Dear brothers and sisters,

Welcome to the beautiful setting that has brought us together for a few days to talk about very topical issues that are both a concern and a worry for the future of our humanity. The fact that we have left aside our activities, which for many of us are just getting busy after summer holidays, to meet here in this center, shows the concern we have regarding the issues of climate change and the use of nuclear weapons, areas that will guide our discussions over the next few days.

Primarily, we salute the effort and courage of the administrations of our two North American entities, the USA and Canada, in agreeing to hold this conference at the suggestion of the members of our Migration, Justice and Peace Commissions. The organizing and preparatory committee, set up jointly by the two administrations, spared no effort in terms of time and resources to bring to fruition this project, which some considered a utopian dream, so that we could meet here today and put our finger on the thorny issues that threaten the survival of humanity. This is an opportunity for **Fr.** **Vien Nguyen** and myself, respectively Provincial Superior of the USA and Regional Superior of Canada, to express our deep gratitude to the organizers for the hard work you have done. A special thank you to you dear confreres and collaborators, Bob Bossie, Jack Kurps, Peter McKenna, Ushindi Kambale, Paul Hoang, Lili Ooi, Joe Tyrell and Cathy Bertrand for the time you have devoted to preparing this meeting.

We would also like to say a special thank you to all the speakers who will enrich us by sharing their knowledge of the two areas, climate change and nuclear proliferation.

Why do religious people and their collaborators tackle such subjects? The answer to this question does not lie far from us. First, it is because consecrated persons are also citizens of the world and share the same universe with the other elements of creation. Preaching the Gospel or living the ideal of religious life does not absolve us from having our finger on the pulse of society, especially when our humanity and the life it contains are threatened. Moreover, when we analyze Pope Francis' Encyclical “*Laudato Si*” in depth, we realize that concerns of this nature exclude no one and should leave no one indifferent, because it is the future of everyone that is at stake. As Dehonian religious, acting on the twin threats of climate change and nuclear proliferation is a way of expressing and living out our charism in relation to the major challenges of our time and our society. Through this Dehonian conference, we want to make ourselves sensitive and dare to take action to alert others to the dangers we face if nothing is done. That is why, rather than aligning ourselves and falling into complicit silence, we want, at our own level, to get involved in this whirlwind.

Our action can therefore lead to an awakening of conscience and sound the alarm to prevent evil from taking root, and our inaction from one day being judged harshly by posterity. Addressing these issues, which very few people have the courage to tackle, are for us Priests of the Sacred Heart, through our various social commitments, an effort to improve the quality of our own lives and those of our brothers and sisters with whom we share humanity, not forgetting our Mother Nature. We therefore want to have this precious time to equip ourselves and become resource people through whom change can take place.

Without any pretense of holding the solution to these thorny issues, we will explore these questions with faith and hope, so that our silence is not complicit. The aim of this conference will be to help us approach and view the issues of climate change and nuclear proliferation with new eyes, no longer as mere observers but as artisans committed to the common cause of saving our common home, as Pope Francis put it in his encyclical *Laudato Si.*

I don't want to put the cart before the horse by anticipating the content of the subjects that will be presented to us by experts in the two fields that will occupy us over the next few days, but I will nevertheless take the liberty of making an optimistic projection of this meeting, whose major orientations and resolutions will be in line with the teaching of Pope Francis. The pope is inviting us to adopt the central message of his Encyclical *Laudato Si* on integral ecology. Our main concern is to develop an ecological awareness and sensitivity aimed at protecting the environment in which we live and combat the threats to our ecosystem. The aim is to bring about a profound transformation in our relationship with the world, with others and with God, by seeking ways to adopt a more responsible lifestyle. This is the way forward, the sine qua non condition for the salvation of planet earth and those who inhabit it.

My dear brothers and sisters, our gathering here in Mississippi is not on the world stage, like the big meetings of heads of state or the United Nations, but believe me, if each of us commits to taking concrete action with the tools we will have at the end of this meeting, we will have an impact on the world, each from our own living and working environment. Like the leaven of the Gospel, even though it is such a small quantity that makes the dough rise, we will change the lives of our brothers and sisters by influencing the choices they make to preserve our common heritage, this common home that we want to leave to posterity.

I wish every one of you rich exchanges and fruitful work during this Dehonian conference. Thank you for your attention.

Gustave Lulendo, SCJ

Regional Superior of Canada