

Catholic bishops urge G8 to take 'bold action on global poverty'

Dear Leaders of the Group of 8 Countries,

As you prepare to attend the G8 Summit in Germany, we write on behalf of the Bishops' Conferences of our respective countries to urge you to take bold action on global poverty, health care, climate change and peace and security. We also urge you to work towards greater access to quality education for all. Our concerns for these issues arise from our religious and moral commitment to promote human life, human dignity and care for God's creation. In these concerns we are united with our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, who reminded wealthier nations of their moral obligations in his letter of December 16, 2006 to the current President of the G8, Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel.

Our Conferences are deeply engaged with the Catholic Church in Africa and the people of that vast continent. Our experience leads us to welcome the Summit's on-going focus on Africa. Initiatives to promote good governance within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) especially deserve the support of the more powerful countries.

We commend you on the commitment made in Gleneagles, Scotland in 2005. At that time, the world's richest countries promised to spend an additional \$50 billion per year on foreign assistance by 2010, with half that amount going to Africa, but we are concerned that, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, foreign aid funding levels from the world's developed countries remained stagnant in 2006 despite this commitment. We urge you to act out of the moral obligation that we all share for the well-being of every human person, but also because replacing despair with hope in Africa will lead to a more secure world for all nations.

We are encouraged by the G8 Development Ministers' recent commitment to "come as close as possible to universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care by 2010." While we recognize that HIV/AIDS can impact anyone, women in the developing world face particularly heavy economic, legal, cultural and social disadvantages that increase their vulnerability to the pandemic's impact. Families often withdraw young girls from school to care for family members. This lack of education has a life-long impact on the girls. In order to adequately address the HIV pandemic, foreign assistance programming for education and development, particularly for women and girls, must be expanded.

In addition, ill-equipped local health systems compromise the effectiveness of programs that address a wide variety of health problems associated with HIV/AIDS and other life-threatening diseases. Funding and appropriate strategies need to be developed that strengthen health systems and thereby support programs for HIV/AIDS and other life-threatening diseases.

The Summit agenda includes global climate change, an issue of particular concern to people of faith who are committed to protecting God's creation. In this regard, we have a special concern for the poor. As a result of where they live and their limited access to resources, the poor will experience most directly the harmful effects of climate change and the burdens of any measures to address it, including potential escalating energy costs, worker displacement and health problems. This is true in our own countries as well as in Africa and elsewhere. While there are many technical aspects that need to be considered in addressing global climate change, we recognize our moral responsibility of good stewardship. Our actions and decisions, particularly those regarding our use of energy resources, have a profound effect today and on future generations. The costs of initiatives to prevent and mitigate the harmful consequences of climate change should be borne more by richer persons and nations who

have benefited most from the harmful emissions that fuelled development and should not be placed on the shoulders of the poor.

The deepening human tragedy in Darfur demands the urgent attention of the G8. As each day goes by and more people are killed or made homeless, the international community's failure to take effective action is becoming morally unconscionable. The G8 must intensify efforts to secure the support of all members of the Security Council for full implementation of the UN mandate to strengthen the peacekeeping force in Darfur. It must insist that the Government in Khartoum accept deployment of an enlarged peacekeeping force, and it must press all parties in Sudan to adhere to a ceasefire and respect international humanitarian law. These necessary steps must be taken with great urgency if the terrible loss of life is to come to an end and the people of Darfur are to return to their homes and lead lives free from fear and full of hope for the future.

We encourage the G8 to strengthen peacekeeping efforts in Sudan and other countries affected by conflict, but also to support peace building and reconstruction efforts in countries emerging from conflict. Greater political, economic and social coordination with states in conflict and post-conflict situations will offer a more comprehensive approach on which to build lasting stability.

We welcome efforts to prevent the illegal exploitation of natural resources. However, the persistent link between poverty and natural resource development, especially in Africa, merits a deeper engagement by the world's richest nations. In communion with Pope Benedict we call on the international community to "continue to work for the substantial reduction of both the legal and the illegal arms trade, the illegal trade of precious raw materials, and the flight of capital from poor countries, as well as for the elimination of the practices of money-laundering and corruption of officials of poor countries."

Finally, we are also aware that a substantial number of African countries have been working to introduce reforms in basic education. A G8 commitment to intensify efforts to bring a quality basic education within the reach of all African children would make an enormous difference to the future of Africa.

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 the G8 leaders to advance the global common good by adopting concrete measures on global poverty, health care, climate change and peace and security.

Sincerely yours,

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President of the German Bishops' Conference (Deutsche Bischofskonferenz)*

*Most Rev. André Gaumond
Archbishop of Sherbrooke
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*His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard
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*Most Rev. Augustinus Jun'ichi Nomura
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*His Eminence Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor
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