

## Pastor's Column

### Bishops to G8: "Bring a Light of Hope"

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The Group of Eight (G8) Summit is an annual meeting attended by the leaders of eight countries: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, and the President of the European Commission.

At the Summit, leaders freely and vigorously exchange opinions on a variety of issues facing the global community centering on economic and social problems. They work to reach a consensus to make top-down decisions. The results are then compiled into a declaration.

In a globalized world, countries are becoming increasingly interdependent. Events unfold with drastic speed and the impact of events becomes more significant beyond national borders. Flexible, resolute, and well-balanced decisions as well as effective measures are needed in order to deal with such a situation.

The host country of the Summit holds the G8 Presidency for the entire calendar year. The Presidency carries out preparatory meetings and prepares for the Summit meetings, Foreign Ministers' meeting and Finance Ministers' meeting. The Presidency may call for emergency meetings as necessary in light of international situations at any given time.

This year, the G8 Summit was held this past week in L'Aquila, Italy from July 8 to July 10. The international economic crisis and regional crises, food safety and security, the struggle against climate change, and the deregulation of world trade were the main issues on this year's agenda.

As this year's G8 Summit approached, the Heads of the Episcopal Conferences of the eight industrial superpowers sent a joint letter to their nations' leaders calling for the group to "take steps" toward concrete action on "reducing poverty and addressing climate change." Their letter follows:

*Dear Leaders of the Group of 8 Nations,*

*At a time of global financial and economic crisis, we write on behalf of the Catholic bishops' conferences in the G8 nations to urge you to take concerted actions to protect poor persons and assist developing countries at the upcoming G8 Summit in Italy.*

*As our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, wrote in a letter to Prime Minister Gordon Brown prior to the G20 meeting which the Prime Minister hosted:*

*"The current crisis has raised the spectre of the cancellation of drastic reduction of external assistance programmes, especially for Africa and for less developed countries elsewhere. Development aid, including the commercial and financial conditions favourable to less developed countries and the cancellation of the external debt of the poorest and most indebted countries, has not been the cause of the crisis and, out of fundamental justice, must not be its victim."*

*Our moral tradition commits the Church to protecting human life and dignity, especially of the poorest, most vulnerable members of the human family. In the faces of poor persons the Catholic Church sees the face of Christ whom we serve in countries throughout the world.*

*Ironically poor people have contributed the least to the economic crisis facing our world, but their lives and livelihoods*

*are likely to suffer the greatest devastation because they struggle at the margins in crushing poverty. In light of this fact, The G8 nations should meet their responsibility to promote dialogue with other powerful economies to help prevent further economic crises. In addition, they should meet their commitments to increase Official Development Assistance in order to reduce global poverty and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, especially in African countries. This requires deepening partnerships with developing countries so that their peoples can be active agents in their own development, participating in political, governmental, economic and social reforms that serve the common good of all. In a particular way it is important to strengthen peacekeeping so that armed conflicts do not continue to rob countries of the resources needed for development.*

*In a similar way, poor countries and peoples who have contributed the least to the human factors driving global climate change are most at risk of its harmful consequences. As Catholic pastors and teachers, we have a special concern for how climate change impacts the poor. Concrete commitments should be agreed upon and mechanisms should be created to mitigate additional global climate change and to help poor persons and developing nations adapt to its effects as well as to adopt appropriate technologies for sustainable development. Protecting the poor and the planet are not competing causes; they are moral priorities for all people living in this world.*

*The G8 Summit takes place in the shadow of a global economic crisis, but its actions can help bring a light of hope to our world. By asking first how a given policy will affect the poor and the vulnerable, you can help assure that the common good of all is served. As a human family we are only as healthy as our weakest members.*

*We pray that your meeting will be blessed by a spirit of collaboration that enables you to take steps to reduce poverty and address climate change in a time of crisis.*

*Sincerely yours,*

*Most Rev. Vernon James Weisgerber, Archbishop of Winnipeg,  
President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops,*

*His Eminence Andre Vingt-Trois, Archbishop of Paris,  
President of the Bishops' Conference of France*

*Most Rev. Robert Zollitsch, Archbishop of Freiburg,  
President of the German Bishops' Conference*

*His Eminence Angelo Cardinal Bagnasco, Archbishop of Genoa,  
President of the Bishops' Conference of Italy*

*Most Rev. Peter Takeo Okada, Archbishop of Tokyo,  
President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan*

*Most Rev. Joseph Werth, Bishop of the Diocese of Transfiguration of  
the Lord in Novosibirsk, President of the Conference of Catholic  
Bishops of the Russian Federation*

*His Eminence Keith Patrick Cardinal O'Brien, Archbishop of  
Edinburgh and St. Andrews,  
President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Scotland*

*Most Rev. Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, President of  
the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales*

*His Eminence Francis Cardinal George, Archbishop of Chicago,  
President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*