

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

June 22, 2009

Hon. Stephen Joseph Harper
Prime Minister, Canada

Hon. Taro Aso
Prime Minister, Japan

Hon. Nicolas Sarkozy
President, French Republic

Hon. Dmitry Anatolyevich Medvedev
President, Russian Federation

Hon. Angela Merkel
Chancellor, Federal Republic of Germany

Hon. Gordon Brown
Prime Minister, United Kingdom

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

Hon. Barack Obama
President, United States of America

Dear Leaders of the Group of 8 Nations:

At a time of global financial and economic crisis, we write on behalf of the Catholic bishops' conferences in the G8 nations to urge you to take concerted actions to protect poor persons and assist developing countries at the upcoming G8 Summit in Italy. As our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, wrote in a letter to Prime Minister Gordon Brown prior to the G20 meeting which the Prime Minister hosted:

The current crisis has raised the spectre of the cancellation or drastic reduction of external assistance programmes, especially for Africa and for less developed countries elsewhere. Development aid, including the commercial and financial conditions favourable to less developed countries and the cancellation of the external debt of the poorest and most indebted countries, has not been the cause of the crisis and, out of fundamental justice, must not be its victim.

Our moral tradition commits the Church to protecting human life and dignity, especially of the poorest, most vulnerable members of the human family. In the faces of poor persons the Catholic Church sees the face of Christ whom we serve in countries throughout the world.

Ironically poor people have contributed the least to the economic crisis facing our world, but their lives and livelihoods are likely to suffer the greatest devastation because they struggle at the margins in crushing poverty. In light of this fact, the G8 nations should meet their responsibility to promote dialogue with other powerful economies to help prevent further economic crises. In addition, they should meet their commitments to increase Official Development Assistance in order to reduce global poverty and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, especially in African countries. This requires deepening partnerships with developing countries so that their peoples can be active agents in their own development, participating in political, governmental, economic and social reforms that serve the common good of all. In a particular way it is important to strengthen peacekeeping so that armed conflicts do not continue to rob countries of the resources needed for development.

In a similar way, poor countries and peoples who have contributed the least to the human factors driving global climate change are most at risk of its harmful consequences. As Catholic pastors and teachers, we have a special concern for how climate change impacts the poor. Concrete commitments should be agreed upon and mechanisms should be created to mitigate additional global climate change and to help poor persons and developing nations adapt to its effects as well as to adopt appropriate technologies for sustainable development. Protecting the poor and the planet are not competing causes; they are moral priorities for all people living in this world.

The G8 Summit takes place in the shadow of a global economic crisis, but its actions can help bring a light of hope to our world. By asking first how a given policy will affect the poor and the vulnerable, you can help assure that the common good of all is served. As a human family we are only as healthy as our weakest members.

We pray that your meeting will be blessed by a spirit of collaboration that enables you to take steps to reduce poverty and address climate change in a time of crisis.

Sincerely yours,

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

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

Most Rev. Vincent Nichols
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