

Faith groups petition Congress to honor Green Climate Fund pledge

Brian Roewe, *National Catholic Reporter*, 15 April 2016

More than 100 faith organizations, including the U.S. bishops and 20 other Catholic institutions, urged congressional support for President Barack Obama's \$750 million budget request toward the international Green Climate Fund.

"We fully support the President's request ... to continue efforts to build critical climate resiliency in states that are already facing eroded shorelines, super storms and longer periods of drought," the 121 faith organizations said in a joint letter Monday addressed to members of Congress.

"This investment in mitigation and adaptation is our moral obligation as a major contributor to climate change. It is also a sound investment in alleviating poverty, ensuring food security and building stability now and into the future," the faith coalition said.

They adding that the fund "represents a new way forward in climate finance" by assisting developing nations in creating low-carbon economies while also adapting to already-present and unavoidable climate impacts. It could also play a critical role in increasing political stability in those nations, they said, with the potential to bring about positive implications on the migration and national security fronts.

The Green Climate Fund was established in 2010 in Cancun, Mexico by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as the primary channel for financing the global response to climate change. The Paris Agreement, the international roadmap for addressing climate change reached in December, reaffirmed the importance of the fund.

The fund has a goal of mobilizing \$100 billion per year by 2020 to address mitigation and adaptation programs in developing nations. As of February, \$10.3 billion has been pledged from 42 nations during the initial contribution phase, which runs from 2015 to 2018.

Obama requested \$750 million for the Green Climate Fund as part of his fiscal year 2017 budget. In March, a similar but slightly smaller faith coalition applauded the president's allocation of \$500 million to the fund through the U.S. State Department. The U.S., the world's no. 2 carbon emitter behind China, has pledged \$3 billion over four years, so far the largest contribution.

Twenty-eight European nations have also made pledges, with the United Kingdom, France and Germany all putting forth more than \$1 billion to the fund. The only other contribution above \$1 billion came from Japan; other non-European pledges so far include Australia (\$187 million), South Korea (\$100 million), Mexico (\$10 million), Peru (\$6 million), Indonesia (\$250,000), and Vietnam (\$100,000). China has not made a contribution to date.

The multi-faith letter, dated April 11, is signed by a cross-section of national organizations representing Islam, Judaism, and numerous Christian sects, including Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, United Church of Christ, and Mennonites. Notable Catholic organizations included the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, NETWORK, the Jesuit Conference of Canada and of the United States, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, and the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach.

"We come from different faith traditions, united across theological lines by our deep concern for humanity and all of God's Creation," the groups wrote in the letter. "We are guided by principles of stewardship, compassion and justice in confronting the moral crisis of our changing climate.

"The Green Climate Fund represents an important step in global cooperation needed to build a more resilient world and to move us along the path toward a low carbon future," they said.

“Our scriptures and religious texts call us to care for God’s creation and our most vulnerable neighbors. We believe that climate change presents an unprecedented threat to all of Creation, but particularly to those living in poverty around the world,” they said.

The faith coalition singled out several examples of already-experienced climate threats across the globe: rising sea levels near small island states; long-term drought and weather extremes impacting food and political stability in less-developed nations; and melting glaciers’ impact on water supplies of major cities in the Global South.

“All of these impacts fall hardest on those with the least means to adapt -- people and communities already struggling with poverty and hunger, who are also the least responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions causing earth’s climate to change,” they said.

In March, the Cook Islands became the first Pacific island nation to receive financing from the Green Climate Fund. Three African nations have also received grants from the fund, with a total of \$350,000 so far distributed among the four countries.

In addition, the fund has approved eight adaptation projects related to Latin America and eight nations, among them building shelters and other infrastructure in Bangladesh to protect more than 130,00 people from coastal flooding.

“Addressing the harmful impacts of climate change upon the most vulnerable peoples and the future of all God’s creation is the moral responsibility of our nation, and our sacred task as people of faith,” the faith groups said in their letter.