



Resolutions To Action

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Climate Change and Hunger

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EXPERIENCE

For I was hungry..." Many speak of hunger. Who are the hungry? Around the world desperate cries of hunger resound. "With higher food prices now, we eat only once a day." "We had hoped the rains would improve, but the animals died and food is scarce." "Often it is leaves, shrubs, and mud cakes for the children."

A family of six has less than half a sack of corn, with eight months until the next harvest. Encamped refugees report food rations cut again, far below minimum standards. Most heart wrenching is the report of a West African mother; desperate to provide for the family, she sold four of her children. The \$64 she received helped her feed the rest awhile longer. Estimates are that one billion people will go hungry and another two billion will be undernourished. (Ban Ki-moon, UN's Millennium Development Goals Report 2008, 11 September 2008) 16,000 children die of hunger-related causes every day.

Why hunger? Reasons given for the food crisis are varied, complex, and subject to debate. Blame is cast upon

high fuel prices which heighten costs of transportation, agricultural inputs, and commercially produced crops; increased production and use of biofuels; rising demand for energy and a varied, higher animal protein diet among populations in emerging economies; national and international trade and agricultural policies; commodity market speculations; more frequent floods, droughts, and poor harvests; climate change.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Climate change is a key factor in the increased hunger in the world. Global climate change means not only average global temperature increases, but global sea level rise, unpredictable weather patterns with more frequent and severe droughts, floods, and hurricanes. Poor people and countries who have contributed least to climate change suffer the worst impacts and are particularly affected by the negative consequences.

Most of the world's one billion extremely poor reside in areas prone to flooding, cyclones, and droughts and are without the capacity to adapt to such disasters. Many live in rural areas and depend on agriculture or other climate-sensitive industries for their livelihoods. Impoverished areas

of Africa and Asia face severe crop losses from climate change within the next 20 years. Yields from rain-fed agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa could be reduced by as much as 50 percent by 2020. (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007) In low-lying regions of tropical Asia, more frequent occurrences of hurricanes, tsunamis, and coastal flooding increase salinity in soils and loss of cultivated land and nursery areas for fisheries. Glaciers retreating in the Himalayas and the Andes already affect vast numbers of people in Asia and Latin America.

Obtaining world food security in the context of the impact of climate change may be one of the greatest challenges of

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the 21st century. Escalating food insecurity and the scourge of hunger demand that governments and the international community recognize everyone's right to food, address root causes, and devise comprehensive and just responses that allow all human beings, from all parts of the world, to live with dignity and

REFLECTION

Every faith tradition calls us to feed the hungry and to care for Earth and its myriad life forms. The powerful account of the judgment of nations in Matthew 25:31-46 is but one summons to ponder our response to the hungry and vulnerable. Catholic Social Teaching, rooted in the sacredness and fundamental dignity of every human life, reiterates that all have a responsibility to care for creation, contribute to the common good, the well being of each and all, and respond with particular concern for the poor and afflicted.

Climate change and the food crisis are issues of justice, issues of life and death for billions of poor around the world, for eco-systems and species, and for Earth itself. The seriousness of each crisis lays bare the depth of the present moral and spiritual crisis. The urgency compels us to face the injustices within structures and policies which shape these issues and to work for appropriate local and global response. "There is a need to break with the logic of mere consumption and promote forms of agricultural and industrial production that respect the order of creation and satisfy the basic human needs of all." (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, No. 486)

Pope Benedict XVI in his message to the Vatican seminar on climate change in April 2007 invited everyone to adopt "a way of living, models of production and consumption marked by respect for creation and the need for sustainable

development of peoples." There is need for prophetic communities, which will look for the deeper, long-term solutions and will embody and witness to alternative lifestyles that respect and foster fullness of life for all. There is need for authentic global solidarity for the healing and restoring of right relationships with all of creation.

ACTION

The crises facing us make apparent that we live in an interrelated, interdependent world. Policy and lifestyle choices affect not only ourselves but extend to all corners of the universe and into the future. "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." (Sean McDonagh, SSC)

Each of us is called and has the moral responsibility to discern and carry out personal and corporate actions for climate and food justice. We have heard the cries, "For I was hungry..." (Mt. 25:35) We cannot remain indifferent. The time to act is now.

In solidarity enter into the experience of hunger. Fast as a spiritual exercise and while fasting pray for the hungry, particularly those affected by climate change and our 25,000 brothers and sisters who die of malnutrition and hunger-related diseases every day.

Reflect on the culture and patterns of consumption within our personal and communal lives and corporate institutions and take concrete steps to use God's gifts wisely and to live sustainably, in harmony with all in the Earth community.

Educate ourselves and others about the diverse but interrelated issues and factors of climate change, poverty, and food within a global framework and about the moral and spiritual obligations to face up to the radical changes required.

Collaborate and advocate with others for a holistic vision and approach; for innovative and sustainable solutions to the interrelated global food, climate, energy, and financial crises; and for more just national and international food, agricultural, trade, and climate agreements and policies.

For additional resources, visit websites:

- www.catholicsandclimatechange.org/;
- www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml;
- www.coc.org/: Center for Concern on climate change, the global common good, etc.;
- www.educationforjustice.org for updated analysis of the world food crisis;
- www.operationnoah.org for "Between the Flood and the Rainbow: Climate Change and the Church's Social Teaching" study guide and other resources;
- www.bread.org/: Bread for the World background paper on "Global Climate Change, Hunger, and Poverty – What is at Stake?" www.bread.org/learn/global-hunger-issues/global-climate-change.html;
- Human Development Report 2007/2008: Fighting climate change: Human solidarity in a divided world, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2007-2008/>.