



Institute Leadership Team Supports Climate Change Legal Brief

Backgrounder

The Sisters of Mercy Institute Leadership Team (ILT), the Northeast Community Leadership Team and Justice Council, the West Midwest Leadership Team and Justice Team and Mercy Ecology Inc., signed onto an amicus curiae (“friend of the court”) brief filed November 6, 2014 with the U.S. Supreme Court in a ground-breaking climate change case brought by several youth. The young people brought the case to force the federal government to recognize that it has obligations to protect essential natural resources for present and future generations.

The case

Two years ago, five youth and two non-profit organizations representing thousands of youth, sought immediate court intervention to compel U.S. government action on climate change. The case was dismissed in district court and then by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit earlier this year. Five young Americans along with the nonprofit group Our Children’s Trust, filed a petition on October 3, 2014, with the Supreme Court, seeking an appeal of the D.C. Circuit decision. The lawsuit is premised on U.S. citizens’ constitutional rights to protection of land, air, and water by their government for posterity. You may read more [here](#).

Supporters

The ILT, Northeast Community Leadership Team and Northeast Justice Council in November 2013 signed onto an amicus curiae brief in the D.C. circuit case that was dismissed earlier this year. Only three other faith organizations signed onto that brief. Many more faith groups, along with prominent economists, mayors, representatives of native communities and others, have signed onto the Supreme Court brief filed in 2014. Other supporting briefs were filed by climate scientists and legal scholars.

The Urgency of this Case

Various government agencies on the international and national levels have issued reports over the past year warning about the current and future impacts of climate change. They

include the National Climate Assessment and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Climate change is set to inflict “severe, widespread, and irreversible impacts” on people and the natural world unless carbon emissions are cut sharply and rapidly, according to a November 2, 2014 report by the IPCC.

President Obama outlined a climate plan in 2013, but with what many experts have said are inadequate targets for carbon emissions based on scientific standards. Then earlier this year the Environmental Protection Agency issued proposed regulations on carbon emissions from existing power plants. President Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping announced on November 11, 2014 that both countries will curb their greenhouse gas emissions over the next two decades. Under the agreement, the U.S. would cut carbon emissions by 26 to 28 percent from 2005 levels before the year 2025, while China would peak its carbon emissions by 2030 and also aim to get 20 percent of its energy from zero-carbon emission sources by the same year.

Congress, meanwhile, hasn’t taken any significant steps towards publicly acknowledging the urgency of addressing climate change, much less proposing mediation efforts.

Why Mercy?

- Our commitment to serving children throughout our history
- Chapter Declaration: “We are led...to act in ways which contribute to a sustainable future for our Institute, Church and Earth”
- Chapter Declaration: “acting in solidarity with impoverished people”
- Critical Concerns: “To reverence Earth and work more effectively toward the sustainability of life”
- Northeast Community’s Corporate Stand on Climate Change:
“We, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Northeast Community and Companions believe the impacts of climate change around the world, from floods to droughts to disease, disproportionately affect poor, vulnerable communities, especially women, who regularly do the work of growing food, collecting water and fuel and raising children.
Therefore we support actions and policies that educate federal legislators and others on the critical need for action on comprehensive climate change and energy, including international adaptation and mitigation.”
- Catholic Social Teaching: Life and dignity of the human person, option for the poor and vulnerable, solidarity, care for God’s creation

- Pope Francis: “Creation is not a property, which we can rule over at will; or, even less, is the property of only a few: Creation is a gift, it is a wonderful gift that God has given us, so that we care for it and we use it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude.” (*May 21, 2014 audience*)
- Pope Francis: “Nature, in a word, is at our disposition and we are called to exercise a responsible stewardship over it. Yet so often we are driven by greed and by the arrogance of dominion, possession, manipulation and exploitation; we do not preserve nature; nor do we respect it or consider it a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future generations.” (*World Day of Peace, January 1, 2014*)
- U.S. Bishops, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, June 2001
 “In facing climate change, what we already know requires a response; it cannot be easily dismissed. Significant levels of scientific consensus — even in a situation with less than full certainty, where the consequences of not acting are serious — justifies, indeed can obligate, our taking action intended to avert potential dangers. In other words, if enough evidence indicates that the present course of action could jeopardize humankind's well-being, prudence dictates taking mitigating or preventative action.”

Institute Leadership Team Statement of Support for Lawsuit in Legal Brief:

The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas’ Institute Leadership Team represents nearly 3,500 vowed women religious with a commitment to persons who are poor, especially women and children. One of the directives of the Sisters of Mercy is to “reverence Earth and work more effectively toward the sustainability of life.” We advocate for carbon-emission reduction measures and work to reduce the carbon footprint of the congregation’s institutions as we continue to further our efforts to realize sustainability of life.