

# 2nd Opinion: I refuse to forget the Christians advocating for climate action

June 7, 2017

While many U.S. evangelicals applaud President Trump's decision to pull America out of the global climate agreement, I instead think of the Christians I met at the 2015 Paris climate talks who are from nations where global warming is not a future hypothesis but a current reality.



Brian Kaylor I particularly recall my time visiting and praying with Bishop Efraim Tendero, secretary-general of the World Evangelical Alliance. A passionate advocate for climate justice and action, he served on the Philippines' official delegation to the talks. He did not recall meeting another clergy member among the 196 country delegations. Yet he remained hopeful for interfaith engagement in the push for climate justice.

We need more people like Tendero—an evangelical minister pushing politicians to do the right thing and take significant actions to reduce the devastating impacts of climate change. And he knows these impacts because he has seen them in his own land. Although the Philippines is

among the least carbon-emitting nations, it is one of the nations most vulnerable to climate change.

### **“Moral issue”**

Across our globe, climate change already is resulting in rising sea levels, droughts, more violent storms, the spread of diseases and greater food insecurity. I heard concerns about this firsthand from Christians at the Paris talks who hailed from Jamaica, India, Sri Lanka and other lands, in addition to the Philippines.

A church silent to such sufferings is a church failing to live out the mandates of Jesus.

During one of several panel discussions led by faith leaders on the site of the Paris climate talks, Tendaro noted Christians value “the preservation of human life.” Thus, he emphasized, saving lives from climate devastation “is a moral issue.”

Tendaro pushes back against evangelicals who wonder why he cares about climate change. He said he even had been asked if he reads Scriptures, to which he retorted, “Yes, I read the Scriptures, and that is why I do this.”

“There’s a moral dimension to climate change,” he argued in Paris. “Jesus came that we may have life in its fullness, but we’re destroying this life that God has given us.”

### **Heed the call**

Tendaro also made another important point I heard echoed by other religious and political leaders in Paris: “People will listen more to their religious leader than to their scientist.”

He urged North American evangelicals to heed the call to speak out for those vulnerable to the consequences of climate change. If we are to have a

prayer of reducing climate change, it will require clergy prophetically addressing the biblical calls to care for creation, love our neighbors and work for justice.

Those of us in the United States need to listen to the stories of our global neighbors suffering from climate change caused by our wasteful consumption levels. And we need to develop a more vibrant theology that prioritizes creation care over consumption and love of neighbor over economic gain.

The reality of climate change is clear; our political resolve and our theological commitments are in doubt.

Jesus warned we could not serve two masters, and yet we keep prioritizing Mammon.

Now our rich—not-so-young—ruler preaches a false gospel of prosperity and urges us to renege on our moral commitments to other peoples. Will we listen to theologians like Tendero or politicians like Trump? How we answer that question will help determine the fate of many of our global neighbors.

*Brian Kaylor is a Baptist pastor, editor and president of [Word & Way](#) and associate director of Churchnet. He served as an observer during the 2015 U.N. climate talks. [Religion News Service](#) distributed his column.*