

CLIMATE CHANGE AND GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

Toward a Sustainable Future

In LAUDATO SI', or Praise Be, Pope Francis' much anticipated encyclical on the environment, we are called to action at every level—individual, regional and global—to redefine our relationship with nature. Through this pastoral letter, Pope Francis reveals climate change to be a multidimensional problem with serious social and economic implications. Though we must all do our part, Pope Francis explicitly calls on policy and decision-makers to institute policies—including at a global level—which reduce the emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, ultimately leading to a low carbon economy.¹ For such policies to become a reality, the world requires frank and open dialogue, political will, innovation and sufficient financing.

Therefore, we appeal to the leaders of the United States to take the following steps:

- Exercise U.S. global leadership to achieve a legally binding, transparent and accountable global climate change treaty, preserving our natural world for future generations.
- Ensure proactive and constructive engagement across government branches to ratify the treaty.
- Commit to the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) target of 26–28 percent, accelerating efforts where possible to meet a 2020 timeframe.
- Develop a clear roadmap to achieve the 26–28 percent commitment, working across government agencies and branches to enact morally appropriate policies, create economic incentives and secure sufficient financing for successful implementation.
- Fulfill, and seek to exceed, the \$3 billion pledge to the Green Climate Fund and, for purposes of enhanced coherence and coordination, support its establishment as the premier global climate finance institution.

WHY WE MUST ACT

In 2012, the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases had increased by 50 percent over 1990 levels, despite the world's first global climate treaty in 1992, which 154 countries signed.² Twenty-three years later, the apparent consequences of climate change have become increasingly visible and damaging. The poor and

¹ Encyclical Letter LAUDATO SI' of the Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home, June 18, 2015, Sections 25–26, p. 20–22

² Quirin Schiermeier, "The Kyoto Protocol: Hot Air," *Nature* 491, no. 7426 (2012), 656.

vulnerable people in developing countries who have contributed the least to the problem are suffering the most.

A MORAL DUTY TO ACT

The Catholic Church has long held that care for creation is a fundamental duty. At Catholic Relief Services (CRS), an agency of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), it is a guiding principle for our work. It calls for responsible use and care of the natural resources at humanity's disposition. As we enjoy the fruits of our natural world, we have a responsibility to protect it so that it continues to thrive, and so that future generations may also benefit. This moral call to protect nature is also a reflection of our deep dependence on it—for our food, the clothes we wear, the shelter we build.

In fulfilling our moral obligation to protect and preserve nature, we have a responsibility to apply all available knowledge to understand our relationship to it. Only in this way can we best exercise our stewardship. Science, though imperfect, contributes to our understanding of the interdependence of natural systems. Though science cannot determine moral norms, it provides us with essential information for sound decision-making. In considering climate change, the broad consensus among scientists is sufficient to inform us that our relationship with our natural world is drastically out of balance.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF INACTION

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has united thousands of scientists from 195 participating countries to study

CRS is supporting smallholder coffee farmers in Honduras and elsewhere to improve soil and water management. Improved practices can increase farmer resilience in the face of climate change.

Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS



climate science across the globe. These assessments have led the panel to conclude that **climate change is having disturbing effects on people and nature on all seven continents and the world's oceans.**³

The IPCC's recently issued *Fifth Assessment Report* makes a compelling case to curb emissions. Report data show that a failure to address the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere will cause a continued rise in temperature, likely to 4 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels.⁴ Such an increase is anticipated to have devastating effects, including inability of crops and animals to adapt, reduced availability of water, extinction of some species, reduced food production and catastrophic storms.

In the long run, climate change will have a profound effect on agriculture, forests, fishing and food security in general.⁵ Conflict over increasingly scarce water resources and arable land are plausible scenarios that could in turn undermine stability and potentially threaten human and political security.

Despite the compelling evidence, the world has continued on a treacherous and unsustainable path. A lack of global commitment has resulted in the failure to achieve the emissions reductions goals required to maintain a temperature increase of less than 2 degrees Celsius, as proposed in Rio in 1992.

OUR BEST OPPORTUNITY TO ACT

In December 2015, the world will have its best opportunity to act.

In 2014, before the U.N. Convention on Climate Change in Lima, Peru, Pope Francis called upon world leaders to act as a united global community, noting that “on climate change, there is a clear, definitive and ineluctable ethical imperative to act.”⁶ **As the world's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases and the world's premier economic and political power, the United States has a critical role to play in ensuring that an ambitious climate change treaty is achieved in Paris.**

The draft negotiating text developed in Lima calls for all nations to participate to the best of their ability in binding commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Paris Conference represents an unprecedented opportunity for several reasons:

- The consensus around “common but differentiated responsibilities” referenced above, bridges the North/South divide that hampered previous efforts, and removes what had been an obstacle to U.S. participation in the past.
- The U.S. and China have recently overcome long-standing differences to negotiate a joint agreement to address carbon mitigation. In November 2014, the two nations announced a joint plan in which China will halt

Without additional mitigation efforts beyond those in place today, and even with adaptation, warming by the end of the 21st century will lead to very high risk of severe, widespread and irreversible impacts globally (high confidence).

—Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014, Synthesis Report summary for Policymakers

3 “Organization,” Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, accessed June 4, 2015, <https://www.ipcc.ch/organization/organization.shtml>.

4 IPCC, *Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report; Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Geneva: IPCC, 2014), 6–19.

5 Ibid.

6 Message of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Occasion of the 20th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, December 11, 2014, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20141127_messaggio-lima-cop20.html

growth in emissions, and the U.S. will reduce emissions by 26–28 percent over 2005 levels.

- Collaborative action between the world’s top two greenhouse gas emitters could spur momentum toward a global accord.

U.S. political leaders need to leverage this unique moment to rally support and engagement from the international community around an ambitious, new and binding treaty.

The Obama administration can catalyze action by playing a highly visible role, convincing the international community of the United States’ commitment and ability to ratify the agreement, and encouraging ambitious commitments from other nations. U.S. leaders should understand that any perceived lack of commitment serves as a disincentive to other nations, which would undermine eventual contributions to the global good.

Domestically, the administration needs to exercise the same decisive leadership it demonstrated with China, in order to garner public support for the 26–28 percent in planned emissions reductions. The president must use the prestige and authority of his office to persuade the American public of the urgency, involving citizens in an active dialogue around climate change and the sustainability of the world’s future. The administration and Congress must work across party lines to chart a clear and transparent roadmap for implementation, establishing morally appropriate policies, creating economic incentives and ensuring sufficient financing to achieve a lower-carbon economy.

DELAY WILL INCREASE THE COSTS

We caution both the administration and Congress that delay will only increase the cost, both in terms of economics and human suffering. If the global rise in temperature exceeds the 2°C mark, we can expect increased difficulty in adaptation, limitations in the ability to reduce or remove emissions from the atmosphere, more frequent and costly emergency response, and an unacceptable level of human suffering.⁷

The Pontifical Academy of Sciences asserts, “Prudence and justice demand that we take note of these risks and act upon them *in time*, for the sake of all humanity, but especially for the weak, the vulnerable, and the future generations whose well-being depends on our generation’s actions” (italics added).⁸ Adaptation is important, but adaptation alone does not chart a sustainable path for people or the planet. Limitations on our ability to adapt require urgent investment in mitigation to prevent these consequences.

CRS recognizes that climate change remains controversial for some. We understand the limitations on the ability of climate models to predict with 100 percent accuracy the temperature increase and ensuing effects. However, for CRS and the Church, these limitations do not diminish the broad scientific consensus that the world is on an unsustainable path.

CRS is not allowed the luxury of inaction when we see in our daily work the effects of changing weather patterns on the poor and vulnerable we serve:

The effective struggle against global warming will only be possible with a responsible collective answer, that goes beyond particular interests and behavior and is developed free of political and economic pressures.

—Pope Francis,
December 11, 2014, in
a message to the U.N.
Convention on Climate
Change in Lima, Peru

⁷ IPCC, *Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report*, 7–19.

⁸ The Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, “Climate Change and the Common Good,” April 29, 2015.



- Farmers in the dry Sahel region of Africa have told us that the average rainy season has shortened from 5 months to 3.5 months, making it more difficult to grow the food they need.⁹
- In the Philippines, where communities have experience managing floods, people report that traditional coping measures are no longer sufficient given the severity and duration of recent storms.¹⁰
- In Central America, a CRS study shows that by the 2020's small farmers will face reduced yields of two principal food crops—maize and beans. Higher nighttime temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and degraded soil will all put pressure on farmers to shift geographic areas under cultivation—potentially increasing pressure on land and other resources.¹¹

Changing weather patterns, including erratic rainfall, prolonged drought and flooding, have left many farmers and pastoralists in highly precarious positions.

Photo by David Snyder/CRS

These changes are devastating for the nearly 1 billion people who already lack access to sufficient food. Left unchecked, climate change will ultimately threaten *global* food security.

WEALTHIER COUNTRIES MUST MOBILIZE GENEROUS FINANCING

Though we are working through our programming to help vulnerable communities adapt, our mission also compels us to identify and address the root causes of poverty and injustice. Global action to mitigate greenhouse

⁹ Catholic Relief Services, *Adapting to the Sahel's Changing Climate: Local Approaches; An Economic and Technical Feasibility Analysis of Adaptation Techniques in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali* (Baltimore: CRS, 2014), 47.

¹⁰ CRS, "Typhoon Preparedness: Disaster Risk Reduction Training Builds Resilience among Philippine Communities Vulnerable to Flooding Caused by Severe Tropical Cyclones" (Baltimore: CRS, 2012), 1.

¹¹ CRS, International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), and the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, *Tortillas on the Roaster Summary Report: Central American Maize-Bean Systems and the Changing Climate* (Baltimore: CRS, 2012).

gas emissions and set the world on a more sustainable course is ultimately the best and only long-term solution.

However, an ambitious international climate change treaty must also be supported with the necessary financing to implement the required measures. Developing countries lack the economic power and technical capacity to fully address a problem that is not of their making. These countries are severely affected by climate change and are investing significant amounts of already limited national budgets to adapt and prepare for climate-related disasters.

Wealthier countries, as the most responsible and the most capable of addressing the problem, need to rectify this injustice. We urge the U.S. to mobilize generous financing to support developing countries in their efforts to reduce emissions as well as to adapt to a changing climate. **The U.N. has estimated that the gap in financing required to support adaptation and mitigation in developing nations is \$100 billion per year by 2020, when the new U.N. treaty would take effect.**

The Green Climate Fund has been established to channel much of that funding, and CRS lauds the U.S. pledge of \$3 billion over 4 years to the fund. However, we urge the U.S.—the world’s predominant economic power—to significantly ramp up contributions to help close the gap in resources.

THE UNITED STATES MUST LEAD

As global citizens, we are all called to care for the gift of creation and for each other. In 1991, and in the years since, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops called for stewardship of our natural world as a means to protect our own dignity and that of future generations.¹²

Today, more than ever, the world is in urgent need of leadership. The U.S. must rise above the controversy and heed the moral imperative to act. Regardless of climate change’s causes, science, technology and accumulated knowledge provide us with the means to solve the problem. **Political will and commitment are now required to chart a new path for our planet, and ensure that the fruits of nature and God’s creation can be shared with generations to come.**

CRS looks forward to working with decision-makers, our U.S. constituency and the people we serve to bring about this new attitude to achieve a just and sustainable future for all people, and for our entire planet.

¹² “Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching,” USCCB, accessed June 4, 2015, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/renewing-the-earth.cfm>.

The establishment of an international climate change treaty is a grave ethical and moral responsibility.

—Pope Francis,
December 11, 2014, in
a message to the U.N.
Convention on Climate
Change in Lima, Peru

faith. action. results.



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