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CLIMATE CHANGE SCEPTICS SELF DESTRUCT

'Giving Climate Change sceptics a disproportionate amount of speaking time at the conference was a brilliant strategy by Cardinal Martino to let them shoot themselves in the foot. Their often repeated litany of objections revealed the absurdity of their position.'

This is the opinion of Columban missionary Father Charles Rue. He was one of eighty guests invited to a conference in Rome on 'Climate Change and Development' by Cardinal Martino. The conference ran 26-27 April and was organised by the Pontifical Council Justice and Peace.

Venerable mathematician Prof Zichichi of the World Federation of Scientists in Switzerland was a leader of much of the scepticism. He attacked the credibility of the Intergovernment Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stating that it claimed to know all about the subject and lacked scientific rigour.

There were recurring themes from the climate sceptics: the cause of Climate Change is natural cycles and human induced levels of Climate Change gases were insignificant; money must go to developing nations rather than be spent on carbon reduction; make the poor nations rich so they can afford to adapt to Climate Change; new technology will solve agricultural problems in developing countries; increasing carbon in the atmosphere is a good thing as it will increase plant growth and is willed by God.

IPCC scientist Prof Stephen Rahmstorf from Potsdam calmly showed how thousands of different scientists have come to a consensus through peer review. Ambassador Raul Oyuela of Argentine, who Cardinal Martino claimed as a personal friend, was much more harsh in his remarks saying a 'game of definition is not useful' and produces confusion.

Jesuit Fr Jacques Haers SJ of Belgium said he was worried 'that world renowned IPCC scientists had been publically rubbished at a church conference' but was 'glad that that proposed models of development had been unmasked'.

The conference was book-ended with major presentations which addressed the real life and harsh realities of Climate Change but which also suggested a way forward for the Church to make a positive response to the problem.

The French Ambassador for the Environment Laurent Stefanini and UK MP David Miliband were the first speakers at the conference. They said that Climate Change is 'not only a scientific and political issue but a moral and ethical one, not a whether question but

a how and what scale question'. They both called for education of people about its realities and the role of the Church in providing motivation for action.

Before the close of the conference there were major papers by Bishop Uhl of Germany on the social doctrine of the Church; Greek Orthodox Lic Elias Abramides of Argentina and WCC member; Rt. Rev James Jones ,Anglican Bishop Liverpool; and Bishop Chris Toohey of Australia. Their words were faith and hope filled, persuasive, and suggesting positive ways forward for church conversion and its public engagement with the issue. Notably, many of the climate sceptics absented themselves from this concluding section.

Besides Bishop Toohey and Fr Charles Rue, Australia members of the conference included Mrs Anne Giles from the Australian embassy, a Divine Word Missionary representing the Japanese Bishops' Conference, and Zenit news analysist Fr John Flynn of the Legionaries of Christ. Other missionaries included Maryknoll Fr John Brinkman from Japan and Mr Gerolamo Fazzini of PIME. Franciscan Fr Gearoid O'Conaire from Ireland attended and he is the incoming JPIC Director for Religious based in Rome.

Two people coming from developing countries were Archbishop Paul Ruzoka of Tanzania and Ms Sharon Looremé of Practical Action in Kenya. Those who added an ecological dimension to debate included Ambassador Dr Shyam Nokta of Guyana and the Hon Jab Szyszko, Minister for the environment Poland.

Dr Martin Robra from Geneva was a notable WCC representative and Dr Mary Tucker from Yale USA contributed on inter-faith and ecology connections.