

BLOG FROM PARIS COP21 – Number 5

A depressing day here in Paris. Bureaucracy has a way of deadening everything. Unfortunately, it prevents us now from being at two key events at Le Bourget, which is the main venue. The first was today, when we were invited to a Pacific Islands presentation at the AOSIS (Association Of Small Island States) venue at Le Bourget; the second would have been next week, when we were invited to talk at a media presentation at the Media Centre at Le Bourget. Unfortunately our accreditation for the side event does not give us UNFCCC accreditation for the main event. As we were told a couple of days ago, we might have been accredited through the Solomon Islands delegation up until three weeks ago. But of course, that was before the bombing, and security is now a lot tighter, and accreditation is now needed. So Fr Nigel, perhaps one of those most immediately affected by climate change, cannot speak at the main event venue on behalf of his people.

Whilst this is a great shame, it does show up part of the problem – bureaucratisation tends to exclude those without power, even if they are those most affected. And at COP21 there is clearly no shortage of bureaucracy, as befits a United Nations event. Over the decades, the COP events have developed their own jargon, and these in turn reflect the political compromises needed. For example, each nation is submitting INDC (Intended Nationally Determined Contributions):

http://unfccc.int/focus/indc_portal/items/8766.php).

INDC are the goals submitted by each nation; in Australia's case, by 2030 that we should be at 26-28% reduction on our 2005 emissions. This is not a particularly onerous goal, and the base year (2005) was a time of economic boom, and therefore presumably relatively higher emissions. It was a goal determined by the Abbot Government so as not to affect our economic growth, and with an optimistic view of the direct action favoured by them. Yet it is inadequate, given that we are one of the world's largest per capita CO₂ emitters (see this fascinating chart:

<http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2015/08/daily-chart-down-under-and-dirty>)

Even the Indians who are committed dramatically increasing their standard of living, have committed to better INDC. But no nation is making the wholesale cuts needed; the United States is held hostage by a climate-sceptical Republican Party, and other developing nations want to “catch up” with the wealthy nations before dramatically decreasing emissions.

So the end result: the current INDC will see the average temperature rise by 2.7 degrees C above pre-industrial age temperatures. This is going to be disastrous for the island states:

<http://www.smh.com.au/environment/un-climate-conference/tale-of-two-leaders--trudeau-and-turnbull--at-the-paris-un-climate-conference-2015-20151130-glbyu4.html>

Bureaucracy: it enables the UNFCCC to go ahead, it allows some unambitious goals to be achieved, but nothing that will be legally binding or able to be enforced. It keeps the organisation going, and given it is the only one we have, this is a good thing. However, it also keeps those who should be heard from being heard, and is complicit in the lack of necessary action. The rich nations preserve their wealth, the new rich nations get to make more, and the poor nations are stuffed. This is where we seem to be on Day 4 of COP21.

Then in the evening we had a seminar with two luminaries of the Environmental Movement. One was James Hansen, the outspoken former NASA Climatologist. More depressing stuff – essentially, it is too late now and the process of global heating and sea levels rising is unstoppable. However, there was a slight lift with Naomi Klein. Yes, things are far from perfect. Yes, there will be suffering. However, there is hope. The nations are talking, there is a genuine sense among most of the negotiators that we have to do better. Each year there is some progress. So faith, hope and love, abide these three – and for now, the one we hold onto is hope. Amen.

*Fr Keith Joseph
Dean of Darwin*