



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

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May 29, 2014

Gina McCarthy
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator McCarthy:

I write on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to address the Environmental Protection Agency's efforts to develop standards to reduce carbon pollution from existing power plants and thereby mitigate climate change. The USCCB recognizes the importance of finding means to reduce carbon pollution. These standards should protect the health and welfare of all people, especially children, the elderly, as well as poor and vulnerable communities, from harmful pollution emitted from power plants and from the impacts of climate change.

As bishops and people of faith, we do not speak as experts on carbon pollution or on the technical remedies to address climate change. We are pastors in a faith tradition that teaches, as Pope Francis recently stated, "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."

The best evidence indicates that power plants are the largest stationary source of carbon emissions in the United States, and a major contributor to climate change. Power plants have often been located near low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. Air pollution from these plants contributes to respiratory problems, especially in the young and the elderly.

Efforts to address climate change must take into account creation and its relationship to "the least of these" (Matthew 25). Too frequently we observe the damaging impacts from climate-related events in the United States and across the globe, particularly on poor and vulnerable communities. Beyond the regulations, the United States should exercise leadership for a globally negotiated climate change agreement.

We know that the communities served by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) are already experiencing the tragic consequences of climate change. Increasingly limited access to water, reduced crop yields, more widespread disease, increased frequency and intensity of droughts and storms, as well as conflict over declining resources – all these are making the lives of the world's poorest people even more precarious.

Therefore, as we wrote in our statement, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, "Action to mitigate global climate change must be built upon a foundation of social and economic justice."

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As the EPA takes steps to address climate change and reduce carbon pollution, we ask you to be guided by the following principles taken from our statement and the teaching of Pope Francis:

- **Respect for Human Life and Dignity.** The regulations and all efforts to reduce the impact of climate change should respect human life and dignity, especially that of the poorest and most vulnerable: from children in the womb to the elderly. In particular, these measures must protect poor and vulnerable communities and persons from the health impacts of climate change, including exposure to climate-sensitive diseases, heat waves and diminished air quality.
- **Prudence on Behalf of the Common Good.** We believe that wise action to address climate change is required *now* to protect the common good for present and future generations.
- **Priority for the Poor and Vulnerable.** The consequences of climate change will be borne by the world's most vulnerable people; inaction will worsen their suffering.
- **Social and Economic Justice.** Workers should be protected from negative effects on the workforce resulting from the new standards and should receive assistance to mitigate impacts on their livelihoods and families. Any additional costs that such standards may generate must be distributed fairly, without undue burden on the poor.
- **Care for creation.** We are called to be responsible stewards of the earth and to use the gifts we have been given to protect human life and dignity, now and in the future.
- **Participation.** Local communities should have a voice in shaping these standards based on their local impact, especially low-income communities whose voice is often not heard. It is in accord with their dignity that they participate in this process.

We appreciate your commitment to address this urgent global challenge confronting the human family. The USCCB stands ready to work with you, the Administration, and members of Congress to ensure that measures necessary to address climate change both care for creation and protect “the least of these.”

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Wenski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left.

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Archbishop of Miami
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development