

Letter from National Conferences of Catholic Bishops to the Leaders of the G8 Nations

June 3, 2013

Hon. David Cameron
Prime Minister, United Kingdom
Hon. Stephen Joseph Harper
Prime Minister, Canada
Hon. François Hollande
President, French Republic
Hon. Angela Merkel
Chancellor, Federal Republic of Germany

Hon. Enrico Letta
President of the Council of Ministers,
Repubblica Italiana (Italian Republic)
Hon. Shinzō Abe
Prime Minister, Japan
Hon. Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin
President, Russian Federation
Hon. Barack Obama
President, United States of America

Dear Leaders of the Group of 8 Nations:

On behalf of the Catholic bishops' conferences in the G8 nations, we urge you to protect poor persons and assist developing countries at the upcoming G8 Summit in the United Kingdom.

Pope Francis, in his inaugural homily, committed himself to “open his arms to protect all of God’s people and embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important....” The G8 nations, as leaders in the world community, should do no less.

Your focus on agriculture and nutrition ahead of the G8 Meeting is timely. In a world that has made great strides in improving food production and distribution, far too many of God’s children still go to bed hungry or suffer from a lack of nutrition, a tragedy that has lifelong consequences for health and educational achievement. In particular, there is a need to strengthen assistance to African countries in order to improve local agriculture.

The G8’s attention to tax evasion, trade and transparency is equally timely. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory to pay taxes...” (No. 2240). It is a moral obligation for citizens to pay their fair share of taxes for the common good, including the good of poor and vulnerable communities, just as states also have an obligation to provide “a reasonable and fair application of taxes” with “precision and integrity in administering and distributing public resources” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, No. 355).

Trade and trade rules must serve the universal common good of the whole human family and the special needs of the most vulnerable nations. It is counterproductive to provide agricultural development assistance on the one hand and then to use unfair agricultural trade policies that harm the agricultural economics of poorer nations on the other.

The G8’s emphasis on transparency is critical. Human dignity demands truth, and democracy requires transparency. With more and better information, civil societies, including faith-based organizations, can hold their governments accountable and help insure that resources reduce poverty and improve the health of the whole society.

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In his Easter message, Pope Francis lamented: “Peace to the whole world, torn apart ... by the iniquitous exploitation of natural resources!” Sadly, the peoples of many nations that are blessed with an abundance of natural resources find themselves victims of a paradox that some refer to as the “resource curse.” Genuine transparency and participation can change the “resource curse” into a blessing.

In word and gesture, our Holy Father, Pope Francis, reminds all of us to act in ways that protect “the poorest, the weakest, the least important.”

By asking first how a given policy will affect the poor and the vulnerable, you can help assure that the common good of all is served. As a human family we are only as healthy as our weakest members.

We pray that your meeting will be blessed by a spirit of collaboration that enables you to take steps to improve nutrition, reduce hunger and poverty, and strengthen just tax, trade and transparency policies for the common good of all.

Sincerely yours,

Most Rev. Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster
President, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of
England and Wales

Seán Cardinal Brady
Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All
Ireland
President, Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference

Most Rev. Philip Tartaglia
Archbishop of Glasgow
President, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of
Scotland

Most Rev. Richard Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton
President, Canadian Conference of Catholic
Bishops

André Cardinal Vingt-Trois
Archbishop of Paris
President of the Bishops’ Conference of France
(Conférence des Évêques de France)

Most Rev. Robert Zollitsch
Archbishop of Freiburg
President of the German Bishops’ Conference
(Deutsche Bischofskonferenz)

Angelo Cardinal Bagnasco
Archbishop of Genoa
President, Episcopal Conference
of Italy

Most Rev. Leo Jun Ikenaga, S.J.
Archbishop of Osaka
President, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of
Japan

Most Rev. Paolo Pezzi, FSCB
Archbishop of Madre di Dio a Mosca
President, Conference of Catholic Bishops of the
Russian Federation

Timothy Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York
President, United States Conference of Catholic
Bishops

Reinhard Cardinal Marx
Archbishop of Munich and Freising
President, Commission of the Bishops’
Conferences of the European Community