

Bishops urge G-8 nations to recommit to fight poverty, climate change

WASHINGTON - The presidents of bishops' conferences associated with the Group of Eight industrialized nations have urged government leaders to honor their commitments to reduce global poverty and address climate change.

In a letter released less than three weeks before the July 7-9 summit of the Group of Eight leaders in Toyako, Japan, the bishops called upon the presidents of the convening countries to "reaffirm and build upon the substantial commitments" made at summits in 2005 and 2007.

The G-8 includes Russia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Chicago Cardinal Francis E. George, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, was joined by the presidents of bishops' conferences in other G-8 countries in reminding the leaders of their promise to spend \$50 billion annually on development assistance - with half going to Africa - by 2010.

"This commitment must be met and additional commitments should be made in the areas of health care, education and humanitarian aid," the bishops wrote.

Citing the current world food crisis, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and a growing concern about malaria and other diseases, the bishops called upon the leaders to consider proposals that would ease access to food in poor communities, increase health and education spending, and "move toward just world trade policies that respect the dignity of the human person in their working life."

Promoting self-help and the empowerment of poor people to be "drivers of their own development" are key to such efforts, the bishops said.

They also urged action to ease the impact of climate change on the world's poor in

developed and developing countries.

“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,” the bishops said.

The cost of efforts to prevent and adapt to consequences of climate change “should be borne by richer persons and nations who have benefited most from the emissions that have fueled development and should not unduly burden the poor,” the bishops said.

The bishops concluded their letter by offering their prayers for the world leaders that they “will be blessed by a spirit of collaboration that enables you to advance the global common good.”

Joining Cardinal George in signing the letter were Archbishop James Weisgerber of Winnipeg, Manitoba; Archbishop Andre Vingt-Trois of Paris; German Archbishop Robert Zollitsch of Freiburg; Italian Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco of Genoa; Archbishop Peter Takeo Okada of Tokyo; Bishop Joseph Werth of Novosibirsk, Russia; Scottish Cardinal Keith O’Brien of St. Andrews and Edinburgh; and English Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor of Westminster.