



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

**GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE**  
February 2015

*“I would therefore like us all to make the serious commitment to respect and care for creation, to pay attention to every person, to combat the culture of waste and of throwing out so as to foster a culture of solidarity and encounter.”*

--Pope Francis, General Audience, June 5 2013

### **BACKGROUND**

Pope Francis has spoken about his desire to address the issue of climate change in his encyclical on the environment later this year. Climate change is at the center of the environmental challenges facing the global community. The effects of climate change are borne by the most vulnerable people, whether at home or around the world. 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. As Catholics our faith calls us to care for *all* of God’s creation, especially the ‘least of these’ (Mt 25:40).

Greenhouse gases are a major contributor to climate change. The EPA Administrator has determined that current and projected concentrations of greenhouse gases endanger public health and the welfare of future generations. Power plants are the largest stationary source of carbon pollution in the United States: about one third of all greenhouse gas pollution in the U.S. comes from the generation of electricity by power plants.

On June 2, the EPA, as directed by the president, proposed the first national standards to reduce carbon pollution from currently operating power plants. These standards create a federal-state partnership, with the EPA setting state goals for reducing carbon dioxide emissions and states deciding how best to meet these goals. Nationwide, by 2030, these standards could reduce carbon dioxide emissions from the power sector by 30 percent.

In the United States, power plants have often been located near low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. Air pollution from these plants contributes to health problems, especially in the young and the elderly. These standards would significantly reduce carbon pollution from power plants; they would also reduce particle pollution, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen oxides, which have been linked to important human and environmental health problems.

Around the world, these effects are even more severe. Catholic Relief Services is helping the most vulnerable people respond to increasing floods, droughts, food and water insecurity, and conflict over declining resources. All these are making the lives of the world’s poorest people even more precarious. These standards are a vital first step to protecting the world’s most vulnerable people and allow the United States to exercise critical leadership necessary for achieving a global agreement.

### **USCCB POSITION**

The U.S. bishops promote prudent action predicated on justice to address the growing impact of global climate change. As the bishops note in *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.”

In the absence of a legislative agenda to address climate change, regulatory measures are the only real opportunity to meet this challenge.

In a July 30 letter to the EPA and in testimony at an EPA public hearing, Archbishop Thomas Wenski and Bishop Richard Pates, Chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and former Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace, expressed support for a national standard to reduce carbon pollution and offered moral principles to guide the EPA and states as they take steps to reduce carbon pollution. These principles include: care for creation, promotion of the common good, respect for the human person, and a priority for those who are poor and vulnerable. The bishops also recognized the important flexibility given to states in determining how best to meet these goals.

U.S. action to reduce carbon emissions has global significance. As the bishops wrote: “These standards demonstrate the commitment of the United States to address climate change and create an opportunity for the United States to exercise the critical leadership necessary for achieving a globally negotiated climate change agreement.”

## **ACTION**

National standards to reduce carbon pollution from power plants represent an important opportunity to protect the health and welfare of all people, especially children, the elderly and poor and vulnerable communities.

Multiple efforts are anticipated in Congress to block the EPA from developing and implementing carbon pollution standards, which the president has directed the EPA to finalize by June 2015. Options available to Congress include passing a Congressional Review Act, which would overturn the rule, or using the appropriations process to block the EPA from using funds to develop or implement the regulations.

During this Congress, remain engaged in the public debate on climate change. As Archbishop Wenski and Bishop Pates urged in their July 30 letter:

- “Call upon our leaders in government and industry to act responsibly, justly and rapidly to implement such a standard.”
- Insist that, “Any additional costs that such standards may generate must be distributed fairly, without undue burden on the poor.”

## **RESOURCES**

- Pope Francis, General Audience, June 5, 2013  
[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130605\\_udienza-generale.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130605_udienza-generale.html)
- USCCB Environmental Justice Program Page: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/environmental-justice-program/>
- *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good* at: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/global-climate-change-a-plea-for-dialogue-prudence-and-the-common-good.cfm>
- Resources from the Catholic Climate Covenant at: <http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/>

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