



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

**GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE**  
February 2011

*The protection of the environment, of resources and of the climate obliges all international leaders to act jointly and to show a readiness to work in good faith, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet.*

--Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 50

**ISSUE**

Climate change is at the center of the environmental challenges facing our nation and the world. Our response to global climate change raises 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 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). Of particular concern to the Church is how climate change and the response to it will affect poor and vulnerable people here at home and around the world.

Protecting God's Creation and "the least of these" requires urgent, wise and bold action. Well-designed climate change policies can both help address climate change and protect the most vulnerable. Most comprehensive policy and legislative approaches to address climate change would 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.

Throughout the past year, USCCB and its Catholic and interfaith partners have worked to ensure that climate legislation prioritizes the needs of poor and vulnerable people by targeting necessary resources to 1) protect low-income people in our nation from energy-related price increases resulting from climate legislation and to 2) assist people living in poverty in the poorest developing nations in adapting to and easing the effects of global climate change. Although prospects for comprehensive climate legislation now appear slim, the efforts of the Bishops' Conference, our Catholic partners, and the Catholic community helped establish a framework and a starting point for the future.

At the international level, a Green Climate Fund was created at the global climate change negotiations held in December 2010 in Cancun and a commitment was affirmed by rich nations to provide \$100 billion by 2020 to help poor countries adapt to and mitigate climate change. It remains uncertain how the financing for this fund will be secured.

As climate impacts continue to be felt by people living in poverty around the world, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), through its international humanitarian relief and development programs, is helping the

most vulnerable communities in the developing world to respond to and prepare for the effects of climate change. CRS provides education and training to poor communities that reduce their vulnerability to climate impacts, such as floods, droughts and storms.

## **USCCB POSITION**

Pope Benedict XVI has continually emphasized the moral dimensions of climate change and our responsibility to care for creation. In his World Day of Peace Message, our Holy Father declares there is an 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 work of the Bishop’s Conference is guided by the leadership of Pope Benedict XVI and the bishops’ statement, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*. Our efforts promote prudent action 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.

The bishops and other leaders of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment outlined in a letter to Congress broad agreement on four key principles:

- The principle of prudence requires us to act to protect the common good by addressing climate change.
- 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.

The USCCB supports strong leadership by the United States and policies that protect poor and vulnerable people, at home and abroad, from 1) bearing the most severe impacts of climate change and from 2) the human and economic costs associated with legislation to respond to climate change.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

- 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.
- Learn more about how climate change is related to Global Poverty at the Catholics Confront Global Poverty Web site at [www.usccb.org/sdwp/globalpoverty](http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/globalpoverty) or [www.crs.org/globalpoverty](http://www.crs.org/globalpoverty).
- Take the St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor at the Catholic Climate Covenant web site: <http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/>
- Invite a Catholic Climate Ambassador to speak at your parish, school or in your diocese about a Catholic approach to climate change. To learn more contact [info@catholicsandclimatechange.org](mailto:info@catholicsandclimatechange.org).

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