

ADDRESS
BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA AND
PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL JANEZ JANŠA
AT THE MEETING WITH THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Brussels, 5 May 2008

Distinguished Religious Leaders,
Mr President of the European Parliament,
Mr President of the European Commission,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

I would, first of all, like to express my gratitude to our host, the President of the European Commission, for this year's meeting of religious leaders to be dedicated to a topic of paramount significance for the modern world. The issue selected concerns all of humanity regardless of nationality, culture or race. It is no random chance that the fight against climate change is one of the key priorities of the Slovenian EU Council Presidency. This constitutes a special reason why we shall welcome any support in achieving the set objectives.

“A crime against nature is a sin against God,” is a frequent warning of Patriarch Bartholomew I. This warning must be taken very seriously, as must all the warnings of religious leaders. Nowadays, we really are running the risk of undermining, with our acts, the future of generations to come. The scientific evidence is indeed most convincing. Thanks to human activity, greenhouse gas emissions increased by 70 per cent in the period 1970-2004. Unless we take timely action, we run the risk of entire regions facing food shortages and famine. The water supply will deteriorate significantly and rising sea levels will put major cities in peril. Numerous ecosystems, from coral reefs to virgin rainforests are faced with degradation; many species will die out. Storm, drought, fire and flood will significantly influence human life in the future. The lack of natural resources, especially water and food, can become a principal generator of conflict.

Climate change is the most serious risk of our time and can trigger unimaginable migration flows. What has the European Union already done and what are we trying to do at this time? When gathered at the EU Spring Council meeting this year, we, the leaders of the countries of Europe, decided to find solutions to enable us to efficiently address the related climate and energy challenges. The European Union has set itself two key objectives to be attained by 2020: to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20 per cent with respect to 1990, and to increase the share of renewable sources of energy to 20 per cent of total energy consumption.

The European Union is endeavouring to reach an effective and comprehensive global agreement in December next year in Copenhagen. It is striving for shared but differentiated responsibility between countries in the international community as well as for increasing the transfer of new environment-friendly technologies to developing countries. It is our belief that the plan we adopted in December 2007 in Bali is the right one. We must therefore devote our attention entirely to achieving this objective, taking into account the principles of interdependence and mutual assistance, to ensure the involvement of new world actors in this process.

Religious Leaders, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In our efforts to preserve the planet that we have, we are not, in fact, fighting for the benefit of the planet itself. As Aristotle taught us, nature does nothing in vain. The planet will undoubtedly survive even without us. Our concern is for the vulnerable and weak, that is to say: mainly ourselves. In 1854, the American Indian Chief Seattle said in his famous speech to President Franklin Pierce, "Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."

The environment is not only a natural place but also a sacred place. The principle of community and loyalty between man, nature and Creator is a basic principle of Judaism, Christianity and Islam alike. Climate change requires us to reconsider how we channel imagination, ingenuity and entrepreneurship into creating a world, free of dependence on fossil fuels, and yet prosperous and connected as never before. This does not mean that we should renounce everything we have achieved. We should reconsider our achievements and look at them from a different point of view. This involves complex changes in behaviour patterns and values at global level and also a change in both the culture of existence and the culture of coexistence. This also requires significantly more intercultural solidarity than has been witnessed so far. On specifically this point, an initiative from you, religious leaders, is of vital importance because it is not easy to bring about complex changes. Old habits die hard, and this is particularly true in our modern society.

We cannot expect anyone to change if we ourselves are not willing to change. We are all connected, regardless of differences. We are all connected by the trust we place in humanity and by our ability to change. Let these thoughts be a starting point for our joint deliberations.