

Letter from National Conferences of Catholic Bishops to the Leaders of the G8 Nations

June 17, 2008

Hon. Yasuo Fukuda
Prime Minister, Japan

Hon. Silvio Berlusconi
President of the Council of Ministers, Italy

Hon. Stephen Joseph Harper
Prime Minister, Canada

Hon. Dmitry Anatolyevich Medvedev
President, Russian Federation

Hon. Nicolas Sarkozy
President, French Republic

Hon. Gordon Brown
Prime Minister, United Kingdom

Hon. Angela Merkel
Chancellor, Federal Republic of Germany

Hon. George W. Bush
President, United States of America

Dear Leaders of the Group of 8 Countries:

As the G8 Summit in Japan approaches, we write on behalf of the Catholic bishops' conferences to the leaders of our respective nations to urge you to deepen your commitments and actions to reduce global poverty and address global climate change.

As our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI said at his visit to the United Nations in April: "[Q]uestions of security, development goals, reduction of local and global inequalities, protection of the environment, of resources and of the climate, require all international leaders to act jointly and to show a readiness to work in good faith, respecting the law, and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet. I am thinking especially of those countries in Africa and other parts of the world which remain on the margins of authentic integral development, and are therefore at risk of experiencing only the negative effects of globalization."

Our religious and moral commitment to protect human life and promote human dignity moves us to be particularly concerned for the poorest and most vulnerable members of the human family, especially those in developing countries. The experience of the Catholic Church in serving the needs of poor communities leads us to applaud the Summit's focus on development and Africa.

It is critically important that you reaffirm and build upon the substantial commitments made in Gleneagles in 2005 and in Heiligendamm in 2007. In 2005 the world's richest countries promised to spend an additional \$50 billion per year on development assistance by 2010, with half that amount going to Africa. This commitment must be met and additional commitments should be made in the areas of health care, education and humanitarian aid. The September 2008 UN summit on the Millennium Development Goals will offer a crucial opportunity to mobilize more broadly the international community.

The global food crisis, which disproportionately devastates poor communities, and the terrible toll of HIV-AIDS, malaria and other diseases, make concerted action even more urgent. We ask you to consider concrete proposals that mitigate the impact of the world food crisis on poor communities, increase health and education spending, and move towards just world trade policies that respect the dignity of the human person in their working life. To ensure long-term success of these measures, the poor must be empowered to be drivers of their own development. Promoting their self-help capacities and their participation in economic, social, political and cultural processes are essential prerequisites for development.

Once again the agenda of your Summit includes global climate change, an issue of particular concern to people of faith based on our commitment to protect God's creation. As Catholic bishops, we have a special concern for the impact of climate change on the poor. The poor, who have contributed least to the human activities that aggravate global climate change, are likely to experience a disproportionate share of its harmful effects, including potential conflicts, escalating energy costs, and health problems. This is true in our own countries as well as in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world. The costs of initiatives to prevent and adapt to the harmful consequences of climate change should be borne more by richer persons and nations who have benefited most from the emissions that have fueled development and should not unduly burden the poor. Specific mechanisms should be created to help poor persons and nations adapt to the effects of global climate change and adopt appropriate technologies that will enhance their development in ways that do not contribute to global climate change.

The G8 Summit will explore many issues of critical importance to human life and dignity. We pray that your meeting will be blessed by a spirit of collaboration that enables you to advance the global common good by taking concrete measures to reduce poverty and address climate change.

Sincerely yours,

Most Rev. Peter Takeo Okada
Archbishop of Tōkyō
President, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan

Most Rev. Vernon James Weisgerber
Archbishop of Winnipeg
President, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

His Eminence André Vingt-Trois
Archbishop of Paris
President of the Bishops' Conference of France (Conférence des évêques de France)

Most Rev. Robert Zollitsch
Archbishop of Freiburg
President of the German Bishops' Conference (Deutsche Bischofskonferenz)

His Eminence Angelo Cardinal Bagnasco
Archbishop of Genoa
President, Bishops' Conference of Italy

Most Rev. Joseph Werth
Bishop of the Diocese of the Transfiguration of the Lord in Novosibirsk
President, Conference of Catholic Bishops of the Russian Federation

His Eminence Keith Patrick Cardinal O'Brien
Archbishop of Edinburgh and St Andrews
President, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Scotland

His Eminence Cormac Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor
Archbishop of Westminster
President, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

His Eminence Francis Cardinal George
Archbishop of Chicago
President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops