



## Department of Social Development and World Peace Office of International Justice and Peace

### Background on Global Climate Change February 2007

*At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both "the human environment" and the natural environment.*

--U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, June 2001

#### **THE CURRENT POLITICAL DEBATE IN THE UNITED STATES**

The politics of global climate change is fueled by divergent perceptions of the economic, social, and political costs. While fewer still question the basic science of climate change, there is a debate about proposed solutions and their associated costs. Some fear that moving too fast will cripple economic growth across the globe. Others fear that waiting too long will necessitate more drastic measures later. Poorer countries blame richer ones for creating the problem in the first place. Richer countries spar over goals and procedures and increasingly want the poorer countries to fully participate.

During the coming year, global climate change is likely to gain greater traction for several reasons: (1) the next International Panel on Climate Change—the official body established by the UN and the World Meteorological Association to review the science of climate change—will issue its next report in the spring of 2007; (2) the Supreme Court is expected to rule on whether the EPA has the authority and the obligation to regulate the emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> under the Clean Air Act; and (3) the new leadership of the Congress is talking about doing more on the issue.

Congress is likely to focus on several key issues: (1) *voluntary* versus *mandatory* limits on greenhouse gas emissions; (2) focusing on *mitigation* (preventive measures) or *adaptation* (better disaster planning); and (3) addressing *selected* sectors that are responsible for emitting higher levels of harmful emissions, like transportation and automobile fuel efficiency, or *all* sectors, including energy production and agriculture. Since the plight of the poor and the relationship between poverty and climate change are not likely to be principal concerns in the legislative process, USCCB will make this concern primary in reviewing and commenting upon legislation.

For the first time, the House is likely to take up the issue. The Speaker is establishing a special Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming and has instructed relevant Committee chairs to prepare legislation for floor consideration by June. In the Senate, where most of the action has previously taken place, there is a lot of activity. Senators Lieberman (I-CT), McCain (R-AZ), Boxer (D-CA), Feinstein (D-CA) and Bingaman (D-NM) have introduced legislative proposals or draft bills. In both chambers, no action or votes are expected until summer. Since there is not yet a consensus on any particular approach, it will not be easy to craft the compromises necessary to address the issues outlined above. There will most likely be a number of hearings this year, but analysts do not expect a comprehensive bill to emerge immediately. Some suggest that at this stage of debate various aspects of climate change will be dealt with in a series of separate bills, rather than a more sweeping or comprehensive bill.

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## **USCCB POLICY POSITION**

In their June 2001 statement, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, the bishops note: “Although debate continues about the extent and impact of this warming, it could be quite serious ... Consequently, it seems prudent not only to continue to research and monitor this phenomenon, but to take steps now to mitigate possible negative effects in the future.” The statement also calls for a less polarized public debate and more focus on the global common good. The bishops call for thoughtful dialogue that relies on the political virtue of prudence. Prudence is not simply a cautious and safe approach, but rather a thoughtful, deliberate, and reasoned basis for taking or avoiding action to achieve a moral good.

Specifically, USCCB supports strong U.S. leadership and advocates for much greater assistance to the developing nations, particularly in providing economic development aid to enable poorer countries to adopt state-of-the-art technology. The centerpiece of USCCB’s efforts on climate change will be to focus attention on the needs of the poor as they will suffer disproportionately from the potential impacts of climate change. The bishops also call for greater emphasis on energy conservation, the development of renewable and clean energy resources, and assistance to industries and workers displaced during the transition to new and more benign energy production.

The bishops’ primary concern in the current public debate is that the needs of poor people and developing nations be addressed. These countries have a right to economic development that reduces poverty. Poorer countries cannot be made to bear an undue burden of the global adjustments needed to address climate change. USCCB supports legislative provisions to assist the poor and adversely affected communities in mitigating the effects of global warming in the U.S. and developing countries. These measures must include additional foreign aid for sustainable development as well as technological assistance in adopting more benign and efficient energy production. On March 13, 2006, Bishop Wenski wrote to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources expressing these concerns in preparation for the Committee’s Climate Conference held on April 4, 2006.

## **ACTION REQUESTED**

Contact your Senators and Congressional representatives to urge greater U.S. leadership to address climate change and especially its disproportionate impact on the poor and vulnerable people here and abroad. We also strongly urge you to assist your bishop in sending a cover letter and a copy of the bishops’ statement, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, to your members in both the House and Senate.

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