



## Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

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February 21, 2013

The Honorable Henry Waxman  
Co-Chair  
Bicameral Task Force on Climate Change  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse  
Co-Chair  
Bicameral Task Force on Climate Change  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight, Senate Committee  
Environment and Public Works

Dear Representative Waxman and Senator Whitehouse:

At the request of Cardinal Dolan and as chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, I am responding to your letter dated January 31, 2013. We thank you for your leadership to address climate change and for the opportunity to share our suggestions for effective measures to address the moral and environmental challenges of climate change with this Bicameral Task Force.

Effective measures to address climate change are urgent and necessary. Evidence continues to point toward significant damaging impacts from climate related events in the United States, across the globe, and particularly for the poorest developing countries. Some poor nations and small island states already experience these impacts as a matter of survival for their people and cultures.<sup>1</sup>

People living in poverty in communities served by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) already suffer the tragic consequences of climate change. Increasingly limited access to water, reduced crop yields, more widespread disease, and increased frequency and intensity of droughts and storms all make the lives of the world's poorest people even more precarious. CRS, which supports projects in almost 100 countries, already assists many communities to adapt to the consequences of climate change.

In signaling the moral dimensions of this issue and advocating for the needs of the most vulnerable, the Catholic Church brings a distinct perspective to this urgent matter. Throughout his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI demonstrated strong leadership on climate change in his teaching office and through efforts to reduce the Vatican's own carbon footprint. In his 2010 World Day of Peace Message, *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*, he pointed to the 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 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is guided by the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI and the principles articulated in the USCCB's statement, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*. This statement notes that, "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." As pastors and people of faith, we are not experts on the science, technical remedies and particular provisions of

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<sup>1</sup> National Religious Partnership for the Environment Letter to President Barack H. Obama, January 29, 2013. <http://bit.ly/YEiNOV>, Accessed February 21, 2013.

legislation or regulatory measures to address climate change. Our efforts seek to link care for creation and care for “the least of these.” As is noted in the bishops’ statement, “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.”

For the USCCB, a fundamental moral measure of any policy to address climate change is how it affects the poor, in our country and around the world. Well-designed policies can both reduce the severity of climate change and protect the most vulnerable. The USCCB supports strong leadership by the United States in enacting policies that protect poor and vulnerable people from bearing the impacts of climate change and from the human and economic costs of any proposed legislation to respond to climate change.

The USCCB asks the U.S. Congress and the federal government to consider the following principles as they shape policies and measures to address climate change:

- Prudence requires us to act to protect the common good by addressing climate change at home and abroad.
- The consequences of climate change will be borne by the world’s most vulnerable people and inaction will worsen their suffering.
- Policies addressing global climate change should enhance rather than diminish the economic situation of people in poverty.
- Policies should create new resources to assist poor and adversely affected communities to adapt and respond to the effects of global climate change in the U.S. and in vulnerable developing countries.
- Policies to address climate change should include measures to protect poor and vulnerable communities from the health impacts of climate change, including increased exposure to climate-sensitive diseases, heat waves and diminished air quality.
- Participation by local affected communities in shaping policy responses to address climate change and programs for adapting to climate change is essential.
- Technology should be made available to people in the most vulnerable developing countries to help them adapt to the effects of climate change (adaptation) and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation).

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

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire  
Chairman

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