



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development
Office of Domestic Social Development

GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE
February 2010

The protection of the environment, of resources and of the climate obliges all international leaders to act jointly and to show a readiness to work in good faith, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet.

--Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 50

ISSUE

Climate change is at the center of the environmental challenges facing our nation and the world. Our response to global climate change raises fundamental questions of morality and justice, fairness and shared sacrifice. People living in poverty—both at home and abroad—contribute least to climate change but they are likely to suffer its worst consequences with few resources to adapt and respond. The impacts of climate change - including increased temperatures, rising sea levels, and changes in rainfall that contribute to more frequent and severe floods and droughts - are making the lives of the world's poorest even more precarious. Urgent action that both addresses the growing impact of climate change and acts to protect the poor and vulnerable is needed.

BACKGROUND

Climate change policies aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and addressing the consequences of climate change will create changes not only in our environment but also in our society and economy. The good news is that well-designed climate change policies can both help address climate change and protect the most poor and vulnerable. Most policy and legislative approaches to address climate change will generate substantial revenue by putting a price on carbon emissions. The United States bishops insist that a significant portion of these resources be used to minimize the disproportionate burdens felt by those least able to cope with the impacts of climate change and policies to address it.

The U.S. Congress has been working on climate legislation, and the House of Representatives has already passed *The American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009*. Key senators, such as Harry Reid (D-NV), John Kerry (D-MA), Joseph Lieberman (I-CT), and Lindsey Graham (R-SC), are currently negotiating elements of a climate bill. While the timing of climate legislation is uncertain, it is important that we continue to urge key senators and members of the committees with jurisdiction over the bill (Environment and Public Works, Foreign Relations, Energy and Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Finance) to include provisions that protect poor and vulnerable people. This is especially important in the Senate, because the climate bill passed by the House of Representatives does not include robust international adaptation funding.

At the international level, global climate change negotiations held in December 2009 in Copenhagen included a commitment by rich nations to provide \$100 billion by 2020 to help poor countries adapt to and mitigate climate change. The Obama Administration has signaled strong support for this effort.

USCCB POSITION

The Catholic Church brings a distinct perspective to the debate about climate change by lifting up the moral dimensions of this issue and the needs of the most vulnerable among us. Pope Benedict XVI continues his leadership on climate change and environmental justice, highlighting these themes in his recent encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, and in his 2010 World Day of Peace message, *If You Want to*

Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation. In Pope Benedict XVI's World Day of Peace Message, our Holy Father declares there is an urgent moral need for solidarity with creation and those affected by climate change. The pope insists, "To protect the environment, and to safeguard natural resources and the climate, there is a need to act in accordance with clearly-defined rules ... while at the same time taking into due account the solidarity we owe to those living in the poorer areas of our world and to future generations" (no. 7).

The USCCB is carrying out these directions and the policies and priorities adopted in the bishops' statement, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*. Our efforts promote prudent action to address the growing impact of global climate change and pursue the common good in a very polarized debate. The bishops' primary concern within the current public debate is to place the needs of the poor and vulnerable at the center of climate legislation. Poor people cannot be made to bear an undue burden of the impacts of climate change or the global adjustments needed to address it.

The bishops and other leaders of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment outlined in a letter to Congress broad agreement on four key principles:

- The principle of prudence requires us to act to protect the common good by addressing climate change.
- The consequences of climate change will be borne by the world's most vulnerable people and inaction will only worsen their suffering.
- Policies addressing global climate change should enhance rather than diminish the economic situation of people in poverty.
- Policies should help vulnerable populations here and abroad adapt to climate impacts and actively participate in these efforts.

Protecting God's creation and "the least of these" requires urgent, wise and bold action. The USCCB supports strong leadership by the United States and policies that protect poor and vulnerable people, at home and abroad, from bearing the most severe impacts of climate change and from the human and economic costs of any proposed legislation to respond to climate change.

ACTION NEEDED

Contact your senators and urge greater U.S. leadership to address climate change, especially its disproportionate impact on poor and vulnerable people here and abroad.

SUPPORT a clear priority for the poor and vulnerable in climate change legislation by:

1. Providing the same level of funding as provided in the House bill to fully protect low-income individuals and families in the United States from the effects of increased energy costs resulting from climate legislation, and
2. Significantly increasing the funding for international adaptation programs. At a minimum, starting in 2012, \$3.5 billion must be allocated to international adaptation programs and increased rapidly to \$7 billion annually by 2020, so that people living in poverty around the world can be protected from the effects of climate change.

Take the St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor at the Catholic Climate Covenant web site: <http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/>

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