September 20, 2007

The Honorable Barbara Boxer, Chair
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James M. Inhofe, Ranking Member
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Chair
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard G. Lugar, Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Climate Change Assistance and Global Poverty Impacts

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the millions of members of our development, faith-based, environmental, and other organizations, we are writing to call for congressional action to address the serious impacts that climate change is creating for the world's poorest and most vulnerable people, especially those in developing countries. As the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently concluded, impoverished countries will have the least capacity to cope with increasingly devastating impacts, including extreme weather events, sea-level rise, drought, disruption of water and food supplies, and impacts on health. Climate change is quickly becoming a major driver of poverty around the world, but that reality has not yet been given the urgent attention it demands.

For example, the IPCC finds that up to 250 million people in Africa are projected to be exposed to an increase in water stress due to climate change, and in some countries, yields from rain-fed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50 percent by 2020. As the IPCC notes, "this would further adversely affect food security and exacerbate malnutrition . . . ." This is but one of the many dire impacts that climate change will likely have on vulnerable countries globally.
In light of these serious concerns, we urge you to take action to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the United States that are contributing to these impacts on impoverished countries, while also putting in place substantial assistance for those countries to adapt to the widespread and serious consequences of climate change. In particular, a significant proportion of any revenue generated from climate policies, such as auctions of emission permits, should be directed to the adaptation needs of poor people and impoverished countries. To maximize those resources, policies to reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions should ensure that the responsibility to pay for emissions reductions and adaptation costs are borne equitably by those who are most responsible for those emissions, such as through robust permit auctions.

Over the past century, the United States and other wealthy countries have been responsible for a disproportionate amount of the greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming. With only five percent of the world’s population, the United States currently emits about 25 percent of greenhouse gases generated by human activity. By contrast, developing countries face enormous burdens to adapt to the impacts, despite being the least historically responsible for climate change. In order to limit the impacts on impoverished communities, the United States should take immediate action to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, while also committing to working with other major emitters. Yet even with significant emissions reductions, the impacts on impoverished countries will be severe, and the United States has a responsibility to assist those countries and communities that are most vulnerable and least able to adapt to the consequences of climate change. Taking such action is in our national interest, as the serious consequences of climate change in developing countries will undermine global stability and security on a wide scale.

The World Bank estimates that the annual cost of adaptation in developing countries is approximately $10 to 40 billion. A new analysis by Oxfam assesses a more complete range of additional impact costs and estimate costs of adaptation in developing countries to be at least $50 billion a year. This includes the costs of reducing the vulnerability of existing infrastructure and the costs of entirely new, unplanned investments. Developing countries will need to adapt water systems and agricultural techniques, reduce vulnerability to extreme weather events, cope with new and exacerbated disease vectors, and address increased migration and conflict. Making precise estimates of future adaptation costs is difficult given the many factors involved, but these assessments demonstrate that the scale of resources needed to help developing countries cope with the impacts of climate change is much greater than is currently available to them.

As you consider vital climate legislation in the coming months, we urge you to address this challenge forcefully not only by reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, but also by providing substantial assistance to developing countries that will face increasingly severe consequences. Given the scope of the challenge, these funds should be above and beyond what is available through traditional development assistance, and should be provided through funding channels that are transparent, accountable, and fully responsive to the needs of affected communities in developing countries.
Climate change poses one of the greatest challenges to efforts to promote development around the world and reduce global poverty. We look forward to working with you to address these serious concerns as Congressional climate legislation moves forward.

Sincerely,

ActionAid International USA
Bread for the World
CARE USA
Center for American Progress Action Fund
Church World Service
Citizens for Global Solutions
Earth Day Network
EcoEquity
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Friends of the Earth US
Friends of the World Food Program
Greenpeace
Heifer International
International Rescue Committee
Jubilee USA Network
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mercy Corps
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate,
Justice Peace/Integrity of Creation Office,
USA

National Council of Churches
National Peace Corps Association
National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council
Oil Change International
Oxfam America
Pact
Population Action International
Presbyterian Church (USA) Washington Office
RESULTS Educational Fund
Sierra Club
Sustainable Energy and Economy Network,
Institute for Policy Studies
Union of Concerned Scientists
Unitarian Universalist Association of
Congregations
United Methodist Church, General Board of
Church and Society

cc: Members of the United States Senate