



Statement of the Secretariat of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE)

**Energy emergency:
COMECE is calling for solidarity ahead of the winter**

The Bishops of COMECE have expressed their *"deep sadness at the horrific human suffering inflicted on our brothers and sisters in Ukraine by the brutal military aggression initiated by the Russian authorities"*. At their 2022 Autumn Plenary Assembly, they reiterated a heartfelt appeal *"to the aggressors, immediately to suspend the hostilities, and to all parties to open themselves up to negotiation of 'serious proposals' for a just peace, to work towards a solution to the conflict, which respects international law and the territorial integrity of Ukraine"*ⁱ.

Russia's war on Ukraine is having important consequences on the population in the EU and beyond. The overdependence on oil and gas imports from one supplier has allowed the 'weaponisation' of energy supplies by Russia, which has reinforced energy insecurity in Europe. As a result, the soaring energy prices are affecting society as a whole, while hitting particularly hard the most vulnerable.

Against this background, we welcome the continuous commitment of European and national policy-makers to put forward initiatives aimed at ensuring access to affordable, secure and sustainable energy and mitigating the impact of high electricity prices on persons, families and businesses. We acknowledge that the current situation is complex and makes balanced considerations necessary, taking into account social, economic, ecological and geopolitical aspects in view of an ethically responsible approach. Despite the pressing emergency, we must not lose sight of the long-term objectives of a just and sustainable energy transition. While finding a fair balance between these considerations is a political task, we wish to offer decision-makers some principles for orientation from the perspective of the Catholic Church:

- **Universal destination of goods:** The natural right to the common use of all the goods of Creation for the benefit of all, current and future generations, is the *"first*

*principle of the whole ethical and social order*ⁱⁱ. Respecting the right to private property and its social function for the common good, the State must ensure that energy is supplied, secure and sufficient, for all. In particular *“the state is obliged to provide regulatory frameworks, or supply companies in the public sector, so as to ensure that the function of energy supply as a common good shall be maintained”*ⁱⁱⁱ. Furthermore, it is necessary to improve the public responsibility of the energy sector, by a fair distribution of energy resources, avoiding a monopolization by any State, interest group or company, to the detriment of poor people and countries who often pay the price of political mismanagement and speculation.^{iv}

- **The preferential option for the poor** is not only a priority in the life of charity of every Christian, but also a social responsibility^v: *“When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours”*^{vi}. Considering the current energy crisis and its impact on life, health and human dignity, energy should be managed in a just way so that everyone has access to affordable energy. *“No energy policy is acceptable that fails to deal adequately with basic needs.”*^{vii}
- **Justice and peace**: Justice enabling integral human development is a prerequisite for peace. The correct management of energy thus becomes a key factor for both justice and peace. The misuse of energy as a tool of geopolitical coercion that we are currently witnessing, should prompt the international community to find institutional means for an effective, inclusive and equitable *global governance of energy*^{viii}, since *“a real and lasting peace will only be possible on a global ethic of solidarity and cooperation”*^{ix}.

Today, as winter is approaching in Europe, we call on all who bear responsibility in public life, not to abandon families and persons who are vulnerable or victims of socio-economic discrimination, unable to cope with soaring inflation and to pay for heating or electricity. This reinforces social inequalities and the energy divide. Facilities providing healthcare and other essential services are facing difficult challenges. Many people were already severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the energy crisis adds to their economic and mental burden. While some companies are going bankrupt, others are laying off workers, and many people are no longer able to cope with the rising cost of living.

The agri-food sector is also suffering terribly from rising energy prices and the scarcity of fertilisers. We cannot risk a disruption in supply and must ensure continuity of production cycles and our ability to provide basic food for all at affordable prices.^x Our solidarity is required with regard to poorer nations in the world

suffering from increased levels of food insecurity and extreme poverty, resulting from high commodity prices due to the ripple effects of the war on Ukraine^{xi}.

In this context, **we call for collective solidarity**. We are mutually connected and dependent on each other, not only as individual persons and families, but also as societies and as an international community. Each of us is called to contribute to the concrete expression of this solidarity.

To the policy-makers at the European level, we appeal, in particular, to:

- **Ensure accessible and affordable energy** to the most affected people through temporary mitigation measures and a fair distribution of resources.
- **Prioritise energy efficiency and identify targets where responsible reduction of energy consumption is possible.** Increased research into alternative forms of energy should be encouraged, while domestic energy consumption can and should be reduced.^{xii} The long-term objective of replacing fossil fuels must be pursued, but "*until greater progress is made in developing widely accessible sources of renewable energy, it is legitimate to choose the less harmful alternative or to find short-term solutions*".^{xiii}
- While strengthening EU's own energy resilience, **pursue responsible and value-based bi- and multilateral energy partnerships, and lay the foundations of a new global energy system** that is governed by the principles of justice, solidarity, inclusive participation and sustainable development.

ⁱ EU Bishops appeal for peace in Ukraine and in the whole of Europe, Autumn 2022 COMECE Plenary Assembly, 12-14 October 2022

ⁱⁱ Compendium of the CST, 172, cf John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42: AAS 80 (1988), 573.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Committed to God's Creation. Suggestions for a Sustainable Approach to Energy, Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, 16.5.2011, p.17,18.

^{iv} cf. *Energy, Justice and Peace*, publication of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2014.

^v Compendium of the CST, 182, cf John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42 (1988), 572- 573

^{vi} Compendium of the CST, 184, Saint Grégoire le Grand, *Regula pastoralis*, 3, 21: PL 77, 87

^{vii} A statement by the committee on social development and world peace. United States Catholic Conference, April 2, 1981, Washington

^{viii} *Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in veritate*, 49

^{ix} *Pope Francis, Fratelli tutti*, 127

^x In August 2022, the price of bread in the EU was on average 18% higher than in August last year, and will likely continue to rise, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20220919-1>

^{xi} The UN estimate a global increase of 47 million acutely hungry and up to 71 million people pushed into poverty since the Russian military invasion of Ukraine.

^{xii} Pope Benedict XVI, encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate* no 49.

^{xiii} Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, 165.