

“I urge you all to work together – an appeal for the voiceless”

Submission to Public Inquiry into proposed surface mine at Highthorn, May/June 2017

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More than a decade ago, Archbishop Desmond Tutu urged us all *“to work together to find sustainable solutions to avert a catastrophe that will exacerbate human suffering to a magnitude that perhaps the world has not yet seen.”*¹ The ‘catastrophe’ to which we were referring was that threatened by climate change.

‘Working together’ was emphasised by Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the U.N., who said that, *“We all have a role to play. We have a responsibility as individuals, the private sector, foundations, universities, and more. So, let’s band together...”*²

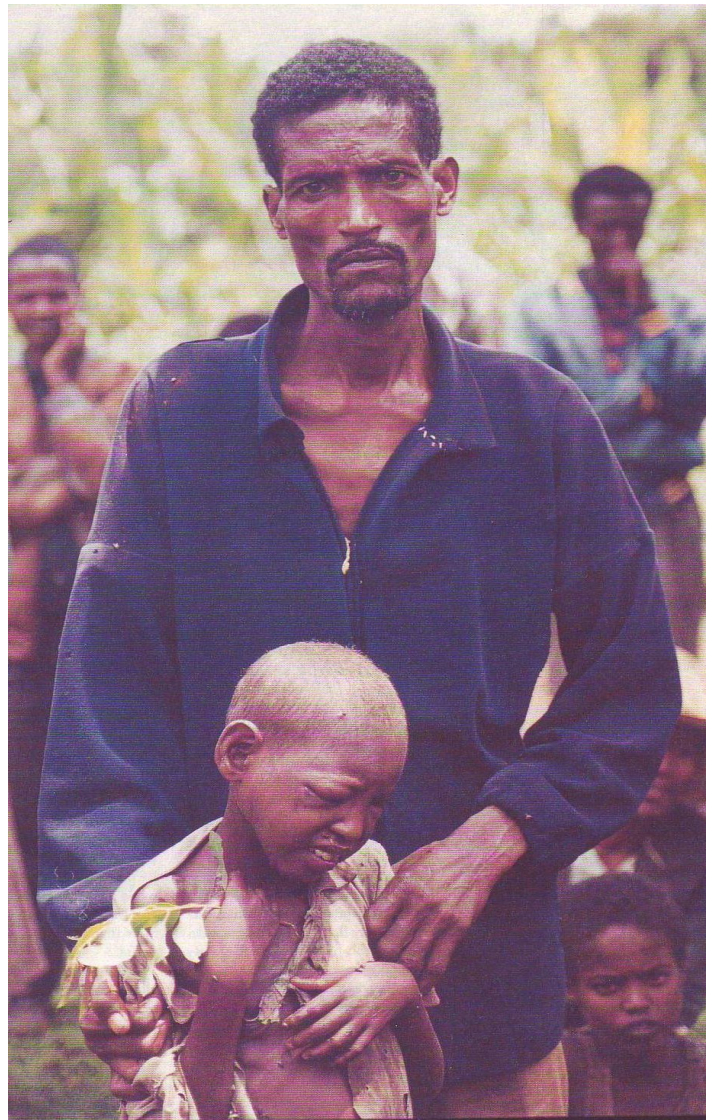
Similarly, the Foreword to the ‘Synthesis Report’ of the 5th Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)³, released on 2nd November 2014, called for *“the urgent attention of both policymakers and citizens of the world to tackle this challenge.”*

Archbishop Tutu referred to ‘human suffering’, and rarely has the suffering of the world’s poor been more strikingly portrayed than by the image of Tamirat Abayie and his daughter Zewdie, in the year 2000.⁴

“Zewdie Abayie’s eyes were swollen shut through malnutrition and her delicate skin was no longer able to mask the skeleton beneath. Brushing away flies from her face with a small twig, the little girl stood quietly as, in 2000, her father explained how three years of crop failure in Ethiopia had left his family facing starvation. Pitiably, she attempted a smile for the cameraman.” (Adapted from text by Keith Ewing; image, courtesy Jim Loring, Tearfund)

[I interrupted my formal verbal presentation at this point and turning first to the Inspector and then to the representatives of Banks Mining and the County Council, said, *“I hope that you, Sir, and all the parties to this Inquiry, will forgive me if I ask you to look carefully at the image of this poor little girl and ponder upon it well in the future, as I have done ever since I first saw it.”*]

I am aware that concern for human suffering is not been restricted to faith leaders such as Archbishop Tutu and our aid agencies. However, it came like a bolt from the blue when, after I retired from my salaried academic post at the end of 2005, I read the text of a letter from Lord Robert May, then President of the Royal Society, Britain’s National Academy of Sciences, to the G8 leaders, which stated that:



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"Today [29th November, 2005], a scientific paper ⁵ has been published in the journal Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society which concludes that climate change, largely caused by a rise in greenhouse gas emissions from human activities, may already be responsible for an increase in drought conditions, and hence for a rise in the risk of famine, in eastern Africa where millions are already at risk of hunger." Note "may already be responsible for an increase in drought."

The letter referred specifically to *"a drop in rainfall since 1996 in Ethiopia and neighbouring countries"*.

Earlier that year, on 7th June, the National Academies' of the G8 nations, plus those of Brazil, China and India, put out an unprecedented joint statement ⁶ calling for international action on climate change, saying that, *"It is clear that many of the world's poorest people are likely to suffer the most from climate change."* That assertion has been repeated time and time again in subsequent years and it was echoed ⁷ in connection with the 'Synthesis Report' of the IPCC in 2014, according to which *"many risks constitute particular challenges for the least developed countries and vulnerable communities, given their limited ability to cope."*

As Professor Rajendra K. Pachauri, Chair of the IPCC put it, *"Many of those most vulnerable to climate change have contributed and [do] contribute little to greenhouse gas emissions."*

"Climate change, largely caused by a rise in greenhouse gas emissions from human activities, may already be responsible for an increase in drought conditions, and hence for a rise in the risk of famine, in eastern Africa where millions are already at risk of hunger," stated Lord May in 2005. Fast forward twelve years, and climate change has helped to create a situation in which, *"hunger on a massive scale is looming across East Africa..."*, according to the Disasters' Emergency Committee ⁸.

"Drought and conflict have left 16 million people on the brink of starvation and in urgent need of food, water and medical treatment... People are already dying in South Sudan and Somalia... Ethiopia is battling a new wave of drought... Women, children and older people are suffering the most; more than 800,000 children under five are severely malnourished. Without immediate treatment, they are at risk of starving to death."

And just what have we done to restrain our emissions in the mean time? To say, *"Not nearly enough"*, would be generous to a fault!

I could easily expand my treatment of the threat of climate-fueled drought and famine. The Royal Society warned that Africa would probably be hit harder than most other parts of the world, in its report, *"Food crops in a changing climate"* ⁹, in 2005. Indeed, changes resulting from climate change *"have potentially disastrous consequences for a continent which relies so heavily on rain-fed agriculture - the threat of climate change to an already vulnerable Africa cannot be underestimated"*, said Professor Brian Hoskins, a Fellow of the Royal Society. And, as Oxford's Dr Richard Washington put it so simply, *"When the rains fail [in Africa], people die."*

However, this is but one component of the 'catastrophe' feared by Archbishop Tutu. *"Most climate scientists believe we are heading for a 4 degree hotter world this century that will threaten global health almost beyond our imagination."* ¹⁰ (Prof Anthony Costello, the world's leading authority on the threat of climate change to global health) [See also, *"Health and climate change: policy responses to protect public health"*, ¹¹ by Nick Watts and 44 others (!), 2015.]

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According to Lord Nicholas Stern, formerly the UK Government's chief advisor on climate change and one of the world's most distinguished economists, the world would face, *"massive rises in sea level, whole areas devastated by hurricanes and others turned into uninhabitable desert, forcing hundreds of millions, possible billions, of [the poorest and most vulnerable] people to leave their homelands."*¹²

Sea level rise resulting from global warming is regarded as one of the most significant *"key risks"*, globally, leading to a *"Risk of severe ill-health and disrupted livelihoods resulting from storm surges, sea level rise and coastal flooding"* (IPCC, Synthesis Report³, p.65). Mean sea level rise by 2100 is predicted to be 0.5-1.0m (3m by 2300), depending on greenhouse gas emissions, etc., in the meantime. (IPCC, Synthesis Report³, Fig 2.2.c, p.61) *"In Bangladesh alone, a 0.5 metre sea-level rise would place about six million people at risk of flooding"* according to the Joint Science Academies' statement⁶ and a one metre rise would displace ten million¹³ - globally, the number is an order of magnitude greater. Furthermore, *"A 10- to more than 100-fold increase in the frequency of floods in many places would result from a 0.5 m rise in sea level."* (IPCC, Synthesis Report³, Legend for Fig. 2.5.c, p.66). Small wonder then, the anguish of Veena Khaleque, Country Director for the aid agency, Practical Action, in Bangladesh, who says, *"I find it almost impossible to imagine how the poor of Bangladesh will cope"*.¹⁴

We live at, *"an unprecedented moment in human history"*, stated Lord May, in a press release¹⁵ by the Royal Society dated 7th June 2005, entitled *"Clear science demands prompt action on climate change say G8 science academies"*. He continued, *"Our leaders face a stark choice: act now to tackle climate change or let future generations face the price of their inaction. Never before have we faced such a global threat. And if we do not begin effective action now it will be much harder to stop the runaway train as it continues to gather momentum."* *"The longer we procrastinate, the more difficult the task of tackling climate change becomes,"* he said.

"The longer we procrastinate, the more difficult the task becomes" - and here we, twelve years later, deliberating about the creation of a new coal mine – it simply beggars belief, given that *"coal is the most carbon-polluting, by far, of all the commonly available types of fuels"*¹⁶ (Professor Sir John Houghton, Fellow of the Royal Society). There is a better way: as Archbishop Tutu has stated, *"People of conscience need to break their ties with corporations financing the injustice of climate change."*¹⁶

We recognise the huge contribution to the development of our economy made by coal, and honour the communities who secured it for us, at such hardship and cost to themselves. But that was then, and this is now. Now we need to send a clear signal to industry and finance, and to the wider world, that we are making a decisive break with our polluting past and embarking on a journey towards a sustainable future. Unless we do so, we face *"severe, widespread, and irreversible impacts globally,"* according to the IPCC (Synthesis Report³, p.64). As William Wilberforce put it, in his first speech to Parliament on the slave trade, in 1789, *"Having heard all of this, you may choose to look away, but you can never say again that you did not know."*

We are both morally and (I believe) legally bound to make this break, given that the UK Government has pledged to *"pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase...to 1.5 degrees Celsius"*. (Paris Agreement¹⁸) - an enormously challenging goal, which allows us no latitude whatever for 'carbon indulgence'. Such outcomes are achievable only *"if everyone fully supports them and helps bring their ambitious goals to life with real action"*¹⁹, and by doing so, we may be able to bequeath to all the world's children, and their children, *"a safe and prosperous world"*.

"Not too long from now," said Nobel Peace Prize winner, Al Gore, at the International Climate Conference in Bali, in 2007²⁰, *"when our children assess what we and our generation did here in this world, they will ask one of two questions."*

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"They'll look back, and either they will ask, '*What were you thinking? Didn't you hear the IPCC four times unanimously warning the world to act? Didn't you see the glaciers melting? Didn't you see the deserts growing, and the droughts deepening, and the crops drying up? Didn't you pay attention to what was going on? Didn't you care? What were you thinking?*'"

"Or they'll ask a second question, one that I'd much prefer them to ask. I want them to look back on this time, and ask: '*How did you find the moral courage to successfully address a crisis that so many said was impossible? How were you able to start the process that unleashed the moral imagination of humankind to see ourselves as a single, global civilisation?*'"

"And when they ask that question, I want you to tell them that you saw it as a privilege to be alive at a moment when a relatively small group of people could control the destiny of all generations to come.

"Instead of shaking our heads at the difficulty of this task, and saying '*Woe is us, this is impossible, how can we do this?*', we ought to feel a sense of joy that we have work that is worth doing that is so important to the future of all humankind. We ought to feel a sense of exhilaration that we are the people alive at a moment in history when we can make all the difference."

So help us God!

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