

Comments by Dr. Carolyn Woo, President of Catholic Relief Services
at the Press Conference for Laudato Si' – the Encyclical by Pope Francis
Rome, June 18, 2015

Thank you very much, it's a tremendous honor for me. As we are talking about nature and ecology, one statement comes to mind, and it's about you as a wonderful audience who has been very patient. There is a saying that the mind can only absorb what the seat can endure. So I hope nature gave you long seats.

I also want to say thank you particularly to Caritas Internationalis. Catholic Relief Services is the American member of Caritas Internationalis, a federation of 164 Caritas agencies, and we have been working over the last year preparing for the launch of this encyclical and how we could propagate it throughout the world, down to the very level of the parishes. So I just want to say on behalf of Caritas Internationalis I am also here.

My audience today is the business audience, and I have a number of things to say. First of all I think of the question posed by the Pope, "What kind of world do we want to leave those who come after us, to the children who are now growing up"? Well, I am a mother and someday I look forward to being a grandmother, and I think that question is completely relevant to each of us and, of course, to business.

The Pope calls for ecological conversion, and again I think it's relevant to people and organizations, but that conversion today begins with consciousness. As we saw, Professor Schellnhuber did a great job raising our understanding of consciousness, but consciousness must lead us to conscience. It must grip our conscience and help us think differently and from consciousness, conviction. Conviction about our part of this problem and our part of this solution and of course from conviction to conduct, what we will change.

So coming back to business, Pope Francis says, "What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts?" These questions by the Pope are fundamental questions that businesses ask when they put together their mission statement and vision statement. Their mission statement is to address how will they make a contribution to society, and I think the Pope's call in this case is to say that any answer must include this in terms of the contribution to people and a contribution to our common home.

While this encyclical points out major challenges and I think heartbreaking evidence of devastation and destruction from our collective action, I actually take it as a very hopeful document because it talks about the potential of us to reverse the course and, particularly, also the potential of business to do the right thing. It actually invites business to be part of the solution. It reminds us that business can be a noble vocation. You know a lot of people think of business as a necessary evil. This is an invitation to business to be a necessary good, and the choice is up to us.

I just want to say there will be people who want to dismiss the Pope's message on the basis of lack of evidence. We can clearly see just from the presentation before me and all the work by the Pontifical Academies of Science and Social Sciences and all of the conferences and workshops they have convened, that this is based on solid science. For business, which is so big on analytics, it is important that it opens its mind and heart to evidence. We should not dismiss this just because we don't like the message from this evidence.

Another point is that the Pope made it very clear -- and I know we don't want to hear it -- but the evidence is that we have not treated our common home well. We have done great damage to it. The Pope reminds us, and actually uses a concept called the "global commons." The global commons actually refers to tangible and intangible assets that belong to human kind -- assets like our water, our atmosphere, our forest, our fisheries, our genetic materials, biodiversity. In the end, the global commons consists of assets that do not belong to any particular company or any particular sovereignty, they belong to all of us.

The Pope reminds us about the loss of biodiversity; it will change our ecosystem forever. He reminds us that all creatures, all species are not just exploitable resources for humans. They have inherent value in and of themselves, that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous and its value is absolutely not dependent on what men put on it, and so we have to have a different way of governing the global commons. And by the way, this is the work of a noted economist and Nobel Laureate, Elinor Ostrom.

In this call for ecological conversion so that we could pivot our work towards the common good and the development of all peoples, there are actually practical implications. I find the encyclical to be extremely poetic, spiritually inspiring, but also very, very pragmatic. There are practical implications.

The first is that the Pope asks us not just to rely on market forces, or even on technology. While there are a lot of benefits of both, and particularly of technology, reliance on it alone will not get us to where we need to be. Technology must be guided by moral energies and by human values, the commitment to serve all people (not just some people) and the ability to serve us fully as human beings and not just as consumers.

Second, the Pope reminds us that the most noble calling of business, a "sacred trust" he calls it, is to create jobs. Job creation, the right to work for human beings is fundamental. It is a way to actually allow people to achieve their dignity, but in some ways to also participate in co-creation with God. It gives us meaning, it gives us purpose. So job creation cannot come at the expense of just markets and technology.

The third thing the Pope warns us about is the dangers of short-term thinking and a selfish mindset. Actually a selfish mindset sometimes elevates self-centeredness and short-term thinking to a virtue. The Pope reminds us that the focus on the short term is

self-defeating if we stop investing in people in order to gain short term financial gain. It is bad business for society and, if the Pope allows me to add one line, I would say it is actually bad business for business also.

Particularly problematic, and we saw this illustrated in the financial crisis, is when the financial sector achieves -- at all costs -- its own financial gains, it creates havoc for everybody else, including business themselves.

The fourth implication is that businesses must now really account for all costs involved in production, not just a fraction of the cost. In business we have this concept called "externalities," and that is we generate benefits that serve us and as well as others, but we also generate costs where we do not absorb all of it ourselves. We spin off those costs to other people and other sectors of society. I think this encyclical basically says there is nobody else to absorb the costs -- it is us and our children who are absorbing those costs. So in business now there is an emergence over the last twenty years for a movement called the triple bottom line, which is the focus on planet and people in addition to profits. We need to have more businesses adopting more sincerely the triple bottom line. I think where the Pope adds to this is the urgency to do this.

The encyclical also calls for the importance of sustainable development, and that is development that does not put economic growth as the only metric, because we cannot have unlimited and infinite growth. Unlimited growth at the cellular level causes cancer. Unlimited growth in economy and society will cause us to run into planetary boundaries. Not only climate change, but also issues such as ocean acidification, de-forestation, chemical pollution, ozone depletion, land use constraints, depletion of water resources and the things that we just heard from my colleague. So we need to rethink the priority we give to unlimited growth, that in the end it might actually do us harm rather than give us growth.

The sixth point is that the Pope is actually a forward-thinking business leader in the sense that he says Investing in sustainability is another "win-win" opportunity for business. I think that business leaders who are forward thinking, who are progressive, actually recognize them. They recognize the cost that comes with catastrophic failures, whether they are coastal disasters or what we see in California right now, where there is not enough water for agricultural production. We have also seen the benefits in terms of increased efficiency, reduced uses of resources and materials, acceptance of customers and increased morale of employees. So the Pope is absolutely right to remind us that investing in sustainability is a prudent economic decision, in addition to all the other moral reasons.

The seventh point is that the Pope reminds us that development must be inclusive. What that means is that *everyone* should gain from it, not just some people, and particularly not at the cost of others. I just want to say that this is not just an empty ideal. We see now the goals of the World Bank and the United Nations for sustainable development, and the World Bank for elimination of extreme poverty and also the monitoring of inequality income gap.

The eighth point I want to make is that business actually can play a very important role to help customers and consumers like us to become virtuous consumers. The way they make product, design product, the way they allow us to recycle and reuse, the type of energy sources that they use, the way they attend to different people in the supply chain, how they are paid and how their communities are attended to can actually help us become virtuous consumers, and that is an opportunity.

The ninth point I want to make is that our government and business and public must work together. There is not just one actor or one sector who can solve the problem.

The tenth point I want to make is that, as the Pope reminds us, it is not good enough just to talk the talk -- just to say all these good things for the sake of marketing and branding. *That*, in the end, is our authenticity and a depth of our commitment by business which really makes a difference.

So to conclude I just want to say we have to remember that business is not just an economic undertaking, it is a human enterprise. Because it is a human enterprise, business must be *by* people *for* the people, and that if it is business as usual, not many of us will be around to really enjoy its benefits.

Thank you very much.