



The eyes of the world will be on South Africa from Sunday 27 November to Friday 9 December this year. Negotiators and political leaders from around the world will gather in Durban at the 17th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP17).

With provincial and diocesan programmes around the Communion, particularly in the southern hemisphere, increasingly having to integrate a response to the impacts of climate change within local mission, it is hoped that governments will make firm and urgent commitments to decrease national carbon emissions.

In the Diocese of Natal, the Revd Dr Andrew Warmback is Rector of the Anglican Church of St John the Baptist, Pinetown, where parishioners have planted an indigenous, waterless garden as a 'green lung' for their area, set up recycling facilities and established a vegetable garden in the church grounds to show how a small area can be used to grow food.

Dr Warmback describes how the Anglican Church of Southern Africa is playing a key role in mobilising its own and other faith communities to join together in the work of influencing governments to make these firm commitments in Durban.

“Through local networks of environmental groups and activists, the Diocese of Natal, with the encouragement of its Bishop, the Rt Revd Rubin Phillip, is just one of the dioceses in Southern Africa where Anglicans are being educated and encouraged to enter into initiatives such as greening their parish and fostering small organic vegetable gardens, and at a wider level taking part in ecumenical and inter faith actions.

“The Anglican Church of Southern Africa is a founder member of the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI), working with people of other churches as well as other major faith groups in the work for an ecologically sustainable world. SAFCEI is well placed to head up the faith communities' insistence that governments of the world carefully consider the moral and ethical implications of the COP17 negotiations, and not only their own narrow financial and diplomatic interests. The call is for a radically different approach to world politics, if planet earth as we know it is to be saved for humanity.

“SAFCEI, working with the Economic Justice Network (EJN) of the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa (FOCCISA), the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee (IPACC), the Diakonia Council of Churches, the KwaZulu-Natal InterReligious Council in Durban, Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) and Christian Aid, has set up a Durban-based project for ecumenical coordination and inter faith activities regarding COP17. An ecumenical secretariat based in the offices of the Diakonia Council of Churches is readying itself to coordinate the practicalities of large numbers of national and international members of faith communities coming to be part of the activities. Some accommodation has already been secured, and the Diakonia Centre has been provisionally booked as a space for specifically faith-based activities.

“At the same time, a member of the Durban-based faith communities' local coordinating committee has been elected onto the organising committee of the civil society organisations' planning for the response of civil society generally to COP17. One of the organising committee's tasks is to secure a space for civil society activities. Negotiations are under way for this to be on the campus of the Durban University of Technology (DUT) which is within walking distance of the International Convention Centre and Exhibition Centre where COP17 will be held. The organising committee has already set up several sub-committees to carry out the tasks needed for such a massive undertaking. The civil society Day of Action, incorporating a march through Durban, is scheduled for Saturday 3 December.

“SAFCEI, under the direction of Anglican Bishop Geoff Davies, has already publicised a

programme of action throughout the year, including joint conferences in Lusaka, Nairobi and South Africa, with the purpose of mobilising the leaders of all faiths across Africa to come to Durban and speak out strongly about climate change. In Durban itself, SAFCEI is planning a large rally of people of faith on Sunday 27 November and a prayer service on Sunday 4 December. The programme has the full support of many faith leaders including Anglican Primate of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, and Roman Catholic Archbishop of Durban, Cardinal Wilfrid Napier.

“In addition, the local steering committee is considering several opportunities for involvement during the two weeks of people of faith coming to Durban for COP17. These include offering a room at the International Convention Centre for quiet contemplation or for counselling of delegates. This inter faith room would be staffed throughout the talks and be a place for delegates to off-load their frustrations with the process, or with other delegations, in a safe, confidential space, which could also be used for personal prayer and meditation. Feedback from COP15 in Copenhagen and COP16 in Cancun indicated that such a space would be well-used and most welcome. In addition many other activities are planned, such as seminars by prominent people, daily report-back sessions with some of the negotiators, cultural events, art exhibitions including the results of a poster competition for schools.”

As many Anglicans as possible are invited to come to Durban to be part of this great initiative of faith communities and civil society across the world. “We will be part of civil society’s watching brief”, said Dr Warmback, “to show our governments that the world is eagerly waiting for an outcome from the COP17 deliberations that will bring justice to the world and enable sustainable, ecologically-sound development for all people, especially those most in need and the poorest of the poor. This is our opportunity to witness to our faith, and publicly to put our faith into action, calling for an ethical and moral outcome to COP17.”

Notes:

A website for the inter faith Durban initiative is currently under construction. In the meantime, for further information, contact the Revd Sue Britton, sueb@stjohnbaptist.co.za .

See www.aco.org/communion/primates/resources/downloads/prim_climatechange.pdf for the statement on climate change by the Primates of the Anglican Communion following the Primates’ Meeting in Dublin, Ireland, 24 to 30 January, 2011

See <http://acen.anglicancommunion.org/news/index.cfm> for the news and resources of the Anglican Communion Environmental Network.