

Vatican-appointed panel warns of climate change

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VATICAN CITY (AP) — A Vatican-appointed panel of scientists has reported what climate change experts have been warning for years: the Earth is getting warmer, glaciers are melting, and urgent measures are necessary to stem the damage.

The scientists called for urgent reduction of carbon dioxide emissions and reductions in methane and other pollutants that warm the air, and for improved observation of mountain glaciers to better track their changes.

The Pontifical Academy of Sciences, a Vatican advisory panel, hosted a conference last month on the causes and consequences of retreating mountain glaciers. Its final report, dated May 5 and signed by independent glaciologists, climate scientists, meteorologists and chemists, was posted on the Vatican website Tuesday.

"We appeal to all nations to develop and implement, without delay, effective and fair policies to reduce the causes and impacts of climate change on communities and ecosystems, including mountain glaciers and their watersheds, aware that we all live in the same home," the report said.

"We are committed to ensuring that all inhabitants of this planet receive their daily bread, fresh air to breathe and clean water to drink as we are aware that, if we want justice and peace, we must protect the habitat that sustains us."

The Vatican spokesman, Rev. Federico Lombardi, said the document was "important" but is not a piece of the church's key teachings and merely reflects the conclusions of the independent scientists involved.

That said, he noted that it was a "significant scientific contribution" to the concerns that Pope Benedict XVI has voiced in both his encyclicals and public statements.

Benedict has been dubbed the "green pope" for his environmental concerns: In 2008, the Vatican installed photovoltaic cells on the roof of its main auditorium. A year later it installed a solar cooling unit for its main cafeteria. The Vatican has also joined a reforestation project aimed at offsetting its CO2 emissions.

Brenda Ekwurzel, the assistant director of climate research and analysis at the Union of Concerned Scientists, a Cambridge, Massachusetts-based think tank, said the report was a "straightforward recap of major known findings about glaciers," that was penned by high-caliber scientists. She highlighted one significant point in the report's title and throughout; it refers to the new geologic "era" of human modification of the world, known as "Anthropocene."

"Perhaps the reality that the Vatican recognizes this fact, as the report indicates, is worth mentioning to those who remain unconvinced of human-induced climate change," Ekwurzel said in an email.

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