

Joint CMSM-LCWR Resolution on Climate Change

Resolution

The Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious jointly resolve to bring our own experience and charisms to the current conversation on climate change and into action for justice; to seek concrete ways to curb environmental degradation, mitigate its impact on the poorest and most vulnerable people, and restore right relationships among all God's creation; and to foster a consciousness of care for God's creation among all our members, colleagues, institutions and those whom we serve.

Rationale

“And God saw everything that God had made, and behold, it was very good.” (Gn 1:31)

That the earth's climate is warming is no longer a matter of serious scientific controversy. This increase in temperature will likely have widespread consequences, from mass extinctions to devastating impacts on the lives and livelihoods of the poorest and most vulnerable human beings.

In a [recent article](#), Sean McDonagh, SSC, wrote:

“In theological terms this is a kairos moment, because the decisions taken by this generation will have huge consequences for future generations. If this generation fails to confront this issue, then no future generation will be able to undo the damage. Every human being and every creature in successive generations will suffer.”



Care for God's creation has become an urgent call for the present generation. This call can be heard:

- In the billions of poor who have no access to even the basic necessities to sustain life, such as clean air and water;
- In the massive investment in natural resource extraction around the world, that leaves development for the poorest scandalously absent;
- In the allure of lifestyles focused on increasing consumption that fail to truly nourish human life and community;
- In the global scramble for energy sources needed to maintain these lifestyles which can lead to conflict and war both between people and among nations.

The UN's [60th Annual DPI/NGO Conference Declaration on Climate Change Threats](#) says:

We affirm that climate change is mainly anthropogenic and is one of the most serious threats humanity and our environment have ever faced which if not addressed will cause:

- catastrophic effects to Earth's ecosystems, biodiversity and infrastructure;
- significantly reduced availability of food, water, energy and transport;
- massive migration of populations and the possible destruction of entire cultures and small island nations,

- significant damage to our economic, political, cultural, social and spiritual structures,
- increased local, national and international violence,
- significant psychological and emotional distress to individuals and communities
- irreversible harm to the lifestyles of indigenous peoples,
- increased spread of vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever, and
- negative impacts on human health and life expectancy.

Some Suggested Actions

- Seek concrete ways to curb environmental degradation and restore right relationships among all God's creation through both education and practical goal setting;
- Foster a consciousness of care for God's creation among all our members, colleagues, students and clients.
- Contemporize our vows in light of eco-spirituality and response to climate change.
- Reflect on the culture of consumption, especially in our own communities and corporate ministries and take concrete steps to reduce the carbon footprint:

Political and Societal

- Promote clean energy legislation
- Press candidates for office on their stance regarding climate change

Institutional and Communal

- Replace incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs
- Replace old appliances with Energy Star-rated ones
- Use programmable thermostats
- Purchase "green" products
- Purchase locally grown foods
- Purchase hybrid cars
- Install permeable surface driveways and parking areas

Personal

- Unplug cell phone chargers & other appliances when not in use
- Reduce personal use of hot water, electricity and heat
- Use public transportation whenever possible

Origin of the resolution: CMSM Justice and Peace Committee and LCWR Global Concerns Committee.

Appendix: Draft Resolution on Climate Change

The scientific consensus on global climate change and its cause in human activity, particularly the production of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, is by now beyond serious question. The IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] Report [Summary for Policy Makers](#) says:



Global atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide have increased markedly as a result of human activities since 1750 and now far exceed pre-industrial values determined from ice cores spanning many thousands of years. The global increases in carbon dioxide concentration are due primarily to fossil fuel use and land use change, while those of methane and nitrous oxide are primarily due to agriculture....

The understanding of anthropogenic warming and cooling influences on climate has improved since the TAR [Third Assessment Report], leading to *very high confidence* that the global average net effect of human activities since 1750 has been one of warming....

The moral dimensions of global climate change: [testimony](#) of

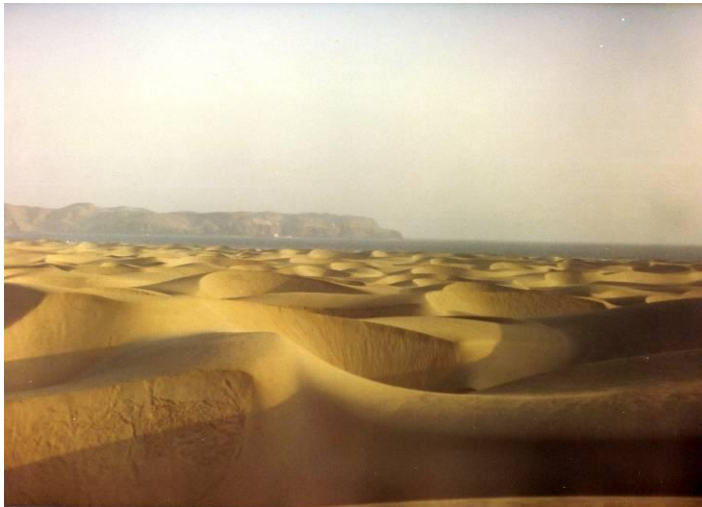
John Carr, Executive Director of the USCCB Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development, before the US Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works:

The USCCB's approach to climate change reflects these three central and traditional ideas: the virtue of prudence, the pursuit of the common good, and the duty to stand with and for the poor and vulnerable.

Prudence. This old fashioned virtue suggests that while we may not know everything about global climate change we know that something significant is occurring. We do not have to know everything to know that human activity is contributing to significant changes in the climate with serious consequences for both the planet and for people, especially those who are poor and vulnerable. Prudence requires wise action to address problems that will most likely only grow in magnitude and consequences....

Common Good. [T]he universal nature of climate change requires a concerted and persistent effort to identify and pursue the common good on climate with an attitude of "we are all in this together." This ethic of solidarity requires us to act to protect what we hold in common, not just to protect our own interests.

Our response to climate change should demonstrate our commitment to future generations. We believe solidarity also requires that the United States lead the way in addressing this issue and in addressing the disproportionate burdens of poorer countries and vulnerable people. This is not simply a technical question of drafting legislation and fashioning agreements, but rather, a deeper question of acting effectively on our moral obligations to the weak and vulnerable and how to share blessings and burdens in this area with justice....



A Priority for the Poor. While we are "in this together," some are contributing more to the problem while others bear more of the burdens of climate change and the efforts to address it. We should look at climate change from the "bottom-up" for how it touches the poor and vulnerable. Pope Benedict XVI, in his powerful encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, insists care for "the least of these" is a defining religious duty. It is also a moral and public responsibility. The same message was just given to G-8 leaders in an unprecedented letter from the Presidents of seven Catholic bishops' conferences on June 1....

[T]hose who contributed least to climate change will be affected the most; those who face the greatest threats will likely bear the greatest burdens and have the least capacity to cope or escape. We should come together to focus more on protecting the poor than protecting ourselves and promoting narrow agendas. Many cite concern for the poor on both sides of this issue. We hope that the poor will not be ignored or misused either in postponing action or choosing policies that harm the poor more than help them, or as excuses to not take action.

Sadly, the voices and presence of the poor and vulnerable are often missing in the debates and decisions on climate change. This Committee and the religious community have an obligation to help make sure their voices are heard, their needs addressed, and their burdens eased as our nation and the world address climate change...

This priority for the poor in climate policy cannot be a marginal concern, but rather must be a central measure of future choices. If we do not address climate change and global poverty together, we will fail both morally and practically. There can be no option for the earth without a preferential option for the poor. We cannot protect the earth and ignore the "wretched of the earth."

Resources

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC] Report, May 2007

<http://www.ipcc.ch/>

UN DPI-NGO final declaration on climate change [September 2007] http://www.wfuna.org/atf/cf/{84F00800-D85E-4952-9E61-D991E657A458}/Final_Declaration.pdf

The Future Is In Our Hands: Addressing The Leadership Challenge Of Climate Change - Msgr. Pietro Parolin, undersecretary for Relations with States of the Holy See, at the High-Level Event on Climate Change [September 2007] http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2007/documents/rc_seg-st_20070924_ipcc_en.html

Address of Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Vatican's permanent observer at the UN, on Climate Change [May 2007] <http://www.zenit.org/article-19608?l=english>

Religious and Moral Dimensions of Global Climate Change - John Carr, USCCB [June 2007]

<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/climate/june07FinalTestimony.pdf>

Faithful Stewards of God's Creation: A Catholic Resource for Environmental Justice and Climate Change

<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/climate/>

The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change

<http://www.catholicsandclimatechange.org/>

Climate Change Puts Earth at Risk - LCWR Resolution to Action [October 2007]

<http://www.lcwr.org/lcwrpublications/resolutionstoaction/RTA10-07.pdf>

Climate change, one of the most serious moral issues of our times – Sean McDonagh, SSC

http://cmsm.org/CMSM_Alert/JulAug07/

American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment

<http://www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org/index.php>

The Earth Charter

<http://www.earthcharter.org>

Developments: One World A Million Stories

<http://www.developments.org.uk>

Climate Change 101: Understanding and Responding to Global Climate Change

<http://www.pewclimate.org>