fear that humanity will continue to possess nuclear plants without being able to realize what is essential spiritual. (sic?)

Today, ecology continues a major global issue. The global climate has changed drastically at an accelerated rate in the past several years. In Japan, for example, air temperature has risen, and tornados, heavy rain and floods have occurred at an unprecedented rate. CO2 emission has caused various changes in the natural world. For example, seawater contains less salt and often becomes slightly acid. Climate change appears intense in certain places on earth. Some areas are frequently hit by typhoons,

while others are affected by scarce rainfall or even drought. Many species have gone extinct, especially in the Amazon region. Pollution is spreading into various areas and the previously available food supplies cannot be obtained any more; people are forced to leave their homeland in many cases. This global pollution is mainly caused by developed countries. If you categorize the amount of CO2 emission by color on a world map, you can easily identify the sources of contamination. This fact is not unconnected with globalization.

Amid fierce economic competition in the world, developed nations seek even more profit by advancing into markets abroad. Such a trend is based on secularism, materialism and consumerism. There is a strong tendency to neglect religion and faith.

Globalization may contribute to the unity of humanity by promoting communication among different countries and communities as well as dialogue beyond national boundaries. However, it also has evil factors such as widening the gap between the rich and the poor, and causing harm in the fields of politics, economics, education, environment, technologies and culture.

Another issue which should not be neglected in Japan is that life faces various threats. Using pre-birth diagnosis, expectant parents can find out beforehand if their baby is handicapped or not. Therefore, they can choose if the baby will be born or not. In many hospitals, doctors often encourage pregnant mothers to undergo such examination. Euthanasia can be practiced everywhere in Japan, if it comes to be allowed legally. The number of suicides is extremely high in Japan, so we should examine how to prevent them. In the case of students in elementary schools, junior high schools and high schools, the main cause for suicides is bullying. In the disaster-affected areas, people often commit suicide because they have lost their hometown and livelihoods and there is no prospect for recovery. One of the factors in elderly people's suicides is that they cannot find motivation in life.

Another threat to life is a sharp decrease in species of animals and plants. This is because they have been deprived of their habitat due to the destruction of the natural environment. It is also problematic in this regard that non-native species threaten the lives of native species. Moreover, climate change also endangers the lives of animals and plants.

We recognize that Asia has been a source of misfortune in the world in many ways. As people in Asia, we feel responsible for the welfare of the whole of humanity. We must not forget the importance of ethics and spirituality in this regard.

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President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan

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