

# Canadian among Catholics pushing for climate deal at UN conference

Standing on the outside looking in as the world's environment ministers and their armies of technocrats hammered out the rulebook for Paris Agreement on climate change, Canadian Josianne Gauthier wished there was an injection of urgency onto the agenda.

"We need more emotion in all of this, more heart and soul," she told Canadian Catholic News on a call from Poland. "Get out of your head, get out of your numbers and do what's right. This is a moral issue."

Gauthier is the secretary general of CIDSE, the Brussels-based alliance of 18 Catholic development agencies in North America and Europe. CIDSE is just one small part of a sprawling gathering of civil society organizations which showed up in the coal-mining town of Katowice, Poland. There, between Dec. 3 and 14, negotiating teams from 197 nations are convening for the UN conference which some are calling Paris 2.0.

Along with hundreds of other organizations, CIDSE was outside the official conference trying to influence what is said and done by official national delegations on the inside.

In 2015, Pope Francis played a similar role. That year he released his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, in part to influence the outcome of the United Nations climate negotiations in Paris. The Paris Agreement set a goal of keeping the rise in the planetary temperature well below two degrees by 2050, and if possible below 1.5 degrees.

Last month the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that Earth will hit the critical 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial temperatures by 2030.



**Josianne Gauthier**

“Yes, we still have time. We can do this,” said Gauthier. “But it’s serious... We need to imagine another way to live.”

While the Paris Agreement set a global goal, it didn’t lay out a roadmap for how to get there. The roadmap is what is supposed to come out of this year’s meetings. But the ecologically minded NGOs in Katowice are aware the politics of climate change are complicated.

Catholic development agencies in the rich countries of the West are taking on a new role, educating Catholics at home about their responsibility for climate change, said Gauthier

“We have to work a lot more on the ground with communities in our own countries. Some of our members, like Development and Peace, have campaigns on the ground and have worked with people in their own countries. It’s no longer about working with people in the north to support people in the south. It’s working with people in the north so that they change their own lives,” Gauthier said.

Development and Peace has tried to open a dialogue that’s a little more nuanced than the cartoon image of latte-drinking downtown elites trying to order rural Canadians to give up their pick-up trucks and their jobs in the oil patch.

“We have asked Canadians to change their behaviour, to question how they eat and how they move around,” said Development and Peace advocacy and research officer Elana Wright. “Let’s make a radical change. Our planet is at stake.”

But that shouldn’t be perceived as a threat to people’s livelihoods, she said. “We always talk about a just transition. It is possible to ensure that workers, families, are still able to make a living as we transition to different energy

sources.”

Development and Peace heard from its rural members in 2014 when it launched its “Create a Climate of Change” campaign.

“We told people, ‘Do what you can do and let’s go further than we think we can go,’” said Wright. “We have to change our individual behaviours, but also at the community level, the municipal level. And we’ve seen some cities really take leadership.”

Rather than forcing change on people, the Pope’s vision is based on conversion to the Gospel, said Gauthier.

“The Pope is a very bold person. I mean, he’s doing some really incredible risk-taking, questioning how we live, challenging us,” she said.

“It is scary for a lot of people, because it’s questioning what we think is the truth. But I think it brings us back to the core message. What the Pope is just trying to do is say, ‘Look, we’ve got to look to the poor and look to the excluded and listen to them.’”