

Climate Change Apartheid – A new crisis

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Recognised for the reception of a Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his role as a unifying leader figure in the non-violent campaign to resolve the problem of apartheid in South Africa. Also known for the use of his high profile to campaign for the oppressed. The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu was more than that. He was a firm believer in Climate Justice.

Climate justice is a relatively new term that acknowledges climate change can have differing social, economic, public health, and other adverse impacts on underprivileged populations. Advocates for climate justice such as Tutu are to date striving to have these inequities addressed head-on through long-term mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Since he was a firm human rights defender. He coined the term Climate Change Apartheid in the 2007/08 UN Human Development Report titled ‘Fighting climate change: Human solidarity in a divided world’. This in

discussion of the wedge between developed nations and the developing world. The developed nations having the means to cope with a warming climate while the developing have no resource to cope with the effects of climate change.

In one of his blogs titled “We fought apartheid. Now climate change is our global enemy”, Tutu highlighted that; “reducing our carbon footprint is not just a technical scientific necessity; it has also emerged as the human rights challenge of our time.

While global emissions have risen unchecked, real-world impacts have taken hold in earnest. The most devastating effects of climate change – deadly storms, heat waves, droughts, rising food prices and the advent of climate refugees – are being visited on the world’s poor.

Those who have no involvement in creating the problem are the most affected, while those with the capacity to arrest the slide dither. Africans, who emit far less carbon than the people of any other continent, will pay the steepest price. It is a deep injustice.”

He viewed the term adaptation in relation to climate change as a euphemism for social injustice on a global scale. While the citizens of the rich world are protected from harm, the poor, the vulnerable and the hungry are exposed to the harsh reality of climate change in their everyday lives. Put bluntly, the world’s poor are being harmed through a problem that is not of their making. The footprint of the Malawian farmer or the Haitian slum dweller barely registers in the Earth’s atmosphere.

Philip Alston, the former United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, revealed in the report that; “Perversely, the richest people, who have the greatest capacity to adapt and are responsible for and have benefited from the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions, will be the best placed to cope with climate change, while the poorest, who have contributed the least to emissions and have the least capacity to react, will be the most harmed.

The poorest half of the world’s population – 3.5 billion people – is responsible for just 10 per cent of carbon emissions, while the richest 10 per cent are responsible for a full half. A person in the wealthiest 1 per

cent uses 175 times more carbon than one in the bottom 10 per cent.³⁸ 15. In addition to the economic benefits rich countries have already reaped from fossil fuels, one recent study found that climate change itself has already worsened global inequality and that the gap in per capita income between the richest and poorest countries is 25 percentage points larger than it would be without climate change.

Dealing with climate apartheid? Tutu urged humankind emphasising that; “In the end the only solution to climate change is urgent mitigation. But we can—and must—work together to ensure that the climate change happening now does not throw human development into reverse gear. That is why I call on the leaders of the rich world to bring adaptation to climate change to the heart of the international poverty agenda—and to do it now, before it is too late.”

There is no shortage of alarm bells ringing over climate change and the injustices surrounding it, but they seem to have remained largely unheard so far. With that; It is time to heed the sound of the alarm bells.