

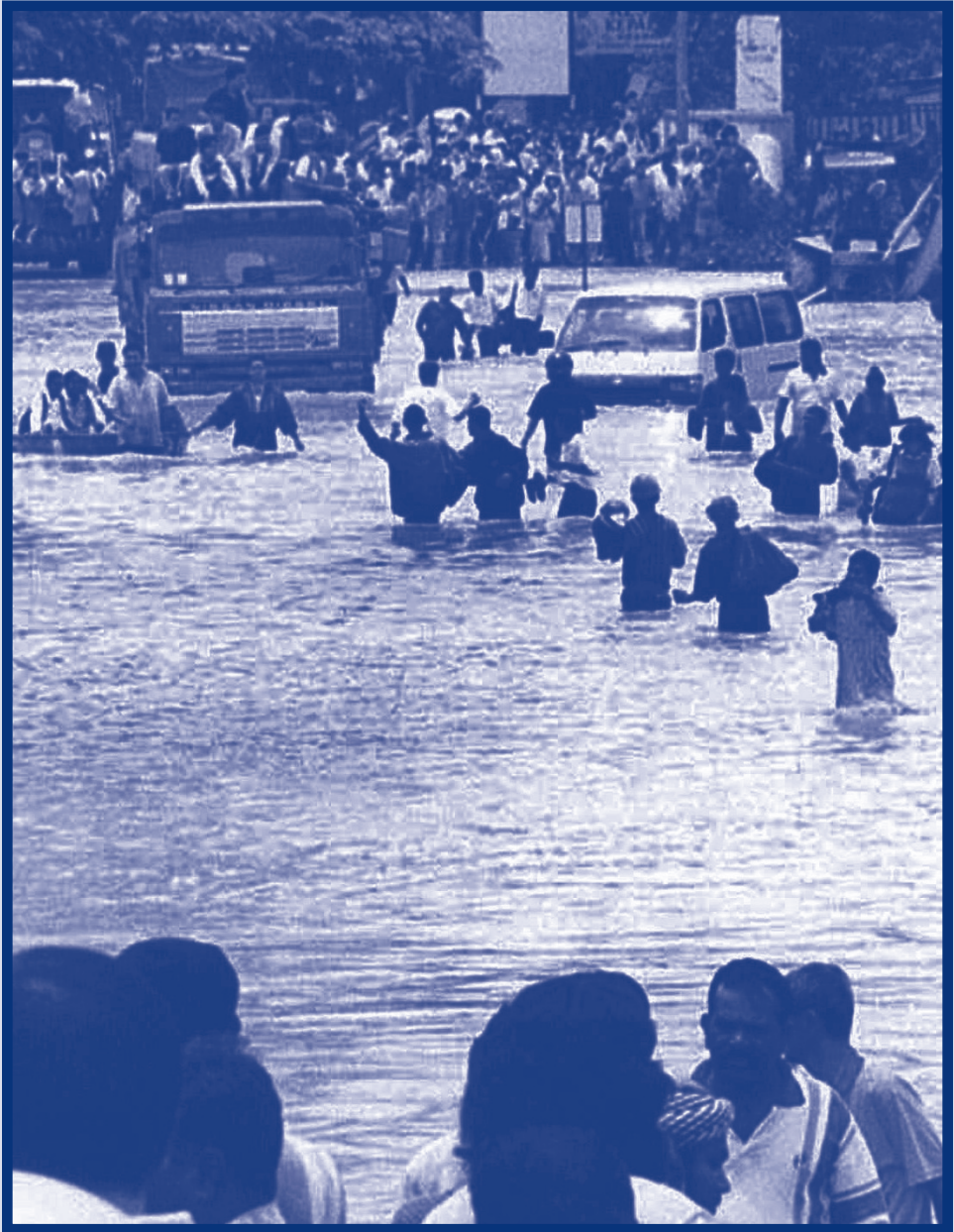
PURSUING THE  
GLOBAL  
COMMON GOOD

*Principle and Practice in U.S. Foreign Policy*

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Center for American Progress





AP Photo

# FORGING A RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

## Why Communities of Faith Are Essential

*Barbara Lerman-Golomb and Melody C. Barnes, with Kumar Garg*

On Christmas Eve in 1968 one of the first (and most famous) pictures of Earth was taken from space. Called *Earthrise*, it was taken aboard Apollo 8. Millions watched on television and millions more were captivated by the reprinted picture—a small, beautiful Earth against the blackness of space. Awed by the image outside their window, the astronauts on board read aloud from the book of *Genesis*. The next day was Christmas, and poet Archibald MacLeish expressed humanity’s shared wonderment at the sight of our planet:

To see the Earth as it truly is, small and blue and beautiful in that ethereal silence where it floats, is to see ourselves riders on the Earth together, brothers on that bright loveliness in the eternal cold—brothers who know now that they are truly brothers.<sup>1</sup>

*Earthrise* captured an essential truth—that whatever physical borders or cultural differences separate us, we are a global community that will collectively suffer, or benefit, from how we care for our planet. The consequences of our action (and inaction) will be borne not only by us and those near to us, but by billions of our fellow citizens around the globe.

Forty years after the Earth picture, such consequences are painfully clear, especially to a small community in the Pacific Islands. Due to rising sea levels, the people of Lateu in the island nation of Vanuatu were the first to be formally displaced due to global warming.<sup>2</sup> Two years ago the community moved their village—houses, furniture, personal possessions, village water pumps, and other infrastructure, even the church—more than 500 meters inland because of rising seas caused by a warming global climate.<sup>3</sup>

The Lateu islanders’ decision to move came after 20 years of struggle in an increasingly arduous natural environment. In the 1980s, their low-lying village was flooded for the first time. By 2005, it was flooding almost every month. The palm trees were exposed to salt water and began to die. The number of yearly storms tripled. The local church finally convinced the villagers to move inland, making the connection between their plight and global climate change.

When the villagers moved at last, they were helped by distant governments, international aid groups, and religious communities. Canada provided critical financial aid to build new village structures on higher ground, while the local church worked to educate the villagers.<sup>4</sup>

In many other places as well, local and international church groups are working alongside international aid groups to help local populations in high-risk regions adapt to the climate crisis.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the misfortune of the people of Lateu will not be the last such incident for impoverished communities, since global warming disproportionately affects the world’s poor.

For people of conscience and good will, such an injustice calls for a strong response. Faith leaders and policymakers have increasingly been engaged in addressing the challenge of climate change. By combining our duty to protect the environment with our moral imperative to protect the world's poor from the ravages of global warming, policymakers can craft U.S. environmental policies that will restore our planet and promote the global common good.

### *Protecting the Neediest Among Us*

Leading climate scientists have concluded that the earth is warming and that the human role in that warming is clear. In the United States, we have already seen the beginnings of what the next 50 years may look like: rapidly melting glaciers in Alaska; the expanding habitat of species such as the white pine beetle that are destructive to forests in the western United States; the death of over 30 percent of the coral reef in the Caribbean due to high surface temperatures; some of the hottest temperatures recorded in American cities; and arguably even the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina.<sup>6</sup>

The vicious irony is that the warming of the planet—a problem to which Americans contribute disproportionately by emitting a quarter of the world's carbon emissions while constituting only 5 percent of the world population—will disproportionately affect the world's most needy, who have contributed the least to the problem. According to a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world's poor will face a series of staggering challenges in the next half-century.

In Africa, climate change may affect hundreds of millions of people, cutting by half the agricultural output in some countries and costing these nations 5 to 10 percent of their annual gross domestic product to adapt to changing climate.<sup>7</sup> In Asia, billions of people could be affected by flooding, especially in countries such as Bangladesh where most of the population is nestled in cities and villages that sit on sweeping river deltas. Rising sea levels in the coming decades may submerge 18 percent of Bangladesh, creating over 30 million refugees.<sup>8</sup>

While such projections show what is likely to come in the next 10 to 50 years, the past few years have already shown how vulnerable these populations are to high-intensity natural disasters. The tsunami of 2004, which killed hundreds of thousands worldwide, often overshadows a series of increasingly frequent and extreme natural disasters that have hit during the last decade. In 1998, for example, Hurricane Mitch killed 13,500 people in Honduras, displaced over 2 million out of a population of 6 million and resulted in damages estimated at \$5 billion—equal to 95 percent of Honduras' GDP for that year.<sup>9</sup> That same year, heavy rains and massive flooding in China left more than 3,000 people dead and more than 14 million homeless.<sup>10</sup>

Heavy death tolls and widespread homelessness from more frequent and severe storms, however, are only the most direct manifestation of climate change. In the summer of 2007, heavy rains and flooding in India brought a gloomy assessment from a top U.N. official that if such trends persist, India's farmers may lose up to 18 percent of their collective food production. Similar fears haunt other (mostly poor) countries in the equatorial belt that are subject to fierce annual rainfall.

Given these signs of devastation, we must think and act with a global perspective. Fortunately, we are not working from a blank slate. A growing and diverse international coalition exists today to combat the climate crisis on many fronts. The coalition includes environmentalists, scientists, growing numbers of business leaders, religious communities, the international development community and, as the recent Live Earth concerts highlighted, young people. Coalition participants know they face a monumental task: convincing policymakers in countries with high greenhouse gas emissions, such as the United States, to make the significant reduction of these emissions necessary to avoid the catastrophic effects of uninhibited warming, while also preparing the developing world to adapt to the effects of warming that are inevitably coming.

### *The Importance of the Faith Community in Meeting This Challenge*

Effective response to the climate crisis begins with two requirements. First, we must engage the discussion in moral terms, rather than limiting it to a cost-benefit framework that defines much of public policy analysis. A moral discussion includes universal convictions that can inspire and connect us, such as reverence for life and belief in the dignity of all people, no matter where they live. Second, our moral commitment must be global, for it is only by broadening our concern beyond family and neighbor to encompass all who dwell on the planet that we can ensure that our actions will benefit the least powerful among us.

Because of their work for environmental protection and on behalf of the world's poor through advocacy and relief, faith communities have a unique contribution to make in meeting this crisis. According to Gary Gardner, the Director of Research at Worldwatch Institute, faith communities can bring impressive resources to bear in advocacy and action, for they are deeply embedded in virtually every society. Faith communities own land, provide gathering places for people of common belief, finance billions of dollars of social services locally and abroad, and perhaps most importantly, inspire their followers to act.

In the United States alone, about 28 percent of all volunteerism is sponsored by religious institutions.<sup>11</sup> Clearly, the response of faith communities to the climate crisis is a key component of effective action. In addition to providing such resources, the participation of faith communities is important because they call us to serve others, to sacrifice for goals greater than our own enrichment, and to care for the impoverished among us.

For much of the 20th century, however, environmentalism was largely a secular movement. Though communities of faith engaged in piecemeal environmental efforts, such as land use, agricultural practices, local pollution abatement, and public health, they held no overarching narrative of care for the environment. Indeed, some secular environmentalists looked with skepticism (or worse) at the religious community. In 1967, for example, historian Lynn White laid the blame for environmental destruction in Western countries on the philosophical underpinnings of Judeo-Christian theology, claiming that it instructed humans that their religious duty was to subdue the Earth.<sup>12</sup>

However, in the following decade, things began to change. The United States celebrated its first Earth Day in 1970, amid increasingly visible environmental problems. The decade saw increased

environmental awareness and legislation, including creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, a strengthened Clean Air Act, and new fuel economy standards. Given growing awareness, religious communities and secular environmental groups came together for dialogue and formed partnerships to address environmental problems.

In 1986, the president of the World Wide Fund for Nature International surprised many by commemorating its 25th anniversary with an invitation to leaders of the five major world faiths—Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism—to meet in Italy to discuss interfaith collaboration on environmental issues. The meetings were so successful that they gave birth to the highly acclaimed Alliance of Religions and Conservation, which now conducts projects in over 60 countries and represents 11 religious traditions—comprised of the first five member faiths as well as Baha'i, Daoism, Jainism, Shintoism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism.

Then, in 1988, the World Council of Churches made history by co-sponsoring a public discussion on climate change with the Greenhouse Crisis Foundation—the first-ever “ecumenical participation in an event on climate change.”<sup>13</sup> That was followed by the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize speech of the Dalai Lama, who proposed that Tibet be made into an ecological reserve, sparking a Buddhist environmentalism movement that eventually included even local Buddhist groups in the United States, such as the Green Gulch Zen Center and Zen Mountain Monastery, to begin engaging in local environmental activism.

A year later, Pope John Paul II, having already voiced concern about the degradation of the natural environment, took a dramatic step. In his 1990 World Day of Peace Statement, he declared that stewardship and protection of the environment was a sacred moral duty for all Catholics. The Pope spoke of the “new ecological awareness that was emerging” and of how the “‘greenhouse effect’ had reached crisis proportions.” He urged all Christians to take part in the “vast field of ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation opening up before them.”<sup>14</sup>

Another turning point was the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development in 1992, also known as the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. This event clearly linked climate change to the world's poor and “succeeded in obtaining unequivocal, worldwide recognition of one incontrovertible fact—there is only one Earth, it belongs to the rich and the poor, and its protection is the responsibility of all.”<sup>15</sup>

If faith-based environmental protection is a fairly recent phenomenon, religious groups providing for and advocating on behalf of the world's poor is a long-established tradition. Today that legacy is embodied by religious relief organizations such as WorldVision, Catholic Relief Services, and the American Jewish World Service, and by secular organizations that work closely with the religious community, such as the American Red Cross and CARE. In addition to relief organizations, groups such as Bread for the World and the ONE Campaign conduct legislative advocacy explicitly geared to combating global poverty.

The list could go on, but the central point is clear enough: Communities of faith are well positioned because of religious principles, institutional presence, and large memberships to work at the intersection of climate change and international poverty. Although these diverse communities of

faith began at different points—from their sacred texts, their long-standing practices and their core beliefs—they arrived at a similar place: a deep respect for the environment, a serious concern about the effects of human-caused environmental degradation on the world's poor, and a belief that it is their duty to act.

For the Abrahamic faiths—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—part of the theological concern stems from the command to be responsible stewards of God's Creation. Among Eastern traditions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, environmentalism has in part been spurred by a strong compassion toward all life and by a sense of the shared unity and divinity of all living beings. And these five major religions share with other faith traditions an ethos of social justice and concern for the poor. With the potential of climate change to wipe out numerous species, utterly reconfigure the Earth's weather, and devastate the world's poor, communities of faith worldwide have ample reason to be committed to action.

And committed they are. In Islam, several organizations have entered the world's green movement, including the Green Front of Iran, the Environmental Foundation of Turkey, Egypt's Society for Improving the Environment, Pakistan's Sustainable Development Policy Institute, and British Islam's Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Services.

In India, the heartland of Hinduism, the engagement of religious leaders in environmental conservation has begun to show dramatic results. For instance, the work of a single temple resulted in over 2.5 million trees being planted, and local religious efforts worked to mitigate the environmental despoliation of the Yamuna, a tributary to the mighty Ganges and one of Hinduism's holiest rivers.<sup>16</sup>

For many Christians, the Pope's words were a catalyst that spurred the creation of many Christian environmental organizations and efforts. In the United States, the early 1990s saw the creation of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Environmental Justice Program, the Episcopal Church's Environmental Stewardship Team, the National Council of Churches of Christ Office of Environmental and Economic Justice, and others. Despite the general resistance of many in the American evangelical community, the Evangelical Environmental Network was formed, hoping to build support for climate change action within conservative U.S. religious communities.

Similar action began about this time in Jewish religious communities here and abroad (see case study, page 50).

International organizations such as the Alliance of Religions and Conservation worked on a wide range of efforts, from reviving the sacred mountains in Mongolia to helping local sheiks use Islamic teaching in Zanzibar to curb over-fishing. Meanwhile, the World Council of Churches began playing an active role in international efforts on climate change, attending meetings of the Rio Summit, launching petition drives on behalf of the Kyoto Protocol, and coordinating with churches in the Third World to assist the world's poor through the coming crisis. According to some estimates, by 1996, nearly 130,000 local projects linking religion and the environment had started up worldwide.<sup>17</sup>

In the decade since, the coalition of climate-conscious denominations has grown larger and more ambitious. Indeed, in the United States, even previously skeptical evangelical leaders have in the past few years joined the cause, making nationwide headlines with their emphasis on “Creation Care,” a biblical call to protect the Earth since it is “the work of our personal and loving Creator” and to protect the “poor who will be hit the hardest.”

Collectively, these new alliances and two decades of faith-based environmental activism in the United States have produced notable short-term results, ranging from saving the Endangered Species Act to implementing numerous local conservation projects.

### *A Case Study of Rapid Activation: Judaism and Global Environmental Justice*

As it did for other faiths, the 1980s provided catalyzing events for the Jewish environmental movement. Communities began to connect their faith in the goodness of God’s creation with the growing climate crisis, and began to realize that any significant change to our planet would come with disastrous consequences, especially for the world’s poor. This tie between creation protection and service to the world’s poor has existed since the beginning of Jewish climate advocacy, and continues to this day.

In 1985, the American Jewish World Service formed in Boston and was dedicated to alleviating poverty, hunger, and disease among people across the globe. It quickly became a leader in disaster relief and gained first-hand experience of the effects of natural disasters on vulnerable communities around the world. Whether responding to volcanic eruptions in the Philippines in 1986 or the effects of drought in Niger, AJWS has seen the extremes to which climate change is harming the poor around the world.

Then, in 1988, Ellen Bernstein, sometimes referred to as the “birth mother of the Jewish environmental movement,” founded the first national Jewish environmental organization, Shomrei Adamah (Keepers of the Earth). Headquartered in Philadelphia and operating nationwide, Shomrei Adamah developed curricula and educational materials on Judaism and ecology, such as “Let the Earth Teach You Torah.”

In the spring of 1992 (at the invitation of Al Gore and Carl Sagan), the leadership of the major organizations in American Jewish life, eminent rabbis, denominational presidents, and Jewish U.S. senators gathered in Washington, D.C. for presentations by distinguished scientists and theologians on the earth’s mounting environmental problems. What became clear was the need to act, and for the Jewish community to speak from its religious faith. Within a year, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, which operates within the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, was founded, declaring unabashedly that “for Jews, the environmental crisis is a religious challenge” and that Jewish communities “cannot accept the escalating destruction of our environment.”<sup>18</sup>

COEJL was driven by a clear sense that the Jewish faith—its teachings, its traditions, and its people—could take pragmatic steps in response to the challenge of climate change. Increasingly,

Jewish environmentalists in the United States approached the climate challenge in a more comprehensive way: by focusing on national and local efforts.<sup>19</sup>

On the national level, these leaders realized they had a unique role to play: taking on the formidable challenge of making environmental protection more salient in American politics by speaking of it in a deeply felt moral framework. Their advocacy efforts included working with American Protestant and Catholic leaders who were also becoming increasingly engaged in the climate change debate. As part of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, for example, Jewish environmentalists lobbied vigorously and successfully alongside the Evangelical Environmental Network in 1995 to save the Endangered Species Act. They framed the issue in explicitly religious terms, stating, “The Endangered Species Act is our Noah’s Ark, and Congress and the special interests are trying to sink it.”

In the Kyoto debate in 1997, Jewish environmentalists were once again part of a broader religious effort. When the 210th General Assembly of the U.S. Presbyterian Church passed a dramatic resolution calling for a full ratification of the Kyoto Protocol by the U.S. Senate, Jewish groups such as COEJL worked to build grassroots support.

And in 2000, COEJL worked alongside other faith groups to launch the Interfaith Climate and Energy Campaign, a state-by-state effort to build political momentum concerning climate change. These state-level campaigns yielded unexpectedly effective results, such as the coal-producing state of Pennsylvania passing a first-ever renewable-portfolio mandate on its utilities.

Collectively, these groups were also able to speak with a loud voice. In 2001 they sent President Bush a letter on energy policy, “Let There Be Light,” which was signed by over 1,200 religious leaders from all 50 states. The leaders represented Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish faiths, and included 600 rabbis, who together served more than 45 million Americans. They called for an ambitious and much-needed legislative agenda, including stricter fuel efficiency, investments in renewable energy, regulating carbon emissions from power plants, and greater mass transit.

When the Bush administration considered a proposal to increase fuel efficiency standards for SUVs and light trucks in 2002, Jewish groups stood alongside the Evangelical Environmental Network as it held a series of high-publicity events highlighting the moral dimension of car ownership and car use with its “What Would Jesus Drive?” campaign. Separately, COEJL launched a “Driven by Values” letter-writing campaign to top automobile executives, demanding more fuel-efficient cars and chiding, “Auto companies are about values, not just vehicles.”

In addition to the national level, Jewish efforts included a strong interfaith component on the local level, with a primary focus on building awareness of environmental issues in their own congregations. By the late 1990s, religious groups were realizing that educating their own followers was essential to a broader mindset change. As a result, the National Religious Partnership on the Environment, of which COEJL is a member, developed a series of denomination-specific educational resources. Outreach to local religious communities

continues to flourish through a variety of activities, such as training conferences, summer camps, workshops and retreats, coordination with religious colleges, scholarships and fellowships to local religious leaders, and more.

The second arena of local action in which Jewish faith communities played an active role has been, by many accounts, the most effective: the “greening” of places of worship in terms of their construction and daily practices. One of the most successful organizations in this regard has been Interfaith Power and Light, which many synagogues belong to and which now has 23 members in various states representing over 30 religious denominations. In what began as a pilot program in California—to allow a group of Episcopal churches to purchase energy from a green supplier instead of the utility companies—IPL has grown into an increasingly ambitious and effective nationwide interfaith program.

Efforts now exist to make communities of faith more environmentally responsible in numerous ways. With a little bit of humor, COEJL launched a “How Many Jews Does it Take to Change a Light Bulb?” campaign in 2006 to promote high-efficiency light bulbs. Some synagogues have signed on with the EPA’s “EnergyStar for Congregations” program to reduce their consumption of energy. A number of synagogues have participated in “green congregations” programs, both independently and through groups such as IPL, COEJL, and GreenFaith.

Some synagogues are even seeking LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification standards set by the U.S. Green Building Council. Such efforts also have a multiplier effect, encouraging individual responsibility and educating congregants as to what steps they can take, and fostering increased interest in advocacy on the subject.

The third area of action has been within the corporate boardroom, with numerous faith-based groups, including Jewish organizations such as the Jewish Funds for Justice and the Jewish Shareholder Engagement Network, acting as environmentally conscious investors. The center of these efforts in the United States has been the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility, which focuses on shareholder advocacy and investment screening. Begun in 1971, ICCR now has over 275 Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic institutional investors, as well as others—and assets totaling over \$110 billion.

Since 1991, ICCR has made climate change one of its core issues and has targeted automotive, electrical power, oil, and gas companies, demanding through shareholder resolutions and meetings with management that they adopt an explicit carbon reduction goal, publicly report their carbon “footprint,” and publicly support U.S. governmental action on mandatory carbon limits.

Though ICCR’s values-based shareholder resolutions rarely pass, the organization has begun to attract media attention and allies. Furthermore, ICCR’s seal-of-approval is increasingly being sought by corporate management. Indeed, the power of socially conscious investing as a means of addressing environmental concerns is finding a global audience, with the creation of the International Interfaith Investment Group in 2005, in which Jewish organizations such as the U.K.-based Liberal Judaism and the World Union for Progressive Judaism participate, and which invests globally in companies that are working to help mitigate climate change.

## Looking Ahead: New Opportunities Amid a Growing Crisis

### *What's Happening Inside Faith Communities*

Over the past 20 years, communities of faith have achieved significant victories in their advocacy and action. But much more needs to be done. Since 1990, yearly worldwide carbon dioxide emissions have increased by more than 25 percent.<sup>20</sup> From 1990 to 2004, Florida alone experienced a 79 percent increase in carbon emissions.<sup>21</sup> Despite this, government-regulated automobile fuel economy standards have not been increased in the United States since 1985.<sup>22</sup>

There is reason for hope, however, and for a renewed dedication to act. Climate scientists say that we already have the technological and administrative know-how to reduce carbon emissions sufficiently to slow down rising global temperatures.<sup>23</sup> But reaching the critical goal—an 80 percent reduction below 1990 levels of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States by 2050—will require dramatic steps.

How can communities of faith help our nation reach that goal? First of all, they need to continue educating their congregations about climate change. A 2006 Pew poll found that 88 percent of secular Americans believe the Earth is warming, but when religious believers are included, that number drops to 79 percent—and to 70 percent among white evangelicals. Moreover, a much-too-low 62 percent of Americans are aware of the key fact—that warming is a result of human activity—but that number drops to 50 percent when communities of faith are singled out.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to building awareness, increased participation by congregations in low-carbon emissions practices is extremely valuable and has great potential. Even with its rapid recent growth, an organization such as Interfaith Power and Light exists in only 22 states and the District of Columbia. According to EPA estimates, there are over 300,000 places of worship in the United States, and a congregation serious about reducing its energy use can do so by as much as 30 percent. Even a 10 percent, across-the-board reduction in energy use by America's places of worship would have a dramatic effect: saving them \$200 million in energy costs and reducing U.S. carbon emissions by over 2 million tons.<sup>25</sup>

Above all, faith leaders must continue to draw the clear link between climate change and protecting the world's poor. This ethical impulse to provide for the needy and protect the vulnerable is among America's most potent shared moral values, and its human face has tremendous power, especially in reaching religious believers who already have a strong commitment to caring for the least fortunate among us.

For Richard Cizik, the National Association of Evangelicals' vice president of government affairs and a leader in other areas (such as the crisis in Darfur), learning of the dramatic effects of future warming on the poor was a wake-up call "not unlike my conversion to Christ."<sup>26</sup> When faith communities highlight the impact of climate change on the poor, more such wake-up calls will occur.

Indeed, it is telling that the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance, a group of conservative evangelicals who dispute the reality of climate change and argue against evangelical involvement in the matter,

makes the audaciously false claim that protecting the environment would, in fact, harm the world's poor. These opponents of "creation care" understand full well that making the moral connection between environmental protection and aiding the world's poor is crucial to expanding support among evangelical communities for international environmental action.

### *Shaping the Federal Response*

The climate change challenge is not for the faith community to carry alone. As religious leaders encourage responsibility within their communities, public officials and policy makers must also display leadership by crafting effective legislation that reflects our ethical obligation to the global common good. Faith communities must urge their representatives to advance these issues, using their vote to voice their concerns. The crisis of climate change can be remedied only by connecting personal responsibility and moral principles with smart governmental policy.

One particular goal deserves attention: reductions in U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. Such a reduction is essential to prevent temperature increases that would result in dangerous climate change and its consequences, such as dramatic sea-level rise and the extinction of many species. Individual action in our homes, in our places of work, and in our houses of worship is not enough. The federal government must also fulfill its responsibility to the global common good.

Fortunately, bold calls for action are coming from unexpected quarters. After the past few years of increasing evangelical dialogue on climate change, headlines were made in 2006 when 86 prominent evangelical leaders launched the "Evangelical Climate Initiative"—a public statement that called for federal action to address the challenge of climate change. In 2007, these leaders went further, issuing "Principles for Federal Policy" that laid out an explicit legislative agenda to reach that 80 percent reduction target by 2050.

The ECI's policy proposals call for a carbon cap-and-trade system in which the government would mandate a nationwide cap on greenhouse gas emissions and then allow companies to trade emission credits in the marketplace. The ECI also endorses efforts to reduce our dependence on foreign oil through more efficient automobile fuel economy standards, more conservation, more investments in renewable energy, and federal legislation to assist the poor here and abroad to cope with the effects of climate change.

Despite ECI being a relatively recent entrant into the climate debate, it has issued one of the clearest and boldest calls by a religious group for federal action. Similarly, the National Council of Churches has embraced as a national priority an 80 percent reduction of greenhouse gases by 2050. This goal will require legislation that enables the swift adoption of clear policymaking priorities, beginning with a cap-and-trade system.

When businesses are obligated to factor the costs of greenhouse gas emissions into their bottom lines, market forces will begin to steer them toward greater efficiency, cleaner fuels, and cleaner ways to burn fossil fuels. A trading system provides independence and flexibility for industries and businesses, allowing them to seek out the most efficient reductions across the economy.

The program could additionally link U.S. industries and capital markets with international cap-and-trade programs already in existence, so that they could coordinate policies and help forge a multinational, unified front against global warming.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to mandatory carbon emissions caps, the United States must enact a full overhaul of our federal energy laws, thereby increasing our sources of renewable energy and promoting the clean use of fossil fuels. The following steps would be a solid start to this work:

- Improving vehicle fuel efficiency standards so that so-called corporate average fuel economy, or CAFE, standards ensure that U.S. manufactured cars, light trucks, and SUVs get a minimum of 40 miles per gallon by 2025.
- Increasing the availability of low-carbon alternative fuels, such as biofuels, so that 25 percent of transportation fuels are low-carbon alternatives by 2025.
- Increasing renewable energy generation so that 25 percent of U.S. electricity production comes from renewable energy resources by 2025.
- Increasing investments and loan guarantees for smart-grid infrastructure to improve efficiency and electricity distribution nationwide.
- Doubling federal research and development funding for renewable and low-carbon energy technologies.
- Encouraging the promotion and development of energy efficient buildings and appliances.

### *Acting Beyond Our National Borders*

The front lines of climate change are found in the most impoverished communities, requiring U.S. government action beyond our borders. Many faith communities have been urging such action. For the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, “the primary concern in the current public debate [on global warming] is the needs of poor people and developing nations to be addressed.” The conference has called for the U.S. government to take a series of actions, including increased foreign aid to developing nations to assist in sustainable development and technological assistance to help them develop more benign energy production options.<sup>28</sup>

In congressional testimony during the summer of 2007 on the “views of religious organizations regarding global warming,” representatives of diverse faith communities—the National Council of Churches, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Evangelical Climate Initiative, and the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism—all focused a significant portion of their remarks on the plight of the world’s poor and the need for the U.S. government to aid developing nations in adapting to the climate crisis.

Nor have faith groups stopped at public statements; they are also addressing the challenge of the global poor through direct action. The World Council of Churches has worked to coordinate

with relief agencies such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and denominations such as the Methodists have taken steps to reorient their foreign missions to incorporate sustainable practices and conservation related to global warming.

Still, leadership by the U.S. government on a global scale is essential—both in international climate negotiations and in supporting the global poor as they face escalating environmental, health, and economic crises associated with climate change. The U.S. refusal to sign the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 has been regrettable because the Kyoto accords are today the only international framework for countries to cooperate, share information, and develop national policies to address global greenhouse gas emissions.

But it is not too late for the United States to become an active participant in global climate change negotiations. Though the terms of the treaty are set to expire in 2012, Kyoto represents the platform through which the next global climate agreement will be determined. Discussions are already underway—unfortunately, without the responsible leadership of the United States—as to what a post-2012 treaty will look like.

How will an international agreement to reduce emissions preserve economic competitiveness? How will it incorporate the participation of developing countries, such as China and India, which are quickly becoming the planet's largest source of emissions? How can we help least-developed countries leapfrog the dirty technologies that are holding our country hostage today? These are issues in which the United States has an enormous stake, and it is to the detriment of our national interests and the global common good that we stand by as the rest of the world seeks answers to these difficult questions.

Likewise, the United States has the responsibility to consider in its foreign aid policies the effects of climate change on the world's most vulnerable communities. No matter how accurate the scientific modeling techniques that forecast changes in precipitation and temperature, without economic strength and institutional capacity, the global poor will have few means of adapting to the predicted changes. And without urgent international action, hundreds of millions will be affected in the coming decades as crop yields drop, ecosystems collapse, and communities' critical infrastructures are threatened by rising sea levels and greater heat waves, droughts, flooding, wildfires, and more intense storms.

Indeed, even moderate climate change scenarios have the potential to exacerbate already endemic poverty in much of the developing world, undermining efforts to build capable economies, stable governments, and health care systems. Developing countries will need to adapt their water systems and agricultural techniques, reduce vulnerability to extreme weather events, develop new policy planning and early-warning systems, cope with heightened disease vectors, and address increased migration and conflict. These challenges will be enormous and will entail high costs.

The World Bank and others have released estimates that adapting to climate change in developing countries will cost anywhere from \$10 billion to \$50 billion annually. Whatever the exact number, it is clear that current levels of development assistance from the industrialized world are woefully insufficient. Currently there are three climate change adaptation funds established under the

U.N. framework, but a mere \$182 million has been committed—an inconsequential amount compared to what is needed.

So great is the threat to global poverty and international development that it calls for a comprehensive overhaul of the U.S. government's international development policy. Four major steps will make real progress in meeting our moral obligation to secure the common good.

First, given the direct link between poverty and climate change, the U.S. government must put a high priority on climate change in its foreign assistance policies so that adaptation (our responses to the consequences of climate change) and mitigation (our action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by embracing clean energy, energy efficiency, and new technologies)—become part and parcel of the missions of U.S. agencies involved in international development activities.

Second, the United States should undertake a climate-risk assessment of its current development activities. Because the United States does not take into account the projected costs of climate change on projects, such as maintenance and operations over a project's lifetime, taking this step would immediately raise the efficacy of U.S. aid dollars and programs. Such an assessment would serve to guide the integration of climate policy into future planning and help the world's poor meet escalating development challenges due to climate change.

Third, the United States should establish a climate change adaptation fund budgeted with additional money over and above what is already dedicated to development assistance. In funding everything from drought-resistant seeds to new water management technology, additional investment and technical assistance in these and other arenas will be crucial. An international adaptation fund may require the creation of a new program not unlike the international Millennium Challenge Corporation, a relatively new U.S. development agency that specializes in promoting economic development, to deliver and coordinate efforts.

Fourth, once the United States adopts a cap-and-trade system to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, a percentage of the revenue generated through the auction of emission permits should be dedicated to the international adaptation fund. We must take responsibility for our contribution to this crisis by contributing our fair share to its solution. In addition, the United States should devote half of the revenue from cap-and-trade auctions to low- and moderate-income Americans to offset any energy price increases they may experience during the transition from carbon-intensive energy to low-carbon alternative sources.

Finally, the United States must ensure that we will be able to adapt to global warming and that our government investments and infrastructure will be able to withstand projected changes in our climate such as increased incidence of more intense hurricanes, drought, flooding, and wildfires. Even if all nations stopped their global warming emissions today, the concentration of greenhouse gases currently in the atmosphere is high enough that we are already experiencing the effects of global warming and will continue to do so for years to come.

The federal government must lead by example and encourage businesses and state and local governments to also minimize their emissions, as well as plan for the projected effects of

climate change. Cumulatively, these steps will go far in finally bringing U.S. international development policy in line with the most significant challenge the developing world is likely to face in the next 50 years.

### *Don't Wait for the World to Change*

There is a traditional Jewish story that rabbis like to tell. A man is busy planting a tree when a neighbor rushes up to announce that the Messiah has come and the end of the world is here. What does the religious man do? He finishes planting the tree, and then he goes to see whether the news is true. The Islamic tradition has a similar story, where a man is carrying a palm cutting when the Day of Judgment takes place. The religious man, it is counseled, should not forget to plant the cutting.<sup>29</sup>

The object lesson of both tales is that we all have a responsibility to creation that is not to be neglected. Today we are faced with an incredible opportunity, and a deep moral responsibility, to save the world as we know it—to save numerous species from extinction, to save hundreds of millions of people from suffering, and to save our precious planet so that future generations may inhabit it. We have the tools to act, the time to succeed, and a vibrant and growing coalition that speaks of the climate challenge in a strong moral voice. Together, we must reach beyond our individual lives and national boundaries to act on behalf of our distant neighbors with whom we share the planet. Our futures are linked.

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