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Headline: Not only a social but also a moral problem

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Pope Francis' recent visit to the Philippines served as an inspiration and a reawakening of faith. Countless testimonials bring to light how he invigorated and touched the lives of millions of Filipinos who braved heavy rains and tuned in for his homilies and speeches.

Central to the Pope's message is caring for the poor. The highlight was his trip to Tacloban City, which underscored his desire to be in solidarity with the survivors of Super typhoon "Yolanda" who continue to experience social injustice. They have since become "victims" of climate change and have suffered mental anguish from losing loved ones and their homes, not to mention being traumatized by such a climate catastrophe that is now considered a new normal.

Climate change has become a social and moral problem that affects everyone, especially the poor. It's one crucial reason why the Pope is calling on the "moral imperative" to ensure social and climate justice for present and future generations.

Aboard the plane en route to the Philippines, the Pope declared that "human activity is the main cause of climate change," and that "man has slapped nature in the face." His words are a powerful indictment of how we risk destroying God's creation.

In his homily in Rizal Park, and in an undelivered speech at a youth forum at the University of Santo Tomas, he tackled head on the importance of protecting the environment. He emphasized how countries like the Philippines will be "seriously affected by climate change," especially the economically poor and marginalized. His call to action on the climate is not only groundbreaking, it also provokes us to think and act with urgency—to do something about our climate situation while we still can.

It is admirable that the Pope, known to be a champion of the poor, is taking on another global injustice and is going above and beyond the secular realm to convince and persuade the 1.2 billion Catholics in the world, faith and religious leaders, even political leaders, to act "courageously" and urgently on climate change.

His unique role as a religious leader who is also vocal about the environment comes at a crucial time: when countries will make an attempt at concluding 20 years of negotiations with a commitment to reduce heat-trapping emissions. He hopes that his forthcoming encyclical on climate change can influence climate talks to be sponsored by the United Nations in Paris later this year.

During his visit, the Pope commended Filipinos for their strength, faith and resilience in the face of natural disasters. He was right to say that we are courageous and resourceful survivors, not mere victims. However, let us not lose sight of who the perpetrators are: the big polluters—the fossil fuel industry—that have profited from pumping carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere and contributed to social exclusion. They must be held accountable for the climate crisis that besets countries like ours.

Thus far, the morally bankrupt fossil fuel industry remains invincible, hiding behind the cloak of its vast wealth and power. It has bankrolled governments and injected fear into the political arena,

thereby constraining it from embracing truly sustainable development. In order for us to create an enabling environment for change, we must break away from the tight grip of the fossil fuel industry.

More than a moral question, it is an ethical imperative for world leaders to now make climate justice a reality, hold the big polluters accountable, and set us on a low-carbon pathway for our children to have a sustainable future.

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