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February 17, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson,

It is our prayer that you may be blessed with wisdom as you begin your term of office as Secretary of State.

Today, we write about our shared obligation to care for the environment. The Judeo-Christian tradition has always understood “the environment” to be a gift from God. From time immemorial, the people of our nation have recognized this gift in our abundant and beautiful lands, pristine waters and clear skies. Rooted in this tradition, Pope Francis called on the world’s leaders to come together to protect the gift of our common home. Sadly, environmental issues can be politicized for partisan agendas and used in public discourse to serve different economic, social, political and ideological interests. By presenting the care for creation from an ethical and moral standpoint, the Pope has invited all to rise above these unhelpful divisions. We have one common home, and we must protect it.

There is no environmental issue that has been as ideologically contested as climate change. In his encyclical letter, *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis rejected a narrow understanding of climate change that excludes natural causes and other factors. At the same time, he recognized that “*a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity*” (LS 23). This nuanced understanding of climate change, which you appear to share, creates space for reasonable people to recognize, without controversy, that the climate is changing and highlights the importance of adaptation in response.

Adaptation policy is fundamentally concerned with helping God’s creatures and all human beings, especially those who are poor, to adapt to the effects of climate change, regardless of the causes. From the perspective of Catholic social teaching, adaptation ranks among the most important actions we can take. The poor and vulnerable disproportionately suffer from hurricanes, floods, droughts, famines and water scarcities. Climate change is one more good reason for Christians to live up to what we should be doing in the first place: “For I was hungry you gave me food, I was thirsty you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mt 25, 35). Globally, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) furthers the cause of adaptation by supporting developing nations in building resilience and recovering from the impacts of climate change around the world. Such resilience improves lives and promotes stability and security. We urge you to support the GCF through your role as Secretary of State.

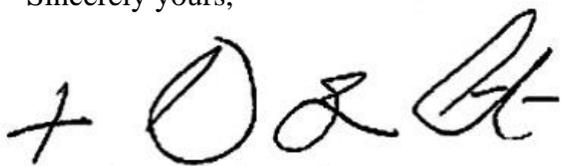
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Uncompromising support for adaptation policies in no way excludes efforts to mitigate the anthropogenic contributors to climate change. The future of mitigation is intimately connected to global energy use, where progress will necessarily require an energy revolution. As you know, the global community currently faces a tremendous challenge in delivering not only sustainable, efficient and clean energy, but also energy that is secure, affordable, accessible and equitable. This will require ingenuity, investment and enterprise, all virtues of the American people. Our leading scientists and engineers, research institutions and energy companies have already made great strides towards developing affordable clean energy. Through investments in infrastructure and technology the U.S. government has the unique opportunity to reach energy security and assert its global leadership in growing a sustainable energy sector.

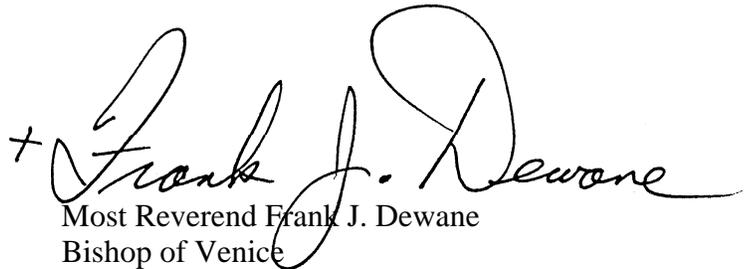
We want to reaffirm the importance of U.S. leadership and commitment to the Paris agreement. In 2015, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops affirmed that funding for climate change related adaptation and mitigation programs as part of the Paris agreement - especially through the GCF - is urgently needed if we are to meet our common and differentiated responsibilities for the effects of climate change. We also underscored the importance to act within our own country to curtail carbon emissions that contribute to the problem and assist vulnerable populations. The Paris agreement is a key step towards both these goals.

This is a time of both uncertainty and significant opportunity for our nation and world. Filled with hope in God, we pray that your work may contribute to America's material, social and spiritual wealth and further solidarity across the world.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Oscar Cantú  
Bishop of Las Cruces  
Chair, Committee on International Justice  
and Peace  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Most Reverend Frank J. Dewane  
Bishop of Venice  
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