

Faith Leaders Call for U.S. to Rejoin the Paris Agreement

As we approach the fifth anniversary of the historic Paris Climate Agreement, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious urges President-Elect Biden to immediately rejoin the accord and to demonstrate U.S. determination to lead by increasing our Nationally Determined Contribution. We believe with Pope Francis that all nations have “a clear, definitive, and ineluctable ethical imperative to act” on climate change. As women religious who have dedicated our lives to building God’s beloved community we know first-hand that we are not faced with two separate issues one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis that requires exceptional global leadership and profound concern for the common good. We have heard the cries of Earth and God’s people. The time to act is now.

--Carol Zinn, SSJ, Executive Director of LCWR

Today marks five years since the world came together in Paris and agreed on a common way forward to tackle the climate crisis. YECA was in Paris when the gavel fell, and were proud to be. The Trump Administration's official exit from the Agreement last month capped a presidential term of unconscionable ecological harm and neglect. We are heartened by President-elect Biden's commitment to rejoin the Paris Agreement on Day One, and urge him to do so.

Yet there is nothing magical about the Paris Agreement in itself. Simply signing it does not guarantee a country's path to net-zero emissions. Campaigning on a promise to rejoin it does not a climate champion make. The Paris Agreement is crucial for global progress to climate action, but it is the starting block, not the finish line.

President-elect Biden must rejoin the Paris Agreement on January 20, and then do everything in his power every day thereafter to achieve the future that the Paris Agreement makes possible. We pledge to continue doing all we can to help, for the sake of God's good creation and our neighbor's good.

--Rev. Kyle Meyaard-Schaap, National Organizer and Spokesperson, Young Evangelicals for Climate Action

The climate crisis requires the whole world to make profound systemic changes – together. The Paris Climate Accord was a miraculous step. Once the U.S. rejoins, the whole world can and must immediately embrace our generation’s singular calling: to restore God’s great gift of creation. Every religion in the world can and must support the metanoia – the great turning – we must complete together. We must initiate a new moral era that moves to undo the disproportionate impact of climate change on communities of color, indigenous communities, and poor white communities around the world even as we commit to hold all our religious, political, corporate, and global leaders accountable to do the same. People of faith must demand an end to all governmental subsidies and bank financing of fossil fuel corporations, a halt to the building of any new fossil fuel infrastructure, and a commitment to accelerate the worldwide shift to wind, water and solar. This is our common, sacred calling. Nothing we do will matter if we fail this calling.

--Rev. Jim Antal, Special Advisor on Climate Justice to UCC General Minister and President

Re-entering the Paris Climate Agreement recasts our global solidarity to act with all other nations to address the human-made climate emergency. Stopping fully the use of fossil fuels by 2030 must be the United States' unequivocal response and responsibility. Ending immediately fossil fuel subsidies to fund a green and just transition must begin now.

--Sister Aine O'Connor, RSM, a member of the Leadership Team of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

CWS welcomes President-elect Biden's pledge to immediately rejoin the Paris Agreement, which, five years ago today, came into being. Doing so repositions United States as important actor, allowing it to regain some badly needed credibility with world leaders, and reigniting global involvement in critical international climate negotiations whose legitimacy had started to flail following the disastrous decision of the Trump administration to withdraw from it.

And not a moment too soon. As the entire planet struggles to face the continuing challenge of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, balanced, yet bold American action - on both domestic environmental challenges and international targets - is perhaps more important today than at any other time in America's history. If the events of 2020 have laid bare the tragic, ongoing fissures in the social fabric of our own country, they have also illustrated how deeply connected America is to the rest of the world. Inequality, hunger, vulnerability, and climate induced displacement are today as much American stories as they are international ones. CWS bears witness to and responds to both.

We accompany at-risk communities both at home and abroad: refugees and asylum seekers who journey from far to call America home, migrants who face threats to life and dignity while in transit or upon reaching borders, and – increasingly – families and communities who must weigh difficult choices of moving or adapting in place, in the face of climate change's impacts. All people deserve to lead lives of dignity wherever they are, and whether near or far, all are our neighbors. Climate change places us all at greater risk and makes it even more critical that we join like-minded and like-hearted people, worldwide, in a collective response.

Resuming climate talks is but the start of what America now needs to do to achieve the urgent, ambitious action which climate science has long advised. Principles of fairness and equity must guide what America does next, which must include nationwide action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions - rapid disbursement of climate finance - pledged, but not yet delivered – as well as scaled up channeling of adaptation, mitigation, and resilience funding to the developing world so that they have a fighting chance to prepare. This is all squarely in the interest of the United States.

--John McCollough, Church World Service

Our Jewish tradition reminds us “to till and to tend” the earth (Genesis 2:15) and to safeguard the planet for future generations. The Paris Climate Agreement reflects our sacred responsibility to steward creation and to care for vulnerable communities, who bear the brunt of the burdens of

environmental degradation. As we commemorate the fifth anniversary of this historic agreement, we call on the United States and Canada to act with urgency, lead global efforts to pursue even more ambitious emissions cuts, and support those who disproportionately face the devastating consequences of climate change.

--Jonah Pesner: Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism

As we mark the anniversary of the Paris Climate Agreement, we also conclude a year of reckoning with the profound racial injustices that endure in our country, as well as dire signs that we are living out of balance with God's creation: hurricanes, wildfires, and pandemic have devastated our communities. As Christians, we seek God's restorative grace and vision for renewed commitment to heal our relationships with each other, and God's creation. As the United States prepares to re-enter the Paris Climate Agreement, may our country's international representatives engage in a way that shows how we have been changed by the events of 2020. We re-enter humbled by a new understanding of our profound interdependence.

--Shantha Ready Alonso, Executive Director, Creation Justice Ministries

The Paris Accord Anniversary is necessary for our survival to live in a climate where emissions are lowered. It is evident that there are more storms that are causing more damage to our environment. If we do not conform, what kind of world will be left for our children and grandchildren?"

--Dr. Jeanette L Bouknight, Executive Secretary, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

On this the 5th anniversary of the Paris Accord, as people of faith we take seriously the Psalmist assertion, "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." As believers and stewards of creation, we are in the process of establishing a concrete course of action to contribute to the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, the increase of renewable energy's market share, and an increase in energy efficiency. We applaud the anticipated return of the United States to the Paris accord which is viewed as the world's first comprehensive climate agreement and described as an incentive and catalyst for fossil fuel divestment."

--The Rt. Rev. Staccato Powell, Bishop AME Zion Church

Faith bodies like the Episcopal Church were inspired to take bold action in the worldwide climate movement in response to the United Nations, UNFCCC, and establishment of the Paris Agreement. And we remain committed to ensuring that people everywhere are empowered to undertake bold action on climate change mitigation and adaptation. We know that caring for God's creation by engaging climate change is not only good for the environment, but also good for the health and welfare of our people.

--Rev. Melanie Mullen, Director for Reconciliation, Justice, and Creation Care
Presiding Bishop's Staff for The Episcopal Church

On the fifth anniversary of the Paris Agreement, the Columbans wholeheartedly support the incoming Biden administration's intention to rejoin the international effort to address climate change. The United States has a moral responsibility to care for our sisters and brothers around the world by re-engaging with our international partners to mitigate the impacts of climate chaos. Rejoining the Paris Agreement is only the first step, however, in what we hope is an ambitious domestic strategy to reduce our country's emissions as quickly and as equitably as possible.
--Rebecca Eastwood, Advocacy Program Manager, Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

United Methodist Women recognizes that the climate crisis disproportionately impacts women, children and marginalized communities in the U.S. and around the world. The Paris Agreement is as necessary today as it was when it was forged five years ago. As women of faith, we urge the incoming Biden/Harris administration to create a cohesive response and take immediate action on day 1 with a plan that is at scale to combat the climate crisis and exceed previous commitments.
--Elizabeth Chun Hye LEE, United Methodist Women