



# The critical role of faith actors in national climate debate



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# UNDERSTANDING NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTIONS

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*The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change has become an important tool for mobilizing international commitment to address climate change. The agreement's implementation is anchored in three key pillars: National Adaptation Plans, Long-term Decarbonization Strategies and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). This is in addition to other important elements such as climate finance, technology, capacity building, the transparency framework, and frameworks for international cooperation.*

*NDCs are particularly pertinent for faith actors, because together with civil society and other actors in the respective countries, they can participate in the relevant local and national processes.*

The NDCs enable each country to create a unique set of commitments to undertake and measure the progress of its own climate response, including an obligation to review what has been achieved every five years. The NDCs' review process provides an opportunity for people of faith to express the vocation to safeguard creation in a way that contributes to effective change.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has been engaged in climate related advocacy since the 1970s. The aim of this guide is to explain the NDCs, and the faith-based perspective that LWF member churches can contribute.

Human beings are called to care for creation. In the book of Genesis, God calls by name each species that God discloses to the human being God had created. The text reveals the wisdom: we love what we know. Through the prophet Isaiah, God says, "I have called you by name, you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1). When we know something deeply enough to name it, we are bound in a caring, compassionate relationship. Our compassion for the earth in general is nurtured by a sense of belonging to a specific place that sustains our life and the lives of the creatures we know and love. We continue to advocate for commitments at the international level while affirming that the local ecological and social systems in which we live can inform just and sustainable solutions that lead to real economic, political and social transformation at local and national levels.

The next phase of submitting new NDCs will focus on local and national processes. It is an opportunity for churches and other faith-based organizations (FBOs) to demonstrate that they are especially equipped and positioned to contribute to this process based on two factors:

- *Churches and FBOs are rooted in local communities, and have knowledge and experience that can translate into specific, actionable policies.*
- *Churches and FBOs often have access to local and national governments, and officials who formulate the NDCs.*

## ENGAGE IN CLIMATE DEBATE AT A NATIONAL LEVEL

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The year 2020 remains critical for making progress on climate change response in view of the NDCs' potential for raising climate ambition from national commitments to a global objective. As the focus shifts from international negotiations to determining national contributions, local faith actors have a significant opportunity to influence implementation of the Paris Agreement. Rooted in the reality of local ecologies with access to leadership at the grassroots and national level, faith communities can ensure that NDCs offer just, sustainable and contextually relevant solutions that can be held to account for the rights and responsibilities of citizens.

*The objective of the Paris Agreement is clear: in order to keep the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C and to 1.5°C if possible, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions must be reduced by 45 percent by 2030 and carbon neutrality must be achieved by 2050.*

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## PARIS AGREEMENT AND THE NDCS

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*The Paris Agreement adoption at the 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP 21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2015 was a historic milestone.*

### Highlights

During COP 19 in Warsaw, Poland, in 2013, countries were asked to submit provisional pledges for climate action, the so-called Intended Nationally Determined Contributions or INDCs.

Prior to COP 21, over 180 countries representing more than 90 percent of the world's emissions had presented their contributions to reducing GHG emissions, action plans for mitigation and adaptation, and financing measures.

With the adoption of the Paris Agreement, the INDCs lost the tag “intended” and shifted to NDCs.

NDCs reflect the voluntary commitments of countries signing the Paris Agreement, whose objectives are to:

- Limit the temperature increases below 2°C with respect to the pre-industrial era, and further aim at limiting it to 1.5°C;
- Strengthen the capacity to adapt to the negative effects of climate change and increase resilience;
- Make finance flows consistent with a pathway toward low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development.

Parties to the agreement are obliged to increase the level of ambition in their NDCs every five years, starting from 2020. The level of ambition should be informed by the periodical outcome of the global stocktaking, starting in 2023.

The Paris Agreement is to be implemented in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, which takes into account the varying national circumstances, and involves countries developing and implementing their own NDCs.



COP 21. INDCs presented.  
Adoption of Paris Agreement



Ratification of Paris Agreement. Paris Agreement entered into force on 4 November 2016. Countries were invited to communicate their first NDC or convert INDC to NDC



Presentation of updated NDCs. Second round of NDCs



First global evaluation to inform third round of NDCs



Presentation of the third round of NDCs



Second global evaluation to inform the fourth round of NDCs



Presentation of the fourth round of NDCs



Keep global warming below 2°C with the aim of limiting it to 1.5°C

## WHY ARE NDCS IMPORTANT?

The nationally determined contributions make it possible to:

- Define the pathway that countries must follow to contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and adaptation to climate change.
- Prioritize sectors and climate action that enable governments to establish financing needs.
- Measure the level of each country's individual contribution and assess the global progress toward realizing the Paris Agreement objectives.

## ROLE OF FAITH-BASED ACTORS

### Shaping NDCs with a climate justice perspective

During 2020, governments must submit the second round of NDCs and ensure civil society participation in the process. The LWF and other FBOs have significant value to add at this stage in the process. The sacred scriptures and traditions of faith communities provide a conceptual framework for understanding the way in which human beings are part of the earth system. By fostering a sense of belonging to their local ecologies, faith communities can motivate their respective countries to develop NDCs that are mutually beneficial to the well-being of their local habitat and all beings whose livelihoods depend on it.

FBOs, as part of civil society also provide a strong moral compass for implementing the NDCs. Faith traditions universally emphasize the need to have compassion for all living things, and the moral imperative to care for the earth. For Christians, our compassionate response is rooted in the Bible's teaching about the particular responsibility of all humans to care for the earth.

*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it (Genesis 2:15).*

FBOs work very closely with local communities, including marginalized groups and indigenous people, who suffer the most from the impacts of climate change. These communities can significantly contribute to the formulation of NDCs by providing stories of specific, differentiated contexts that require response, and by suggesting alternatives and sustainable solutions that are rooted in local knowledge.

## Linking local-national-global processes

FBOs play a key role in translating local needs into national demands. They can articulate the views of marginalized people, ensuring their full and meaningful participation, which is vital for elaborating international commitments that are grounded in people's needs.

FBOs can advocate for climate actions that are aligned to effective enjoyment of human rights, gender justice as well as intergenerational justice.

FBOs have the ability to convene different actors and facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogues that bring different perspectives to the process. Faith actors can reach communities that do not often engage in dialogue, in order to ensure just, inclusive and sustainable solutions. This includes those who suffer from the effects of climate change, and those whose livelihoods will be affected by the growing shift to green energy in various sectors.

*The impact of climate change constitutes one of the most serious threats to human life and the environment, directly affecting the livelihoods of the poor and most vulnerable worldwide. As people of faith, we have an obligation to take care of creation and promote social and economic justice, gender and intergeneration justice, as part of LWF's climate justice work.*

## USEFUL INFORMATION

UNFCCC <https://unfccc.int/> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

NDC registry <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NDCStaging/Pages/Home.aspx> provides an update on parties that have submitted NDCs

NDC Partnership <https://ndcpartnership.org/> provides tools and resources for implementing NDCs.

The Climate Action Tracker <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/> assesses the total global and country NDCs' effort and current climate policies.

**For more information about LWF Climate Justice, please contact:**

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*The Twelfth Assembly reminded LWF member churches to advocate for climate justice, especially in terms of engaging governments for low carbon development and urging them to keep global warming below 1.5°C.*

*(LWF 2017 Assembly resolution on climate change)*



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