

Global climate change and the environment

"... Ask the beasts to teach you, and the birds of the air to tell you; or the reptiles on earth to instruct you, and the fish of the sea to inform you ... In God's hand is the soul of every living thing ..."
Job 12: 7-10

Kessai Boseto lives in a small fishing community in the Solomon Islands in the Pacific Ocean. Historically, tuna fishing has been the economic mainstay of the community.



But, because the local sea water temperature has risen, the fish have moved farther north in search of cooler waters. The migration of the fish has left the community with no steady source of livelihood.

Kessai is concerned about how to earn enough money to support his family. How will he send his children to school? What will he do if one of the children becomes seriously ill? Kessai is understandably bewildered. The temperature rise of the ocean has not been caused by anything he or his fellow islanders have done in their small unindustrialized part of the world. Nevertheless, everyone -- the women and children as well as the men of the village -- are profoundly affected and will surely face hardship. Maryknoll sisters working on other Pacific Islands express similar concerns.

It has long been understood that pollution affects the local environment, but it is a new realization that carbon emissions from the United States and other industrialized countries have far-reaching effects around the globe. Ocean temperatures are rising, droughts are longer, hurricanes and floods are stronger and fresh water sources are disappearing as glaciers melt.

Catholic social tradition emphasizes care for creation, right relationships with the community of all life and a responsibility to future generations as part of the universal common good.

Realizing that the earth is limited and fragile presents an opportunity to make a dramatic adjustment in lifestyle toward a way of living that will be sustainable for the entire world. Resolve to act correctly in this regard is strengthened by faith, by the realization that all are sisters and brothers and by recalling factors that have forged the U.S. heritage of generosity.

Industrialized countries need to "power down" – use less energy and consume less – in order to meet everyone's needs, now and in years

to come. Powering down will mean diminishing dependence on oil, gas and coal, which emit large amounts of carbon dioxide, while rapidly developing alternative, clean and renewable energy sources, such as wind, solar, tidal, small scale hydro and local biofuels. Corn ethanol does not significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions when the entire production process is taken into account, and nuclear energy is too dangerous to use.

The era of cheap oil has ended. New sources of oil will not resolve the problem. Lower consumption levels and the value of sufficiency are needed to bring society back within the limits of nature. This will require concerted effort, moral conviction, enormous creativity, and good financing. Just and realistic government policy will be required to set the direction.

Important policy goals include:

- End oil and corn-for-ethanol subsidies.
- Reject investments in new nuclear power plants.
- End mountaintop removal in the coal mining industry.
- Create incentives for development and use of alternative energy sources that reduce greenhouse gases, such as wind, solar, tidal, small scale hydro and local biofuels.
- Help poorer, more vulnerable countries with financial and technological assistance to develop measures for adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change.
- Agree to set and abide by international standards for carbon emissions through the Climate Change Treaty process.
- Work to guarantee the right of everyone to fresh, clean water, and stop support for the privatization and commodification of water.
- Suspend genetically modified food production that uses chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and support organic agriculture.
- Support public transportation.

Questions for candidates:

1. What are the first steps you would take in response to global warming?
2. What would you do to transition to alternative

energy sources?

3. What is your position on the dangers of nuclear power plants?
4. What would you do to guarantee the right of everyone to fresh, clean water?

A fair and sustainable economy

"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." Philippians 2: 4

Jesús' family has been living on the same piece of land in Oaxaca, Mexico, for centuries. In the past few decades, life has grown increasingly difficult as the prices for their crops of corn, beans and wheat fluctuated greatly while many expenses have increased.

Social services such as health and education became scarcer and more expensive in the 1980s when Mexico accepted loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that demanded reduced spending on public services. Since the early 1990s when Mexico prepared to enter the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), life has become precarious. As part of the agreement, the Mexican government eliminated the aid it had given to farmers to buy fertilizers and pesticides, so the cost of those items shot up. The bag of fertilizer for which Jesús once paid 90 pesos now cost 320 pesos. At the same time, the price of his maize plummeted as cheap imported corn flooded the local markets. A kilo of corn once worth three pesos was now hardly worth 1.5 pesos. Ironically, despite the drop in corn prices, tortillas became over four times more expensive because the government also agreed to remove long-standing subsidies that had ensured the affordability of Mexicans' daily tortillas. Since early 2007, international corn prices have skyrocketed due to increased interest in biofuels made from corn. As a result, prices of food like tortillas, chicken and eggs have gone up even further, but manipulations by giant corporations that dominate the corn market have prevented the benefits of higher prices from reaching Jesús and other small farmers in local markets.

While many still had enough food from what they grew, everyone began to lack the money to buy other necessities. Many men left to go north to look for work. Some ended up in overpopulated Mexican cities, while others crossed

the border into the United States. More recently, women and children are leaving to join their family members.

Many of those who remain are dependent on the money sent back by those who left. Some, however, like Jesús, have changed their farming and marketing methods. They have started producing their own fertilizers through the use of composting, worm beds and nitrogen-fixing plants. They have also diversified their food production so they can sell year-round in local markets.

Since World War II, the U.S. has played an important role in shaping the global economy and today has an obligation to help change economic policies so that people like Jesús don't suffer needlessly.

Catholic social tradition advocates an economy that guarantees the human dignity of all members of society and the well-being of God's creation, our planet. In the last few decades, however, the globalized economy has provided tremendous benefits for the world's wealthiest people with little trickling down to others, and the Earth is threatened as never before.

Maryknoll missionaries have seen little improvement in the situations of the poorest and most at risk members of the human family; poverty rates have remained too high in many of the countries where we work. Racism continues around the world. In many countries, including the U.S.,



we see that the darker a person's skin, the poorer they tend to be. Women too are undervalued in the world economy. Though half of the population,

women continue to be excluded from participating in economic decisions that affect their lives.

The growing influence of mega-corporations on political processes encourages economic decision-making that focuses on wealth and prosperity while forgetting more vulnerable people in the U.S. and abroad. Many of these decisions profit larger businesses at the expense of smaller ones and encourage unsustainable levels of consumption.

Important policy goals:

- Enforce a separation of large corporations and state, strengthen and enforce anti-trust laws and promote enforceable mechanisms for corporate accountability.
- Pass the Jubilee Act, which addresses the issue of unjust and overwhelming debt, and extend debt cancellation to heavily indebted middle-income countries in the global south.
- Change restrictive trade policies to allow countries space to meet the needs of local communities, adapt to a future without cheap oil and provide real job opportunities for poor people.

- Include explicit gender and racial equity goals in government decision making.
 - Place less emphasis on simple economic growth (GDP growth) as a measurement of U.S. well-being and consider using tools like the Human Development Index to measure our progress as a society.
- Questions for candidates:

1. What specific proposals do you have to reduce the excessive influence of powerful corporations on our public policies?
2. What would you do to make our economy both fairer and more sustainable?
3. How would you address the reality that the median household wealth of white families in the United States is many times greater than that of families of color?
4. Would you support the cancellation of unjust debts of impoverished and middle-income countries to the United States, the World Bank, IMF and regional development banks?
5. How would you change U.S. trade policy to strengthen local economies and adapt to a future without cheap oil?

Welcoming the stranger

"I was a stranger and you invited me in." Matthew 25:35

Amir is an Egyptian who traveled to the U.S. on at least two occasions, with proper temporary visas, to study English. Over time, he decided he no longer wished to follow traditional ways, for which he received serious threats of bodily harm from his family and home village in Egypt.

Amir returned to the United States and requested asylum from persecution. He spent five months in the Elizabeth, N.J., facility for immigration detainees where Maryknoll affiliates heard his story. None of the over 300 detainees at the facility, which is run by the Corrections Corporation of America, have criminal records; about half are asylum seekers and the others are undocumented immigrants who were picked up by federal agents. Many are from Asia, Africa and Latin America; other detainees are from Eastern Europe and the Middle East, all places where economic hardship and violent conflict are pervasive.

Amir's attorney was able to help him receive asylum based on his credible fear of perse-

cution, but a government prosecutor immediately challenged the judge's ruling. While the appeal was pending, Amir was able to live for over a year in a sanctuary program, study, hold a job (with a proper work permit) and pay taxes. But after 14 months, despite acknowledging that he was threatened if he returned home, the courts reversed Amir's asylum ruling, and he was held again at the detention facility and forbidden to contact his attorney.

After seven months of confinement, Amir said he would rather return to Egypt and "die once, rather than die here a little bit every day." He was deported to Egypt, but eventually secured passage to Canada, where he lives and works today.

Amir is one of an estimated 191 million migrants in the Americas, Asia and Africa. They include political and economic migrants, refugees from war and civil conflict, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons. Three percent of the world's population -- about one in 35 persons -- is

a migrant.

In their 2003 pastoral letter “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope,” the Catholic bishops of Mexico and the United States enunciate five principles of Catholic social teaching applicable to migration: 1) persons have the right to find opportunity in their home land; 2) persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families; 3) sovereign nations have the right to control their borders, but are obliged to accommodate migrant flows; 4) refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection; and 5) the human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected.

Important policy goals include:

- Implement just and compassionate national immigration policies that counter punitive and isolationist tendencies, that recognize the importance of global solidarity in an intensely polarized world and that respect the inherent dignity and human rights of all migrants and asylum seekers, documented and undocumented alike.
- End the use of workplace raids, and stop the practice of deporting parents of under-age U.S.-born children.
- Give urgent attention to the root causes of involuntary migration, especially war and economic injustice.
- Definitively end human trafficking, and provide protective and rehabilitation services for trafficked



Grave marker for unidentified migrant in Holtville, CA / Photo by Rick Reinhard

persons.

- Protect refugees and asylum seekers and reverse laws and policies that lead to their incarceration.
- Ratify and implement the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, and support the creation of a Permanent Forum on Migration Issues within the UN as a space for ongoing dialogue and policy formulation among governments, migrants, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

Questions for candidates:

1. What would comprehensive immigration reform look like in your administration?
2. Would you support the ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families?
3. What steps would you take to stop the exploitation of migrant workers and the anti-migrant actions and attitudes in this country and around the world?
4. What would you do to stop trafficking in human persons?
5. What do you feel is the obligation of wealthy nations toward migrants? What would you do to support development efforts in poor countries that might reduce the disparity between wealthy and poor nations that drives many to take perilous journeys across borders?

HIV/AIDS

“We are all members of one body” Ephesians 4:25

Ruth was found along a dirt road in Mbuya, Uganda, together with her ill and malnourished baby and her 4-year-old daughter. Sent away from her village by her family, she had come to Kampala to seek treatment for HIV/AIDS, but after a short hospital stay, she was discharged. She had not eaten

for days, had no home, and she could not tolerate the medicines she’d been given. Ruth wanted to die ... and she wanted her baby to die.

A community worker from the Reach Out program, herself living with HIV/AIDS, took the little family into her home. She helped Ruth receive



Photo of AIDS patient in Tanzania by Sean Sprague, courtesy of Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers

treatment for tuberculosis and other infections, and after a few weeks, both Ruth and her baby were started on antiretroviral therapy for AIDS. When Ruth grew stronger, Reach Out rented a small room for her close to the community worker, who stayed by her side during the first difficult months.

Six months after her first visit to Reach Out and following the support she received, Ruth is proudly showing off her baby to other clients at Reach Out and people in the community, especially other struggling women. She attends adult literacy classes and soon will be able to run a small business and care for herself and her children.

An estimated 33 million people still live with HIV/AIDS, 25 million have died and more than 15 million children worldwide have been orphaned. In many places where Maryknoll missionaries work with communities devastated by AIDS, as in the U.S., stigma is still a major obstacle to overcoming this disease, and prevention efforts have not caught up with the high rate of transmission. More than six million people, many of them children, die each year of TB, malaria and HIV/AIDS for lack of medicines. Overwhelming debt payments and unjust trade policies impede governments' adequate response to the pandemic.

At their recent summit, the leaders of the G8 wealthier countries promised an increase in investment in programs to respond to AIDS, TB and malaria. However the \$60 billion they committed is only one-third of what the UN estimates is needed in the next five years. The President's Emergency Program for AIDS Response (PEPFAR) made a good beginning, but recent funding is far

less than the amounts needed, and restrictions on access to more affordable generic drugs have created insurmountable obstacles for HIV-positive poor people. Less than 30 percent of those in the global South who need them receive antiretroviral drugs.

Important policy goals are suggested by our Catholic social tradition that holds as sacred the right to life and the dignity of every person, especially the most vulnerable:

- Allocate \$50 billion (which constitutes the U.S. fair share of supporting treatment for at least 33 percent of those in clinical need, and continues existing bilateral programs) over the next five years in response to AIDS, TB and malaria worldwide. Increase U.S. donations to the Global Fund, which finances HIV/AIDS programs beyond what the U.S. can cover bilaterally.
- Respect the World Trade Organization's rules to make generic medications available worldwide.
- Approve use of U.S. funds to purchase generic medication.
- Cancel unjust and overwhelming debt without conditions that restrict government spending on health care.
- Invest in the training, retention and support of health workers in poor countries.
- Include nutrition and health care education with programs responding to HIV/AIDS.

Questions for candidates:

1. How would you address the racial disparity in HIV/AIDS prevention and services here in the U.S.?
2. Would you support a greater U.S. contribution to the Global Fund? Why or why not?
3. How would you ensure that the United States and other G8 nations keep their promise to increase investments in programs to fund AIDS, TB and malaria for the rest of the world?
4. Should the United States require that funds designated to purchase HIV/AIDS medicines for people in other countries be limited to medicines produced by U.S. pharmaceuticals?
5. What can our government do to ensure the lowest possible prices for essential medicines?

Peace and sustainable security

"I will heal my people and let them enjoy abundant peace and security." Jeremiah 33:6

Cathy, a former Maryknoll lay missionary, has visited Iraq and neighboring Jordan several times during the past few years. Refugees in Amman and her friends in Baghdad tell her about what it is like for the people of Iraq to live in extreme hardship for long periods of time. Asked about the harshness of the summer heat and lack of water and electricity, one Iraqi told Cathy, "There are nights when no sleep was possible because of the sound of low-flying aircraft, of explosions and mortars." Another said, "Believe me when I tell you we did not feel the heat this summer as in years past. We had so many other problems to face." Near desperation was evident in the comment, "Do you know what people are saying now? We don't need to eat or drink or sleep anymore! We just want to be safe. That is all we want...."

Meanwhile, Fatima, a 40-year-old mother from Wassit Province in Iraq, feels more confident these days. Since a literacy campaign for women began in her area, Fatima has attended every class, motivated by hopes of a more promising future and of being a better parent.

The women's literacy campaign is a community action program, funded by USAID but run by Iraqis with training and support from U.S.-based non-governmental organizations. Thousands of Iraqi women have taken advantage of the program. Beyond the obvious benefit of empowering women with literacy and knowledge, it provides job opportunities for hundreds of previously unemployed teachers and brings together different sectors of Iraqi society.

With a very small investment, community action programs like this and small-scale, local peacebuilding efforts have helped provide stability in different parts of Iraq, mitigating somewhat the enormous frustration that is often a recruiting tool for insurgents.

The National Security Strategy of the United States describes the U.S. military as a co-equal partner with our

diplomatic corps, our development agency and our homeland security department. Official policy is to "pursue national security by championing aspirations for human dignity, strengthening alliances, defusing regional conflicts and expanding development." But the military budget absorbs more than eight times the money spent on all non-military security tools together, including diplomacy, foreign aid, nonproliferation and homeland security, even though these other areas are likely to be more effective.

Despite the sacrifice of thousands of lives in Iraq and Afghanistan and mammoth expenditures on war, far too many in the U.S. and around the world, especially women and children, continue to be insecure. Some live in war zones without access to basics like housing, health care and education. Others live with the violences of poverty and racism, with little to look forward to besides unemployment, displacement and humiliation.

Unless all people have basic needs met and are protected from harm, we will never be secure. Unless we respect each other as neighbors, though we live on different sides of the world or come from different cultures, we will never really be secure.

Those seeking election in 2008 should redefine U.S. priorities from national security to sustainable human and community security. This would guarantee access to food, clean water, healthcare, education and meaningful work for all people everywhere, the right of all women and men to participate in important decisions that affect their lives and a sustainable future for human beings and the Earth. Sustainable security would emphasize international cooperation to build understanding, to prevent or resolve conflict before it becomes violent and to diminish violence where it is already raging.

Catholic social tradition's emphasis on the protection of human life would suggest impor-



Iraqi boy at the al Huda refugee camp
Photo by Linda Panetta
www.opticalrealities.org

tant policy goals, including:

- End the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Invest in dialogue and diplomacy, reconstruction and development. Emphasize regional and global cooperation toward an enduring peace.
- End torture in all its forms and under any circumstances.
- Support U.S. engagement in multilateral efforts to solve grave transnational problems, including terrorism and tyranny, weapons proliferation, racism, hunger, global warming, resource depletion, migration and disease.
- Support the participation of women in peace processes, gender training in peacekeeping operations, the protection of women and girls and respect for their rights.
- Begin immediately to convert the U.S. military budget to invest in conflict prevention, nonviolent

conflict resolution and peace education at every level in the United States.

Questions for candidates:

1. What is your plan for U.S. engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan?
2. How would you contribute to a just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
3. What would you do to ensure the integrity of existing treaties and promote cooperative approaches to peace and security through the UN and other organizations?
4. How would you restructure the federal budget to promote sustainable security for neighborhoods and communities at home and abroad?
5. How would you use U.S. power for preventive diplomacy and nonviolent conflict resolution?

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