

January 5, 2021

Dear President-Elect Biden and Members of Congress:

As faith leaders at the national, state and local level, we are deeply saddened that in its final days the Trump Administration is rushing forward with a lease sale that will not only violate Indigenous rights but decimate sacred land and threaten God's creation.

We are called not only to care for all of God's children and to protect God's creation but to be outspoken leaders for God's creation. We urge both Congress and the Biden Administration to act with haste and prioritize protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, a part of God's creation that stands alone in its wilderness, ecological integrity, and beauty, from the imminent threat of oil and gas exploration and drilling.

Oil drilling in the Arctic Refuge would significantly compromise the spiritual wellbeing and livelihoods of an indigenous community and compound the devastating and unevenly distributed climate impacts already being felt in the Arctic Refuge and in communities of color across the U.S. To combat these injustices, we should be moving towards efficient energy that produces low levels of pollution, not supporting the extraction of more fossil fuels.

The Gwich'in people, many of whom are Episcopalian, are dependent on the health of the landscape and the Porcupine caribou, which provides them a majority of their food source, to maintain their culture and way of life. The Gwich'in refer to this sacred place, the birthing grounds for the Porcupine Caribou Herd, as "Iizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit" or "The Sacred Place Where Life Begins." The faith community's decades long commitment to protecting the Arctic Refuge is inspired by our dedication to defending all of God's creation, including the fundamental rights of the Gwich'in people.

We have a spiritual duty to protect the Arctic Refuge for both conservation and Indigenous rights. The rush to auction off the Arctic Refuge to the oil industry has resulted in a deeply flawed process and environmental analysis with no meaningful protections for wildlife, Alaska Native cultural values and ways of life, or the area's iconic wilderness character.

Once oil exploration and drilling begins, this sacred landscape and the communities that rely upon it for survival will be harmed forever. We must demonstrate our commitment to protecting all of God's creation and living out our call for justice for God's people by calling a halt on plans to drill and conduct oil exploration in the Arctic Refuge. We have a moral obligation to promote justice, stewardship, and intergenerational responsibility.

Sincerely,

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