



December 4, 2008

Dear President-elect Obama,

Congratulations on your recent election. We hope you and your staff will accept our prayers as you begin this important work at this critical point in the history of our nation. We write you as the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC), a group of 35 Christian denominations comprising more than 45 million people. As an ecumenical organization, the NCC includes the mainline protestant denominations, the historically African American denominations, the orthodox churches, the historical peace churches and others. These denominations have acknowledged the importance of working together on issues of great significance to the church, particularly working to protect God's Creation and working for justice for all of God's people. The NCC, at the request of its member denominations, has supported its Eco-Justice program for more than 20 years, identifying the key issues of our time that threaten the future of God's earth and the well being of vulnerable communities here in the United States. Attached you will find the NCC's current eco-justice platform highlighting the issues that most threaten God's Creation.

Each of these issues is of great importance and we urge you to consider them as you set your priorities for the coming four years. However, during this time of transition and planning for your new administration we urge you to focus on the following as the most critical priorities for the protection of God's Creation, requiring the most urgent action:

- **Re-engage in United Nations international climate negotiations**

For too long, the U.S. has failed to effectively engage with the international community to address global climate change, the most pressing moral issue of our time. Your administration must work to heal our relationship with our global neighbors. Your administration should prioritize the upcoming UN meeting in Poznan, and seek to negotiate and implement effective climate agreements that will prevent the worst impacts of climate change.

- **Prioritize funding for environmental programs and research and development**

Under the current Presidential administration, the budget for numerous environmental programs that protect our air, land and water and our fellow creatures has been decreased or eliminated, undermining efforts to protect God's Creation and God's people. We urge you to place a high priority on restoring these critical programs as you draft the fiscal year 2010 budget.

As noted above, there are many issues that we consider of the utmost importance to protect God's Creation for future generations and to provide for the most vulnerable among us. In preparation for the challenges that your administration will face, we also encourage you to make your agency appointments in a timely manner, calling on individuals who will work to restore the public's trust through a renewed effort to enforce public statutes.

We look forward to working with you over the next four years as we seek justice for all of God's Creation.

Sincerely,



American Baptist Churches USA
Brethren Witness/Washington Office
The Episcopal Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office
Progressive National Baptist Convention
The United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society
The United Church of Christ – Washington Office



A Faithful Vision for Action:
National Council of Churches
Priorities for the New Administration

December 4, 2008

As members of the faith community, we are concerned about the well being of God's Creation and God's people. We are called to be good stewards of God's good earth and work for justice for all of God's people, particularly the most vulnerable among us.

We are concerned for the future of this planet and believe we must work to achieve a true interconnectedness with Creation. For too long, we have consumed and destroyed the beauty around us from the mountains to the oceans and everything in between. It is time to recognize the value and importance of God's gifts and shift our policies to reflect the true value of God's Creation.

In this spirit, we offer the following priorities as our collective vision for action the next several years and urge you to provide leadership on these important issues.

1. Implement National Climate Legislation

Global warming has become one of the top priorities for the Council's denominations as it threatens the health and well being of God's Creation as well as God's people. In addition, it affects efforts to address poverty and peace – two other issues that unite our denominations, congregations and communities. The United States and your administration must make global climate change a top priority upon assuming office and press for action in the first 100 days.

The faith community has developed four main principles guiding our response to global climate change: justice, stewardship, sustainability and sufficiency. In addition, the faith community has identified three main policies that must be included in national legislation to ensure that climate legislation promotes justice for all and stewardship of God's Creation. We believe that legislation must:

- Follow scientific recommendations to ensure that the average temperature does not rise more than 2 degrees Celsius
- Protect those living in poverty from the impacts of climate change and climate legislation through focused resources to low income people living in the US
- Increase international adaptation assistance to those in the most vulnerable developing nations to help them adapt to the impacts of climate change

As the new President, it is imperative that you provide leadership both domestically and internationally to help us deal with this moral crisis. We have lost valuable time and credibility as a result of our unconscionable silence over the last eight years. We urge you to propose legislation reflecting the aforementioned policies and calling for US leadership in response to the global climate crisis. In addition, the United States must re-engage in international talks on global warming



and ensure full participation by the US in the development and implementation of any new agreements.

2. Development of a Sustainable Energy Policy

Energy sustainability, though intricately linked to global climate change, is an important issue in and of itself. The United States must shift its energy portfolio to clean and renewable sources that protect God's Creation and have little impact on the health of God's people. Current energy sources such as coal, oil, and gas are not only finite and expensive but their extraction results in major changes to God's Creation that is devastating God's Earth. We urge you to support research for and investment in clean and renewable energy sources that will benefit God's Creation and God's people. These can be achieved with the following:

- **Adopt policies that encourage energy conservation** in the federal government, and in American homes, communities, national transportation and distribution systems and commercial enterprises.
- **Re-direct valuable research dollars** from "clean coal" technology to renewable sources such as wind, solar, geothermal, and biomass; and from corn-based to cellulosic ethanol. New sources of energy present an important opportunity for investment and jobs; this is a particularly critical goal in light of our struggling economy.
- **Ensure that at least 20% of the United States energy comes from renewable sources by 2025.** As a country, we must seek new solutions to the growing energy challenges that we are facing. By setting benchmarks, we can ensure that we are reducing our dependence on fossil fuels as well as air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

3. Commitment to Environmental Health

A growing body of scientific literature suggests that chemicals found in the products we use may contribute to a wide array of health problems. By fixing our chemical regulatory system and giving authority to pertinent agencies such as the EPA and the FDA to ban and regulate chemicals of concern, we can ensure that vulnerable populations such as pregnant women, children, communities of color, workers, and those living in poverty are protected. We urge you to do this in two key ways. First, we call for reform of the Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976 that would test the more than 82,000 chemicals registered for use. Second, we call on you to strengthen the cosmetics section of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetics Act to give the FDA authority to regulate ingredients in personal care products and ensure that the harmful chemicals found in fragrance and flavor must be made public knowledge.

Overall, by ensuring that the chemicals in products are safe before the American public is exposed to them, we can improve public health and the health of all Creation. Specifically, we call on you to support legislation that:

- Grants authority to the EPA and the FDA to regulate chemicals in products and places the burden of proof on companies that produce and supply chemicals.
- Bans carcinogens, mutagens, reproductive toxins as well as harmful chemicals found in cord blood



- Phases out chemicals that persist and bioaccumulate up the food chain and are found to be harmful to human health and God's Creation. These chemicals should be replaced with safer alternatives that have been put through rigorous safety substantiation.
- Ensures that any new chemicals are rigorously tested for safety.
- Listens to the new science linking low dose exposure to various health problems
- Ensures that the public is informed about harmful chemicals and that products and chemicals found unsafe are not exported abroad or dumped in low income communities
- Promotes incentives for the development of a non-toxic, green economy that will allow all of God's Creation to flourish

4. **Protection for Public Lands**

Land stewardship is a matter of morality, faith, and ethics and not simply one of property rights and resources. We urge you to support the expansion of the National Landscape Conservation System and funding for its operation.

People of faith are also working throughout the country with local place based campaigns to urge wilderness designation and working to help protect and maintain our National Parks, Wildlife Refuges, and the rest of the system of public lands that has made our country the world's leader in the protection of land for present and future generations. In recent years, our peerless system of public lands has suffered from a lack of funding and attention, and we call on you to take a comprehensive look at the needs of the system in order to ensure that it will endure for our children and grandchildren.

5. **Increase Enforcement and Funding for Environmental Programs**

For the last eight years, funding and enforcement of many US environmental regulations have been lacking. This has limited our ability as a nation to advance a clean, sustainable and just future for all of God's Creation. To ensure that we, as a country, refocus our efforts on environmental protection and environmental justice, funding and enforcement must be restored. In particular, the following issues areas have suffered greatly in the recent past.

- **Environmental justice and racism**

For decades, the environmental and health impacts of many of our unsustainable practices have been placed onto communities of color, children, women and the elderly. Despite decades of working to prevent these injustices, the recent release of *Toxic Waste and Race* by the United Church of Christ highlights that we have made little progress in the last 20 years. In particular, it is important for you to recommit to Executive Order 12898 which addresses "environmental justice in minority populations and low income populations" as called for by the Office of the General Inspector.

- **The Border Fence**

With the critical problems facing our border communities in the Southwest and the serious environmental problems that have been and are being created with the construction of the border wall, the NCC urgently calls you and Congress to ensure that the waiving of environmental rules under the guise of "national security" is no longer used as a means of justifying controversial projects. We must honor and enforce the environmental regulations that have been established to protect God's ecosystems and communities. We urge your administration to consider ways to reverse the damage done as a result of the construction of



the border wall, particularly in critical habitats, National Wildlife Refuges, and native communities.

- **Endangered Species Act**

We are alarmed by the continued threats against the Endangered Species Act, which provides guidance for living in peace with the rest of God's Creation. The recent proposed rule changes from the Bush Administration and the Department of the Interior and Commerce seek to undermine species protection that has been in place since the passage of the Endangered Species Act in 1973. We urge you to restore the standards set by the Endangered Species Act and ensure that God's Creation is protected, particularly as new threats emerge such as climate change and excessive pollution in our water sources.

- **Water**

Water is the sustaining element of all plants, animals and humans, making it the world's most precious resource. . A recent status report on clean water found that 45 percent of rivers, 47 percent of lakes, and 91 percent of Great Lakes shorelines fail to meet federal standards. To respond to these growing concerns we ask you to recommit to fulfilling both the letter and the spirit of the Clean Water Act and the Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act of 2005. In order to defend our nation's supply of clean water we also urge you to extend protections to all water bodies that have been historically covered by the Clean Water Act by supporting the Clean Water Restoration Act.