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## Pope Francis To World Leaders: Consumerism Represents ‘Constant Assault’ On The Environment

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Pope Francis had choice words for countries meeting at the G20 leadership conference this weekend, reminding the world leaders to keep the natural environment in mind as they discuss economic issues.

The Pope sent a letter to Australia Prime Minister Tony Abbott, who's chairing the conference of G20 nations, a group of major developed and emerging economies that includes the U.S., China and the E.U. In it, the Pope warned the countries against unchecked consumerism, as well as reminding the leaders of the people in their own countries who are unemployed and who can't get enough to eat.

“There are constant assaults on the natural environment, the result of unbridled consumerism, and this will have serious consequences for the world economy,” the Pope wrote in his letter.

The Pope’s warning has been backed up by numerous reports. One study, published in 2004 by the Worldwatch Institute, chronicled the impact that rising levels of consumerism in developing and developed nations has on the environment: in Asia, for instance, a shift to an increasingly car-focused culture as has drastically increased local pollution. Worldwatch Director of Publications Gary Gardner told National Geographic in 2004 that “most of the environmental issues we see today can be linked to consumption.” Worldwatch again warned of the dangers of unchecked consumerism in 2010, finding that, in 2006, the world consumed 28 percent more goods and services than it did in 1996.

“In essence, the whole point of the report is to say that for humanity to thrive long into the future we’ll need to transform our cultures intentionally and proactively away from consumerism towards sustainability,” Worldwatch’s Erik Assadourian told CNN in 2010.

The Pope is also right in his assertion that “assaults on the natural environment” will impact the world economy. In fact, they already are — a 2012 report found that climate change is already contributing to a global decline in GDP. Extreme weather is a major contributor to this economic decline: in 2013, the world experienced a record number of billion-dollar disasters, including costly floods in Calgary and Colorado and Super Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines and Vietnam. Climate change has also made farming a less reliable source of income in many regions as rainfall and other weather patterns become unpredictable, a shift that affects local economies, especially in developing countries where farming is one of the few opportunities for work.

The G20 Leader’s Summit is meeting this weekend in Brisbane, Australia, a part of the country that’s currently in the midst of a major heatwave. Prime Minister Abbott has long been known for his anti-climate and anti-environmental policies, and said this week that jobs and economic growth — not climate change — were the main priorities for the G20 Summit. That statement comes in spite of the fact that the recently- announced climate deal between the U.S. and China will mean that the climate will likely come up during the meeting.

Though a major economic summit presents a timely opportunity for the Pope to warn about the dangers of consumerism, this isn’t the first time Pope Francis has warned about consumerism or has appealed to civilization to take better care of the environment. In 2013, the Pope called consumerism a “poison” that young people are particularly susceptible to. In May, Pope Francis said that Christians should “safeguard Creation,” warning that if humanity destroys the planet, humans themselves will ultimately be destroyed.

“Creation is not a property, which we can rule over at will; or, even less, is the property of only a few: Creation is a gift, it is a wonderful gift that God has given us, so that we care for it and we use it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude,”

Francis said.

Francis also said in July that “exploiting the Earth” by destroying forests — especially Amazonian rainforests — is a sin.