



MESSAGE

From His All-Holiness
Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

To the United Nations Rio +20 Earth Summit

(Rio de Janeiro, June 20-22, 2012)

To the national leaders, esteemed delegates, observers, media representatives, and all those concerned about the pressing issues to be engaged by the Rio +20 conference.

Beloved friends, it is with great joy that we greet those gathered in Rio de Janeiro for the Earth Summit. However, the joy of our paternal greeting must be tempered with sobriety because of the utmost sensitivity surrounding this Summit and the urgent need to deliver meaningful action on its goals. Your efforts to address these issues are crucial for the health of the world's ecosystems and the millions of people who depend upon them.

Over the next several days, world leaders will face the challenge of correcting the forces that degrade our planet's air, land, and waters, while establishing a new course toward a green economy. This is not just an admirable goal; it is an essential correction to the world's seemingly intractable problems, moving toward the eradication of poverty and the rejuvenation of the natural environment.

Paradoxically, the goals of the Earth Summit are all attainable and affordable. Forests and oceans can be protected; clean energy is possible now; climate change can be slowed; sufficient food can be made available; people in undeveloped countries can be educated and provided with the means to support themselves. Nevertheless, society continues on a path of development and commerce that remains deeply unsustainable and insensitive to these opportunities.

Our political leaders at Rio know that these achievements are possible. The tendency remains, however, to address easier questions about the outer shape of issues with little attention to the moral and spiritual realm where these problems originate. In truth, the issues we face arise out of choices that individual leaders and people habitually make. And choices always derive from values. This is why delegates must look beyond the surface of problems in order to probe their root causes, which lie in the human heart and mind. A satisfactory conclusion to the Earth Summit requires a penetration into the root causes of ecological afflictions. An easy approach will not solve these problems.

In order to probe these deeper realms, which we might call “an ecology of heart and mind,” we must first perceive the world as having a spiritual as well as a physical dimension. This means that the world is a sacred place as well as our only home. Thus, as a world with finite resources, we must temper our attitudes by reducing our demands on the natural order. We must distinguish between our greed and others’ need. To achieve moderation and frugality, we require personal sacrifice for the good of the planet. In other words, we need a sense of temperance, which in turn implies recognition of justice. We can either have a humane world with justice for all, or a polluted, degraded and angry world without justice.

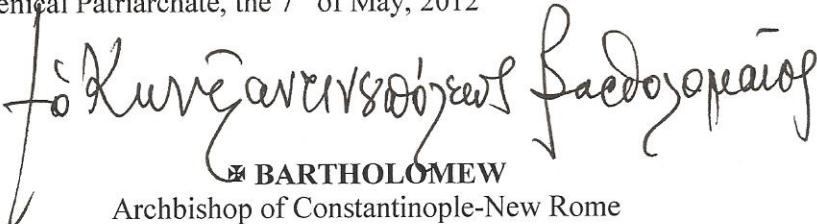
Unfortunately, in reality, the promotion of these goals by religious organizations will not be sufficient to resolve these problems. Courage is needed by national leaders to transform the systems of greed that have caused worldwide turmoil and to replace them with structures of compassion that enhance the common good of all people and all life.

Moreover, in order to transform the present network of interlocking commercial and economic activity, we must develop standards to evaluate the systems and actions of society. Commercial and political structures must be evaluated to determine whether or not they enhance or deplete the natural systems of the earth. Those that cannot pass the test of sustainability must be corrected or rejected. All activities must maintain the fruitfulness of the earth’s biological systems. Unless we integrate the lifestyle of humanity into the ecosystem of the planet, we will bequeath only pain and suffering to the future. As a general rule, the developmental needs of the present must not hinder the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

These qualities are fundamental to an integrated ecology of earth, heart and mind. And they can facilitate a more effective grasp of the human impact on the world’s natural systems that must be addressed.

Dear friends, what we are proposing and proclaiming here is not just theological rhetoric. For many people, these issues are now a matter of life and death. Unless those who represent the nations of the world can see beyond ideology and the surface of issues in order to make the necessary changes or corrections, nothing will happen. The health and future of millions of people hangs in the balance.

At the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the 7th of May, 2012



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and Ecumenical Patriarch