



Resolution of the Central Conference of American Rabbis

CLIMATE CHANGE

Adopted by the 116th Annual Convention
of the Central Conference of American Rabbis
Houston, Texas
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Background

In December 1997, the nations of the world gathered in Kyoto, Japan to develop a treaty with binding commitments to address the threat of climate change. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a group of over 2,000 climate scientists was charged to evaluate the data on climate change to inform the treaty negotiations. IPCC has documented changes in the earth's atmosphere that are attributed to human activity, causing elevated levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses that are heating the earth's surface.

The following Jewish and secular moral principles serve as the foundation for the Conference's position on the development of agreements and policies to address climate change:

Responsibilities to Future Generations: *"Therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live"* (Deuteronomy 30:20). Humankind has a solemn obligation to improve the world for future generations. Minimizing climate change requires us to learn how to live within the Earth's ecological limits so that we will not compromise ecological or economic security of those who come after us.

Integrity of Creation: *"The human being was placed in the Garden of Eden to till it and to tend it."* (Genesis 2:15). Humankind has a solemn obligation to protect the integrity of ecological systems, so that their diverse constituent species, including humans, can thrive.

Protection of the Vulnerable: *"When one loves righteousness and justice, the earth is full of the loving-kindness of the Eternal"* (Psalm 33:5). The requirements and procedures to address climate change must protect those most vulnerable to climate change both in the United States and around the globe: poor people, those living in coastal areas, those who rely on subsistence agriculture.

Equitable Distribution of Responsibility: Nations' responsibilities for reducing greenhouse gas emissions should correlate to their contribution to the problem. The United States has built an economy highly dependent upon fossil fuel use that has affected the entire globe, and must therefore reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a manner that corresponds to its share of the problem.

Sustainable Development: The Earth cannot sustain the levels of resource exploitation currently maintained by the developed world. As we work toward global economic development, the developed world should promote renewable energy sources and new technologies, so that developing nations do not face the same environmental challenges that we face today because of industrialization.

Strong action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is consistent with a number of long-standing public policy priorities, including: improving air quality, increasing mass transit, development of non-polluting alternative energy sources, energy efficiency and energy conservation.

Together, the people of the world must use our God-given gifts to develop innovative strategies to meet [present] needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

THEREFORE the Central Conference of American Rabbis resolves to:

1. Call on the United States Congress to take leadership on the issue of Global Climate Change. [we must scale] back emissions to year 2000 levels....
2. Urge the federal government to immediately adopt policies to accomplish emissions reductions, including: programs that use pricing to lower demand for fossil fuels; encouraging non-polluting energy sources; and raising revenue for public projects such as mass transit, that would lower carbon emissions.
3. Urge the federal government to complement the above policies with programs to help those Americans whose economic security would be jeopardized by such policies, including assistance to poor people and retraining for coal miners and other affected workers;
4. Urge the federal government to work cooperatively with other nations to address climate change through participation in international bodies, treaties and protocols and through the promotion of international development efforts that promote environmental sustainability; and
5. Urge institutions within the Jewish community to promote and provide resources to conduct energy audits of private homes and communal facilities, including synagogues, schools, community centers and commercial buildings and to promote eco-friendly purchasing.

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Statement by the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism Climate Change and Global Warming

HUMAN ACTIVITIES ARE CAUSING AN ENORMOUS, DANGEROUS EXPERIMENT to be conducted to the globe. The burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, and agricultural and industrial practices unleash billions of tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the environment. Since the industrial revolution, atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide have increased by more than 30 percent to levels unsurpassed in the past 160,000 years.

Jewish Values and Climate Change

Jewish tradition emphasizes values that speak to energy policies that are environmentally responsible. Humankind has a solemn obligation to improve the world for future generations. Addressing climate change requires us to learn how to live within the ecological limits of the earth so that we will not compromise the ecological or economic security of those who come after us. Genesis 2:15 emphasizes our responsibility to protect the integrity of the environment so that its diverse species, including humans, can thrive. The human being was placed in the Garden to till it and to tend it. Jewish tradition teaches us that human domain over nature does not include a license to abuse the environment. The Talmudic concept *bal tashchit*, “do not destroy” asserted God’s ownership of the land. Psalm 24 notes, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” From this concept it follows that any act of destruction is an offense against the property of God.

Energy policy must also be equitable and just, as the Torah commands, “Justice, justice shall you pursue” (Deuteronomy 16:20). The countries most responsible for climate change should be those most responsible for finding a solution to the problem.

Judaism also underscores the moral imperative of protecting the poor and vulnerable. When one loves righteousness and justice, “the earth is full of the loving-kindness of the Eternal” (Psalms 33:5).