We are writing to support and join our political leaders in taking bold action to address climate change. As African-Americans and members of the Christian clergy, we speak from the dual perspectives of a people whose longstanding bond with the Earth is equaled by an abiding commitment to walking by faith—a faith that serves as our moral compass, and directs us to be responsible stewards of the whole of creation. Our perspective is shaped by the life-giving and healing legacy of earth-connectedness passed down by our forbears. A powerful connection to the Earth—among both urban and rural communities—has helped sustain the bodies and souls of our people for generations. Issues related to climate change are already affecting us, and without decisive action to protect our planet and its inhabitants, the hopes we hold for future generations will not be realized.

We affirm the interconnectedness of all humanity, and the importance of respecting and enhancing the lives of each and every one of our sisters and brothers—whether in Africa, Antarctica, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America or South America. We all inhabit the same Earth, are tethered to it by the universal force of gravity, breathe its air and drink its water. When natural resources are degraded or scarce, the deleterious impact on an individual, group, or population is cause for concern, but even more than that, it requires corrective action, and whenever possible, preventive measures. We are well aware of this sad reality: The voices of communities whose inhabitants look like us often are dismissed or disregarded. But the world cannot afford to silence us, and we cannot afford to be—and will not—be silent. Climate change most directly impacts the poor and marginalized, but ultimately, everyone is in jeopardy. We must come together to solve this crisis, which can only be addressed effectively when we seek the good of all and speak candidly about where we are and where we’ve come from.

We grieve the long, sad history of racial oppression and the legacy of slavery that continues to affect virtually every dimension of life in America. As we assess the state of our country—and world—during the second term of our country’s first Black president, we cannot escape the reality that our community has been deeply wounded by the systemic racism that reverberates throughout American society, curtailing opportunity and injuring psyches. We are deeply saddened by ongoing disparities in health care, housing, and economic opportunities, and in the educational and judicial systems. The frequency with which the “I-was-afraid-so-I-had-to-shoot” defense is successfully invoked when people of color are murdered reflects the pervasive impulse of law enforcement (and others) to view us as threatening or menacing, even in the most benign circumstances. We know the horror and fear that comes from knowing that none of us can control another person’s perceptions or reactions. And yet, we live in hope—a hope born of faith, reinforced by the progress thus far, and propelled forward by people of good will, committed to ongoing constructive engagement around difficult, pressing issues. Confronting climate change is one of those pressing issues.

We recognize that the church has been instrumental in advancing racial and Environmental Justice. Our desire to further extend that involvement into the realm of Climate Justice leads us to now speak about the importance of caring for the environment we all share, even as we seek better ways of coexisting with each other. The effects of climate change, which touches every aspect of human life, are already painfully clear: Over 50,000 people died of heat waves in 2010 in Europe; drought and increased wildfires threaten both food supplies and communities throughout the United States and the world; drinking water supplies have been jeopardized, and respiratory illnesses such as asthma are particularly vulnerable to
the exacerbation of heat-related illness and stress. Devastating environmental, health, social, and economic consequences imperil our brothers and sisters around the world and in the United States. Today, as we contemplate the gravity of the global climate crisis, we think especially of communities of color and the poor. We are well aware of the disproportionate impact that climate change is taking on these populations the world over. We know it is crucial that our faith communities join with government, the private sector, and nonprofits in mitigation and resiliency planning, as more disruptions and damage caused by massive storms and tornados will continue to take place. This is a humanitarian emergency that requires resources to help vulnerable communities prepare for the dangers ahead and to care for those in harm’s way.

We pledge to address the issue of climate change in the longstanding social justice tradition of the African-American church, with both spiritual and practical involvement. We especially encourage our civic leaders to help the marginalized and disenfranchised cope with the realities of climate change, and we pledge to work with the college and university systems to help develop solutions. We recognize the “inescapable network of mutuality” that Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. described when he wrote “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. ...Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” The effects of climate change are significant, and our environment itself is an “inescapable network of mutuality.”

We call for bold action from political leaders at home and abroad, that will: 1. Assure resources for community resiliency and for the use of faith organizations in the face of immediate climate related disasters. 2. Create, promote and enable energy and carbon emission reduction targets. 3. Develop viable local communication networks to explore interfaith and secular solutions for climate challenges. 4. Continue support of grants and research to provide targeted assistance to underrepresented communities impacted by climate change around the world.

The upcoming United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations must result in a binding international treaty that:

• Commits signatories to meeting the IPCC-agreed emission reduction levels necessary to keep temperature increases below 2°C;

• Includes financial commitments from wealthy countries to assist developing countries and communities in identifying and implementing adaptation and mitigation strategies;

• Includes a meaningful role in negotiations for those who are most severely impacted by climate change.

We pray for wisdom and courage to attend our elected officials and all political leaders. It is vital that steps are taken now; the consequences of inaction are dire.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden
to work it and take care of it.
Genesis 2:15

[signed]