



PROCLADE POLICY BRIEF FOR UNEA-7

Integral Ecology and Environmental Justice in a Time of Planetary Crisis

Seventh United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA7)

*Claretian Missionaries / Fondazione Proclade Internazionale-Onlus
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNEA-7 convenes at a defining moment for humanity. The world enters this Assembly amid accelerating climate disruption, record heat, loss of biodiversity, ocean degradation, toxic pollution, and deepening inequality. These interconnected crises expose not only ecological fragility but also the moral fractures of an economic system that sacrifices communities and ecosystems for short-term gain. After COP30 failed to deliver a fossil fuel phase-out roadmap, and following two inconclusive rounds of plastics treaty negotiations, UNEA-7 becomes a critical space to rebuild trust in multilateral environmental governance and to uphold the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

UNEA-7's official theme—**“Advancing Sustainable Solutions for a Resilient Planet”**—requires decisions that strengthen ecological integrity, center justice, and support the leadership of frontline communities, Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, and environmental defenders. These constituencies already live the daily realities of ecological breakdown, yet they also carry generational wisdom and visions of transformation rooted in community, solidarity, and care of creation.

Therefore, PROCLADE through the Claretian family—drawing from our presence among vulnerable communities in forests, mountains, river basins, farmlands, and coastal regions—presents **eight faith-based calls for UNEA-7**:

1. **End the Fossil Fuel Era: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative**
2. **A Plastics Treaty that Serves People and Creation, Not Profit**
3. **Just Transition in Minerals and Energy: No New Sacrifice Zones**
4. **Protect Environmental Defenders: Guardians of Life and Hope**
5. **Disarm War Against Creation: Environmental Dimensions of Armed Conflict**
6. **Heal Pollution and Toxic Injustice Against the Poor**
7. **Embed Integral Ecology and Community Power in Global Environmental Governance**
8. **Food Sovereignty, Agroecology, and Community Land Rights**

These calls are grounded in the Claretian mission of accompanying communities, listening to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, and promoting integral ecology through pastoral, social, and advocacy work at local and international levels.

1. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

A. The Crisis: One Complex Reality

UNEA-7 convenes under the theme “**Advancing Sustainable Solutions for a Resilient Planet**” at a moment of profound planetary distress. Pollution, toxic chemicals, biodiversity collapse, deforestation, plastic contamination, degraded soils, and the militarization of fragile ecosystems all expose structural injustices that fall most heavily on those who contributed least: Indigenous Peoples, small farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, waste pickers, women, youth, and the urban poor. These communities bear the weight of an economic model that treats their lands, waters, and labor as expendable.

Ocean degradation now stands at the center of this interconnected crisis. Rapid warming, acidification, deoxygenation, overfishing, plastics, nutrient runoff, and deep-sea disturbance jeopardize food security, cultural identity, and the survival of coastal and island peoples. UNEA-7 therefore becomes a crucial platform preparing the way for ambitious commitments at the Third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3), where states will adopt the *Nice Ocean Action Plan* under SDG 14.

UNEA-7 also sits between two pivotal biodiversity and land-restoration milestones. The 2024 UN Biodiversity Conference (COP16 in Cali) set the finance, monitoring, reporting, and indicator arrangements for the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, determining how nations will mobilize resources and measure progress toward its 2030 targets. Whether UNEA-7’s decisions on ecosystems, chemicals, and pollution can truly halt biodiversity loss will depend on how these COP16 outcomes are implemented on the ground. Meanwhile, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification’s COP16 in Riyadh marks a major step-change for land restoration and drought resilience on its 30th anniversary—the largest UN land conference to date. Its decisions on land-degradation neutrality, finance, and rural livelihoods are critical for realizing UNEA-7 commitments on soils, drylands, food systems, and community resilience.

The year 2024 was the hottest ever recorded. Coral reefs collapsed at unprecedented scales, fish stocks declined, and hydrological cycles destabilized. Environmental defenders—many of them Indigenous women and youth—continued to be criminalized or killed for protecting forests, land, oceans, and sacred waters. These tragedies reveal a deepening moral and spiritual crisis: a profound forgetting of our interdependence with creation and with one another.

Trust in global environmental governance has been strained. Recent rounds of negotiations for the global plastics treaty—the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-5) and its resumed session (INC-5.2)—ended without progress toward an agreed text, exposing deep divides over production caps, toxic additives, financial mechanisms, and trade. This deadlock threatens not only progress on plastics but also coherence with upcoming commitments at UNOC3.

At UNEA-7, states will consider resolutions on wetlands and peatlands, mineral extraction, nutrient pollution, wildfires, deep-sea ecosystems, and coral-reef

resilience—reflecting the breadth and complexity of the planetary emergency. Addressing these interlinked challenges requires an integrated approach shaped by justice, community participation, human rights, and the protection of all life.

B. Ecological Debt and Global Responsibility

Ecological debt lies at the heart of global environmental justice. For centuries, wealthy nations and corporate actors have accumulated vast ecological debt through extraction, land dispossession, industrial pollution, and disproportionate carbon emissions, while externalizing environmental harm to the Global South. This burden falls most heavily on **Indigenous Peoples, small-scale farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, coastal communities, waste pickers, urban poor, women, and youth**, who face toxic waste dumping, chemical exposure, biodiversity loss, ocean degradation, and escalating climate impacts despite contributing least to the crisis. This imbalance is not only economic but profoundly moral: it reveals systems that privilege profit over people and creation. UNEA-7 must therefore insist on equitable responsibility and reparative action, including financial support, technology transfer, and debt relief, grounded in justice, solidarity, and the ethical obligation to repair the harm inflicted on communities and ecosystems.

C. Intergenerational Justice and Youth Leadership

UNEA-7 elevates the moral and political imperative of intergenerational justice. The **Global Youth Declaration**, shaped through extensive global consultations and presented to the Assembly, will directly inform UNEA-7 outcomes. Its priorities—human rights, chemical safety, pollution prevention, biodiversity protection, and environmental peace—reflect the clarity and urgency of youth perspectives.

Youth leadership is not peripheral; it is **indispensable**. The credibility and future orientation of global environmental governance depend on ensuring that the voices of young people are respected, resourced, and integrated at all levels of decision-making.

D. The Claretian Vision

Claretian Missionaries accompany communities whose lives are interwoven with forests, rivers, mountains, agricultural landscapes, and coastal ecosystems. We witness firsthand how environmental destruction tears apart livelihoods, cultures, and spiritual identity. From these experiences emerges a profound commitment to **integral ecology**—the recognition that environmental, social, economic, cultural, and spiritual wounds are inseparable.

This vision, grounded in the Gospel and in the tradition of Catholic social teaching, inspired by *Laudato Si'* and embodied in daily pastoral and social ministry, shapes Proclade's advocacy at UNEA-7 and grounds it firmly in the experiences and aspirations of the world's most vulnerable communities.

2. CLARETIAN CALLS FOR UNEA-7

CALL 1: End the Fossil Fuel Era — A Moral and Spiritual Imperative

The fossil-fuel economy drives every major crisis that UNEA exists to address: toxic air, chemical pollution, plastic production, biodiversity collapse, ocean warming and acidification, and the accelerating climate emergency. Fossil fuels deepen global ecological debt and disproportionately harm vulnerable peoples.

COP30 ended without any plan to phase out fossil fuels: all phase-out language was stripped from the Mutirão decision, leaving a governance vacuum on fossil fuel supply. This absence of multilateral direction makes the initiative of Colombia and the Netherlands to convene the First International Conference for the Phase-Out of Fossil Fuels (Santa Marta, April 2026) strategically essential. It offers a credible intergovernmental platform—outside the constraints of the UNFCCC—to craft a science-based, rights-aligned, equitable pathway to wind down coal, oil, and gas, echoing growing demands for a fossil fuel non-proliferation architecture.

UNEA-6 already recognized the link between climate change, marine biodiversity loss, and ocean pollution. UNEA-7 must now explicitly confront fossil fuel expansion as a root cause of environmental collapse.

Demands

- Affirm the sacred right of all peoples—especially the most vulnerable—to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, and acknowledge that the continued expansion of fossil fuels violates this God-given right.
- Commit to a global, just, and irreversible transition away from coal, oil, and gas, guided by scientific truth, human rights, and the moral call to protect future generations.
- Transform financial and economic systems so they uplift workers and communities, ensuring no one is abandoned in the transition to renewable energy, and prioritizing community-centered and people-focused renewable energy pathways that honor local wisdom and leadership.
- Support the Santa Marta Conference as a courageous step toward a cooperative global vision for phasing out fossil fuels.

CALL 2: A Plastics Treaty that Serves People and Creation—Not Profit

Plastic pollution is a symptom of a throwaway culture that treats land, oceans, and people—especially the poorest—as disposable. The failure of INC-5 and the resumed INC-5.2 session to agree on production limits, toxic additives, and financial mechanisms leaves the negotiating process far from the mandate UNEA originally set through resolutions on marine litter and microplastics.

Meanwhile, plastic contamination continues to devastate marine ecosystems, fisheries, coastal communities, and human health. UNEA-7 must insist that the treaty fulfils the promise it initiated—especially as the world prepares for UNOC3, where ocean health will again take center stage.

Demands

- Adopt a binding plastics treaty grounded in human dignity and the integrity of creation, addressing the full life cycle of plastics—including limits on production and toxic additives.
- Honor and protect waste pickers and informal workers, ensuring a just transition that safeguards livelihoods and recognizes their essential role in caring for our common home.
- Commit to ending plastic leakage into rivers, coasts, and oceans, defending the oceans as God’s life-giving gift to humanity and strengthening synergies with UNOC3.
- End the unjust export of toxic waste that burdens impoverished communities, in line with the Basel Convention.
- Promote circular, non-toxic, and equitable material systems that reflect a culture of care and sufficiency.

CALL 3: A Just Transition in Minerals and Energy — No New Sacrifice Zones

The accelerating demand for transition minerals, metals, and renewable-energy infrastructure risks reproducing extractive colonialism. Without safeguards, the shift toward “green energy” will create new sacrifice zones—particularly in Indigenous territories, rural communities, biodiverse regions, and the deep sea.

UNEA-7 deliberations on deep-sea ecosystems, mineral extraction, and nutrient pollution underscore the need for transitions that reduce material demand, avoid militarization, and protect fragile ecosystems.

Demands

- Reduce overall material and energy demand, embracing policies and lifestyles rooted in sufficiency, solidarity, and reverence for the earth’s limits.
- Uphold Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as a sacred expression of Indigenous self-determination and a moral and legal obligation.
- Reject militarization in mining and energy hotspots, ensuring human security and ecological integrity.
- Ensure that transition mineral and energy projects are governed by public-interest regulations that prevent corporate abuse and guarantee fair benefit-sharing.
- Protect deep-sea, freshwater, and terrestrial ecosystems as part of our shared sacred trust, rejecting destructive mining that threatens life and cannot be restored.

CALL 4: Protect Environmental Defenders — Guardians of Life and Hope

Environmental and land defenders—many of them Indigenous leaders, women, and youth—face escalating threats, criminalization, and assassination. Their stewardship preserves forests, biodiversity, watersheds, and cultural heritage. A world that depends on their protection must also guarantee their safety.

UNEA precedents and regional frameworks like Escazú affirm the need for a safe and enabling environment for those defending the earth.

Demands

- Condemn without hesitation all violence, intimidation, and criminalization directed at environmental and land defenders.
- Ensure all UNEA resolutions include concrete protections for defenders, recognizing their mission as a profound service to humanity and creation.
- Strengthen national and international accountability systems to safeguard defenders' rights, lives, and communities.
- Guarantee safe and meaningful participation of defenders—especially Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth—in environmental decision-making, and recognize them as indispensable partners in ecological restoration and care for creation.

CALL 5: Disarm the War Against Creation — Environmental Dimensions of Armed Conflict

Armed conflict devastates ecosystems: forests are burned, rivers contaminated, coastlines militarized, and communities displaced from territories that sustain biodiversity. These impacts often persist for decades, compounding humanitarian suffering and eroding environmental security.

UNEA-7 builds on earlier resolutions and the International Law Commission's Principles on the Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts (PERAC) to strengthen multilateral support for environmental protection before, during, and after conflict.

Demands

- Integrate environmental protection into peacebuilding, humanitarian response, and post-conflict recovery, ensuring that ecological damage is not treated as collateral or secondary.
- Demilitarize and restore biodiverse and coastal regions, placing the well-being of communities and creation above geopolitical competition.
- Support community-led restoration and rehabilitation programs, recognizing that affected peoples are best positioned to restore their homelands.
- Strengthen monitoring, reporting, and accountability for environmental harm in conflict zones, using scientific and rights-based methodologies.
- Enhance interagency cooperation to address long-term ecological consequences of war, promoting healing rooted in justice and dignity.

CALL 6: Heal Pollution and Toxic Injustice Against the Poor

Toxic chemicals, pesticides, and air pollution disproportionately damage the health of the poor—farmworkers, urban slum residents, Indigenous Peoples, and children. These burdens violate human dignity and the human right to health.

UN negotiations toward a global science-policy panel on chemicals, waste, and pollution remain pivotal. UNEA-7 must ensure that justice—not industry interests—shapes the panel's mandate.

Demands

- Commit to the global phase-out of highly hazardous pesticides and toxic chemicals, especially where their harm falls upon children, the poor, and workers who already bear disproportionate burdens.
- Support transitions away from reliance on highly hazardous pesticides, including through agroecological and non-toxic approaches that protect small-scale farmers.
- Ensure rights-based governance of chemicals and waste, centering transparency, accountability, and the precautionary principle.
- Guarantee meaningful participation of affected communities in decisions on chemicals and waste.
- Embed justice, human dignity, and health at the center of the new global science-policy panel's mandate and operations.

CALL 7: Embed Integral Ecology and Community Power in Environmental Governance

UNEA-7 must respond to intertwined ecological, social, and spiritual crises with governance rooted in integral ecology, transparency, and local leadership. UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy 2026–2029 highlights the centrality of community-led action, but it must be fortified against corporate capture and procedural exclusion.

Demands

- Recognition and direct support for community-led initiatives in renewable energy, water stewardship, ecological restoration, food systems, and environmental monitoring—including access to finance and technology.
- Protection of Indigenous governance systems, territorial rights, and customary law, aligned with UNDRIP and regional human rights mechanisms.
- Robust transparency and access-to-information measures in UNEA processes, including mandatory disclosure of lobbying and conflicts of interest.
- Clear safeguards against corporate capture and undue influence in environmental policymaking, implementation, and scientific advisory bodies.
- Coherent linkages between UNEA-7 outcomes and global processes such as UNOC3, the Plastics Treaty, and the science-policy panel, ensuring meaningful participation of frontline communities.

CALL 8: Food Sovereignty, Agroecology, and Community Land Rights

Industrial agriculture is a leading driver of deforestation, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and land dispossession. Agroecology and food sovereignty offer transformative alternatives grounded in traditional knowledge, ecological wisdom, and the agency of small-scale farmers, Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists, and fishers.

UN frameworks—including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP), the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) guidelines, and the International Decade of Family Farming—provide strong normative foundations for UNEA action.

Demands

- Affirm food sovereignty and agroecology as essential pillars of sustainable and just food systems, aligned with UNDROP, CFS guidelines, and climate-resilient development pathways.
- Legal protection of land, water, seeds, and territorial rights for Indigenous Peoples, peasants, pastoralists, and artisanal fishers, ensuring safeguards against land grabbing and forced displacement.
- Progressive reduction of reliance on synthetic fertilizers and hazardous pesticides, complementing global efforts to phase out highly hazardous pesticides and supporting agroecological practices that restore soil, biodiversity, and water cycles.
- Strengthened resilience of local and Indigenous food systems, including seed diversity, traditional knowledge, and community-based adaptation.
- Policies and finance that empower community-managed landscapes, watersheds, forests, and coastal zones, positioning local stewardship at the heart of ecological restoration.

3. IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

A just and effective environmental agenda requires mechanisms that turn commitments into action. Implementation must be grounded in rights-based monitoring, community leadership, and transparency. Claretian engagement with grassroots communities shows that successful environmental action depends on accessible information, inclusive participation, and accountability for violators of ecological and human rights.

Key dimensions include:

- **Community-Based Monitoring:** Local populations, especially Indigenous Peoples, must be supported to monitor environmental change, land use, pollution, and biodiversity health.
- **Rights-Based Accountability:** Environmental policies must include clear procedures for holding governments and corporations accountable for violations of ecological or social rights.
- **FPIC as a Governance Standard:** Free, Prior and Informed Consent must be a non-negotiable requirement for land use, extraction, conservation, and development decisions.

- **Science-Policy Integration:** Decisions must be guided by independent science that integrates justice, human rights, and Indigenous knowledge.
- **Transparency in Finance and Governance:** Environmental finance must be traceable, equitable, and aligned with just transitions, not used to strengthen extractive models.
- **Faith-Based and Civil Society Participation:** Faith communities bring moral clarity, global reach, and deep relationships with vulnerable populations; their contributions should strengthen environmental governance.

4. CLARETIAN COMMITMENT TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The Claretian family's presence in diverse ecosystems—rainforests, mountains, islands, coastal villages, river basins, and urban and rural communities—deepens our commitment to ecological conversion and justice. Our spirituality calls us to defend life wherever it is threatened, to accompany vulnerable communities, and to promote policies that safeguard creation. Rooted in *Laudato Si'* and Catholic Social Teaching, we work to heal the relationship between humanity and the earth through pastoral presence, education, advocacy, and community action.

Our commitment includes:

- **Accompaniment:** Walking with communities facing environmental destruction, documenting and reporting abuses against environmental and land defenders, advocating for their rights, and supporting local initiatives that protect land, water, forests, oceans, and coastal ecosystems. Claretian missions in ocean areas, coastal villages, and forest regions play an active role in biodiversity protection, ecosystem restoration, and community-led stewardship of fragile habitats.
- **Education and Formation:** Strengthening educational, pastoral, and formation networks that cultivate ecological spirituality and deepen understanding of Catholic Social Teaching; integrating agroecology, ocean literacy, and sustainability into Claretian educational institutions; and preparing leaders capable of guiding just transitions and ecological resilience.
- **Model Agricultural and Ecological Initiatives:** Promoting and participating in community-based traditional farming practices; establishing model agricultural and agroecological projects in our missions; and demonstrating how regenerative farming, watershed care, and biodiversity conservation can sustain cultures, strengthen food systems, and restore ecosystems.
- **Advocacy:** Engaging in national, regional, and international advocacy to uplift grassroots voices, engage faith and civil society networks for policy accountability, and promote environmental governance rooted in justice, human rights, and community participation.
- **Ecological Conversion:** Encouraging lifestyle and institutional changes reflecting the call of *Laudato Si'*, including reduced consumption, ecological solidarity, adoption of community-owned renewable energy systems, and support for agroecology, food sovereignty, and regenerative practices that protect forests, coasts, and marine ecosystems.

- **Global-Local Linkages:** Mobilizing Global South-North solidarity to ensure that insights from global environmental processes are translated into grassroots empowerment, and that the lived realities, traditional knowledge, and innovations of communities—especially in ocean areas, coastal villages, and biodiversity-rich forests—directly shape international decision-making.

5. CONCLUSION

Humanity stands at a decisive threshold. The environmental crisis—spanning climate change, biodiversity collapse, toxic pollution, and ocean degradation—is one complex reality that demands urgent, courageous, and united action. As *Laudato Si'* teaches, the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor rise together, calling the world to embrace integral ecology as the path toward justice and renewal.

In his recent messages for COP30, **Pope Leo XIV** warned that creation is crying out in escalating droughts, storms, floods, and heat—not because humanity lacks knowledge or multilateral tools, but because political will is failing. He urges the world to recognize that caring for creation is inseparable from building peace and that ecological conversion must be expressed in bold decisions grounded in justice.

Marking the tenth anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Leo XIV reminds us that there is no room for indifference or resignation. God will one day ask whether we have protected, cultivated, and cared for the world entrusted to us—and whether we have stood with our brothers and sisters who suffer first and worst. The decisions taken at UNEA-7 will become part of the moral answer humanity offers to that question.

UNEA-7 carries a profound moral weight. The world cannot continue on a path of fragmentation, exploitation, and indifference. Nations are called to embrace a new vision—where fossil fuels are phased out, plastics no longer poison creation, oceans flourish, biodiversity is protected, communities lead transitions, defenders are safe, and future generations inherit a world of justice and peace.

The time to act is now.

The world depends on choices made in this moment.

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