CLIMATE CHANGE AND GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

Toward a Sustainable Future

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. Twenty-three years later, the apparent consequences of climate change have become increasingly visible and damaging. The poor and vulnerable people in developing countries who have contributed the least to the problem are suffering the most. Currently, nearly 1 billion people in the world do not have enough food to lead healthy and productive lives—and climate change threatens further consequences for agricultural production and overall food security.

As arable land and water become increasingly scarce, conflict looms, along with the potential for migration from the most affected countries and a repetitive cycle of costly emergency response.

A MORAL DUTY TO ACT
At Catholic Relief Services (CRS), 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. 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.

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.

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. Over the last decade, we have had to adjust our programming to address the increasing impacts of climate change in communities
where we work. Already vulnerable people living in these places have limited resources to buffer them against crisis. Though their simple lifestyle has contributed the least to creating the problem of climate change, these small-scale farmers and fishers are most affected by its consequences:

• Droughts and floods have increased in frequency, resulting in losses to income, crops, livestock, homes and entire communities.

• Pests and disease are on the rise, threatening crops and human health.

• Shifting rainfall patterns leave farmers uncertain when to plant.

• Higher temperatures shorten crop lifecycles and increase plant stress, decreasing yields.

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

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 UNITED STATES MUST LEAD

As global citizens, we are all called to care for the gift of creation and for each other.

The U.S. should increase investments in climate change adaptation to empower the 3 billion most at-risk people to prepare themselves, their homes, their farms and their communities to constructively cope with the potentially devastating change that is already happening. Not only will such investment reduce unnecessary human suffering, it will also reduce the economic cost of chronic emergency response.

We appeal to the administration, however, to ensure that funding for climate finance supplements existing development assistance.

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.
WE ASK THE US GOVERNMENT TO

- Increase climate financing to address the needs of the 3 billion people most at risk to the consequences of climate change, ensuring adequate support, particularly to those living in Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States.
- Fulfill, and seek to exceed, the $3 billion pledge to the Green Climate Fund.
- Provide climate-specific adaptation funds in addition to current and future development and humanitarian assistance funding.
- Promote people-centered approaches to adaptation funding that empower vulnerable populations with the tools and knowledge necessary to effectively create a dignified and sustainable future.
- Ensure that adaptation approaches are broadly consistent with the morally acceptable principles of good development, including transparency, accountability, local ownership and participation of civil society.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do I think of our planet? Do I think we have a responsibility to care for it and preserve it for future generations? Do I believe we as a nation and as a world have a responsibility to make significant, even painful, changes to protect our planet for the future? Do I think we must help those who are suffering because industrialized and consuming lifestyles are now hurting them?

2. Do I believe Congress has an important role in addressing Climate Change? Do I believe that we as a country have a responsibility to protect vulnerable people in poor countries around the world, who are the most adversely affected by rising sea levels, droughts, and extreme weather?