



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

GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE
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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

ISSUE

Climate change is at the center of the environmental challenges facing our nation and the world. Our response to global climate change raised 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

The public debate around climate change has evolved for the most part from a question of "whether climate change exists" and how severe the consequences will be to the question of "what to do about it." While fewer question the reality of climate change, there is a vigorous debate about proposed solutions to address climate change and their human and economic costs. It is true that 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 act to 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. This includes low-income communities in the United States, people living in poverty within poorer nations, vulnerable populations including the elderly and children, and workers within older industries.

In the last Congress, the USCCB and our coalition partners, focused on shaping policies and establishing precedents on climate change and the poor. The USCCB and its Catholic and interfaith partners had a real impact in shaping several provisions within the Lieberman-Warner Climate Security Act of 2008, S. 3036, that protect the poor and vulnerable at home and abroad from suffering the worst consequences of climate change and any undue burdens of climate change legislation. These efforts helped lay a foundation for future climate change legislation.

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. The USCCB is deeply involved in several aspects of the climate change issue. 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.

In their June 2001 statement, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, the bishops note: "Action to mitigate global climate change must be built upon a foundation of social and economic justice that does not put the poor at greater risk or place disproportionate and unfair burdens on developing nations."

Bishop Skylstad and other leaders of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment have sent a letter to Congress that outlined broad agreement on four key principles:

- Global climate change is real; the principle of prudence requires us to act to protect the common good.
- 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 U.S. leadership 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 Members of Congress 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 and adequate funding to:

1. Ensure that low-income individuals and working families are protected from energy-related price increases, including utility, transportation and other associated costs and economic burdens resulting from climate change policies.
2. Create new decent climate-friendly jobs targeted especially to those most in need and assist workers who lose their jobs as a result of new climate regulations and other policies.
3. Assist the most vulnerable developing countries and communities in the U.S. who have contributed the least to climate change in increasing their resilience, adapting to climate change impacts, and developing sustainable low-carbon economies. International funding for adaptation and mitigation must be in addition to other overseas relief and development commitments.

Join the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change's new campaign on climate justice at http://www.catholicsandclimatechange.org/coalition_activities/covenant.html.

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