

MC Australia response to price on pollution and position on climate change

Micah Challenge Australia is a campaign focused on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with a view to seeing global poverty halved by 2015. Micah Challenge is not a climate change campaign.

But many of you will have noticed that for two years now, we have included reference to climate change and environmental sustainability in our campaigning, including asking the Australian government to take action on climate change. Why have we chosen to engage in this debate?

Quite simply, the reason is that our coalition partners work daily with very poor people in the developing world. These people are telling us that their climate is changing. This changing climate is threatening the achievement of the MDGs – so as a campaign seeking to achieve the MDGs, we need to respond.

Micah Challenge aims to help Christians to be a prophetic voice in the debate, to help lift people's eyes beyond selfish interest, to highlight the needs of the world's poorest who are often voiceless in the debate. Ensuring a safe climate is an essential aspect of MDG 7 which focuses on environmental sustainability. We seek to remind the church of our responsibility to be good stewards of God's resources, entrusted to our care, and to use that which God has given us for the good of others and for the manifestation of justice in our world.

Specifically, Micah Challenge has been asking the government for two things:

- 1) For Australia to take a leadership position on reducing climate change
- 2) For Australia to contribute its fair share to help poor communities deal with the impacts of a changing climate

The first ask has to do with Australia taking action to reduce our emissions and encouraging others on the international scene to do the same. We recognise that there are differences of opinion in parts of the Christian community regarding the science of climate change, so we don't claim to speak on everyone's behalf. However, the vast majority of organisations and individuals that make up the Micah Challenge coalition do believe there is a scientific consensus that humans are contributing to climate change.

What do we mean by a leadership position? When the Rudd Government was unable to get an emissions trading scheme through Parliament, it adopted a position which said 'we will do no more and no less' than the rest of the world in response to climate change. That is not an acceptable response to the problem. At present, both the Government and the Opposition have policies which formally recognise climate change is happening and which commit Australia to reducing carbon emissions by 5% on 2000 levels by 2020. When you compare these policy positions to international responses, it is clear that we are lagging behind the majority of the world in our response to reducing emissions. We feel we can't remain silent on this issue when the poorest of the world are struggling to find clean water sources, to hold back the tide of malaria, or hold back the literal tides due to rising sea levels and to cope with increasingly extreme weather events.

In light of this, Micah Challenge welcomes the Government's announcement on Sunday because it represents a significant shift towards showing some level of leadership on this issue. It is encouraging to see the goal of an 80% reduction on 2000 emissions levels by 2050 in place in this new policy. As one of the highest per capita polluters on earth, it is critical that Australia reduces its environmental footprint, including greenhouse gases.

While we don't presume to speak on your behalf, we do seek to help mobilise you into action to speak and act for and with the poorest of the world. We believe that Christians can play a constructive role in addressing the environmental issues faced by the world's poorest people. Opportunities exist for Christians in Australia to do that through both prayer (see www.hopeforcreation.com.au for prayer opportunities) and action (see <http://www.micahchallenge.org.au/share-the-earth>).

Our second ask to government focuses on the need for Australia to contribute its fair share to global initiatives to help the poor adapt to a changing climate.

In the midst of ongoing debate regarding the *causes* of climate change, the communities our coalition partners work with are dealing with its *effects* on their local environments. Australia can and should play our part in international efforts to alleviate the effects of these changes by investing in initiatives that help poor people and nations to adapt.

It is good and right that the government has focused on our national interests in the release of this policy. It is important that the government works with industry in Australia to help them adapt to this structural change in our economy and adapt to a clean energy future. It is important that the government consider the price impacts on Australian families and respond appropriately. .

However, as Christians we look beyond our own interests, to the needs of the poor. As we seek to speak up for and with the global poor, Micah Challenge is disappointed to see that the government has missed an opportunity to secure much needed additional support for the global poor in their carbon price announcement. To this point, there has been no commitment to channelling any of the revenue to international initiatives that help the poorest of our world adapt to a changing climate.

This announcement by the government is a good first step toward showing leadership on this issue. It is vitally important that we do not forget the world's poorest people as we continue to seek a sustainable future for our environment and the people who depend on it.