

Catholic groups convene to consider impact of climate change

By [JULIE TROCCHIO](#)

WASHINGTON — Over 20 national Catholic organizations met with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in mid-January for a briefing on the impact of climate change on the poor. Group members committed to work together to advocate for the poor.

In welcoming the group, John Carr, secretary of the USCCB Office of Justice, Peace and Human Development, said that the bishops came to the issue of climate change with three basic principles in mind:

- **Prudence** — Something significant is occurring. Prudence requires wise action to address problems that will most likely grow in magnitude and consequence.
- **Common good** — Climate change affects all people. The response to climate change should demonstrate commitment to future generations.
- **Concern for the poor** — Those who were the least responsible for the problem, the world's poor, will be most affected by the consequences of global warming.

"The Catholic community has a distinctive role because of what we believe about the poor," said Carr.

"Many groups are talking about climate change, but almost no one is talking about its impact on the poor."

Jonathan Pershing is climate program director for the World Resources Institute, an environmental think tank. He gave an overview of the problem: because of a buildup of gasses, the Earth is heating up like a greenhouse. The change is especially pronounced at the poles, in Africa and in Central America. With the warming comes drought resulting in less drinking water and crop decline; an increasing number of weather-related disasters; and a rise in certain diseases — such as malaria because disease-carrying mosquitoes reproduce more rapidly in higher temperatures.

In the U.S., rising energy costs associated with global warming likely will fall with disproportionately strong impact on the poor.

"Addressing the problem of climate change is likely to result in an average increase in energy-related costs of \$750 to \$950 a year for the poorest fifth of the population" said Martha Coven from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonpartisan research policy institute. "Congress should include adequate measures in

climate-change legislation to shield low-income families." In addition, workers in the coal industry and other industries most affected by the shift to a less carbon-intensive economy will need help."

David Waskow, climate change program director for Oxfam America, added: "Poor countries will need financial resources to adapt to climate change." Funds are needed to shift crop production, to improve water systems, and to create better food storage." Developing countries also will need help accessing technology to adapt to climate change.

Carr said that it is likely that this year federal legislation will be written — but not passed — to set aside funds for the poor in the U.S. and poor countries to adapt to the consequences of global warming. "The time to work together to get good legislation is now," he said.

Copyright © 2008 by the Catholic Health Association of the United States.
For reprint permission, contact Donna Troy at dtroy@chausa.org or call 314-253-3450.

