Anglicans take action at UN’s Rio +20

Ali Symons, Anglican Church of Canada May 16, 2012 -


Rio 's Christ the Redeemer statue has become a symbol for Christian support of the UN's Conference on Sustainable Development.

Above the skyline of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, a 39-metre Jesus statue spreads its arms over the slums and mansions of this sprawling city. The iconic statue, built in 1931 to represent peace, has now become a symbol for the work of thousands of Christians—Anglicans included—who are actively supporting the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which meets in Rio June 13 to 22.

Known as Rio +20, the conference marks the 20th anniversary of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, known as the "Earth Summit." The event will gather leaders from governments, the private sector and NGOs to discuss a green economy and an institutional framework for sustainable development. Themes will include energy, food security and disaster readiness.

The goal is to produce an action plan, entitled "The Future We Want," with specific sustainable development goals for the UN's 193 member states.

A new resource pack, produced by the Anglican Alliance—a global Communion network focusing on development, relief, and advocacy—has been compiled to help Anglicans learn about and pray for Rio+20. The pack includes information on the conference and topic sheets with facts, action points and prayers on environmental justice, water, climate change and ecojustice.

The resource materials, designed for use on Rio Sunday (June 3), the People's Summit first global day of action (June 5), and during the conference, were developed with help from the Anglican Communion UN Office, Lambeth Palace, the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil and the Anglican Communion Environmental Network, whose secretary is the Rev. Ken Gray of Victoria, B.C.

Anglicans have a long history of environmental activism. They have worked internationally through the World Council of Churches since the 1980s and Rio +20 is the latest focal point for this work.

Local Brazilian Anglicans are leading the way. Their Primate, the Most Rev. Mauricio Andrade, has invited the Anglican Communion to follow Rio +20 and take practical steps towards preserving the environment.
"With hope, audacity and renewed faith, I call on the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil and the Anglican Communion around the world to assume their prophetic duty to ‘take care of Creation,’” he said in a recent letter. "We need to support the initiatives of organized civil society and make a strong appeal to the governments to take their responsibility for the life on our planet."

A People's Summit will run parallel to the UN meetings. Its goal is to build a common voice for justice among civil society groups, including churches. Anglicans are part of an ecumenical coalition that is organizing a space for religious perspectives. Anglicans also be involved in debates, workshops, roundtables and local advocacy. On June 22 at 5:00 pm, the Anglican cathedral in Rio de Janeiro will host a special service.

For more information and resources, follow these links to:

- access the Rio+20 resource pack
- learn about the World Council of Churches' work to support Rio+20
- visit the People's Summit website