

A MELTING ARCTIC IS A MELTING FUTURE

Hope from Spiritual Traditions

■ **REVEREND HENRIK GRAPE**

World Council of Churches/Church of Sweden Climate Coordinator



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REVEREND HENRIK GRAPE is Officer on Sustainable Development, Church of Sweden and Coordinator of World Council of Churches Working Group on Climate Change. Rev. Grape worked for more than 16 years at the national level of the Church of Sweden on Environmental issues. He was a member of the drafting team for the Church of Sweden Bishops Letter on Climate Change, and a member of the drafting group of the Uppsala Interfaith Climate Manifesto 2008. Rev. Grape is a member of the Enabling Team of ECEN (European Christian Environmental Network) and Organizer of conference 2015 on Climate Change Indigenous people and faith communities in the Arctic. He has attended most of the UNFCCC Conference of the Party meetings since 2006.

In October of 2015, faith leaders and indigenous people from the Arctic region in Europe and North America gathered at Storforsen, Sweden. That meeting produced the Storforsen Appeal, which was a call from all the participants to the leaders of the world to make bold decisions in Paris later that year.¹ Since then the Paris agreement has been praised as a huge success, but it is a framework that needs to be filled with action and a societal transition.

In April of 2016 came the good news of the prompt ratification of the Paris agreement, but the more worrying part is that it is now jeopardized by political development in Western countries, where nationalism and populism seems to slow down the action for transformation that the world needs to avoid dangerous climate change.

If we think that climate change can be solved only by changing our energy system, which is an absolutely necessity, we are not going to succeed.

Climate change is not anymore about the future. It is already here. In the Arctic the temperature will rise more than the global average. A 2 degree Celsius rise globally might be 6 degrees in the Arctic. And the evidences that it is actually happening today are many. During Autumn 2016, the temperature in the Arctic was shockingly higher than we ever seen before. Some days with 20 degrees Celsius higher compared with the average temperature at this time of the year cannot be ignored.

The Arctic is often pictured as wide areas with snow, glaciers, ice, polar bears seals and spectacular views. This is true. Furthermore, the ice at the poles is a regulator for the world climate and a melting Arctic will have great impact on the planet.

1 The Sorforsen Appeal file:///knet.ad.svenskakyrkan.se/dfs01/Nationell_users/hengrape/Mina%20Dokument/Divest/Storforsen%20Appeal%20-%20Future%20of%20Life%20in%20the%20Arctic.pdf

But the Arctic is also a home for indigenous people that have a long history of making their living from the seasons with snow and ice. A stable climate is a precondition for their possibilities to make a living. The people of the Arctic, and especially the indigenous people, are some of the first to experience a world with serious impact of climate change. They should also be listened to by the rest of the world because they are warning us. Their voices are telling the rest of the world that we have to make a systematic change to avoid the most dangerous risk for next generation. Climate change is already very visible in the Arctic and the witnesses of indigenous people of the Arctic are many.

The answers to the climate threat are not only politics and technology; it is in its deepest sense a spiritual insight of the interdependency that is pivotal to humanity and other forms of life.

When church leaders and indigenous people met in Sápmi territory in Storforsen, Sweden, we collected stories from the circumpolar district about the climatic changes that were observed and it was very compelling. All the testimonies about what was observed became a litany: a litany that very well corresponded with the scientific narrative about what is happening in the circumpolar district. It was clear that both traditional knowledge keepers and scientists are describing the changes that are occurring.

A melting Arctic is a melting future for the entire world and the voice from the indigenous of the Arctic as well as the indigenous of the rest of the world must be heard. The suffering of the land is clearly connected with the effects on traditional livelihoods, the mental health of the people, and the identity and wellbeing of all who live there. And as the Storforsen Appeal says:

“People of the North are witnessing these changes. Their stories are a testimony of the relationship between humanity, land and the Creator. The ancestors and Indigenous Peoples bear witness to a worldview, spiritual relationships with the land, animals, water, and the Creator, and traditional practices. We believe these are indispensable resources for addressing climate change.”

From the witnesses and the scientific data the conviction is strong that the power of change lies in the spiritual traditions. It lies in spiritual traditions and the relations of a spiritual origin to the land, the living animals and to the Creator. The answers to the climate threat are not only politics and technology; it is in its deepest sense a spiritual insight: an insight of the interdependency that is pivotal to humanity and other forms of life. We are depending on ecosystems as well as cooperation between humans and between life manifested in a multitude ways.

To be church in the Arctic is to be open and inclusive to the spirituality of the indigenous people. There is richness in the insights and the understanding of the Creation that is a gift to the world to share and to reach another understanding of the richness, the fragility and the richness of the region.

To understand all land, all of the cosmos as sacred and a sacrament infused with meaning, makes it clear that all human beings are called to be responsible caretakers, or as formulated from the Orthodox tradition, we are all called to a priestly vocation. The traditions in the Arctic stress the interconnectedness and the solidarity between humanity and the living Earth. This is not a passive viewing, a romanticized attitude to the Nature. It is more about an incentive to action. The Storforsen appeal says

“It is our hope that we can change and make peace with each other and with the creation. The spiritual resources and traditional knowledge of the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic can serve to overcome the climate challenge we are all facing today. Our spiritual traditions and ancestral sources tell us human life is open to the possibility of transformation. The wisdom of the elders tells us that by forging good relationships with the Creator, each

other and with nature, we enhance our capacity for peace, transformation and reconciliation.”

The climate challenge is about making peace with each other and with the Creation. This is the very core of the climate discussion that too often is left out. If we think that climate change can be solved only by changing our energy system, which is an absolutely necessity, we are not going to succeed.

This is the reason why faith communities play a central part to the transformation that is needed to avoid the more dystopian visions of the future. The reference to spiritual traditions and ancestral sources as a momentum for transformation is a gift to a world that so easily get stuck in a mindset that are driven by fear instead of trust, by the fear of losing what there is instead of leaving for a better and more sustainable world.

This is hope in action-- not in passive contemplation. Our hope is not rooted in prognosis; it has its origin in the transcendent.

Today we need more than ever to build trust between people of the world if we are going to have a chance to overcome the climate challenge and all other challenges that is formulated in the 17 Sustainable Goals. This is the call from the Arctic and from indigenous people of the world: building trust and creating relationships with the Earth and each other.

The Storforsen Appeal closes with an affirmation of the urgency of the situation, but also the spiritually rooted hope that we can change our ways on our pilgrimage for justice and peace.

“Creation is alive with God and with the Spirit. Life is precious. The future of seven generations is at stake. Therefore we also ask faith communities and people everywhere to rededicate themselves to stand in solidarity and support the peoples in the North, who are now already survivors and leaders in responding to climate change.”

This is a genuine contribution from the Arctic to the global threat we are facing as humanity today. To stress that Creation is alive with God and the Spirit and how precious life is, is a serious way of affirming the richness and fullness of being gifted with the precious gift of life. This is hope in action-- not in passive contemplation. Our hope is not rooted in prognosis, it has its origin in the transcendent. This is the gift from the people of the Arctic in our common work and struggle for a more sustainable, peaceful and just future. This is the pilgrimage of our time in which we need all spiritual traditions to come together and share if we are going to change the world.



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