Nuclear energy: Its dangers outweigh its benefits
A statement from Maryknoll leadership
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Overwhelming scientific evidence points to carbon emissions from human activity as a primary factor in the changing climate that is threatening the survival of all living species in the biosphere. One proposed solution is increased development of so-called "clean and carbon free" nuclear energy. Taking seriously the imperative of reducing dependence on fossil fuels for the sake of future generations and of Earth herself, Maryknoll has gathered experience and reflected with great care on this proposal.

Our experience is deep and important: Maryknoll centers are located in Ossining, New York, less than 10 miles from the Indian Point nuclear power plant. Hundreds of us, including many of our retired and elderly members, live there. Maryknoll sisters have lived and worked in New Mexico among uranium miners; and Maryknoll missioners have lived in Japan long enough to witness the destructive capacity of nuclear technology in both the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the most recent Fukushima Daiichi accident.

Around the world Maryknoll missioners have lived with the most impoverished and marginalized communities. In our reflection on this critical issue we are intensely cognizant of the importance of energy to improving the quality of life for those on our planet who are barely surviving. But we are convinced that other pathways to a genuine "good life" exist than one that is as fraught with danger and deception as that of nuclear power.

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns has scrutinized the link between nuclear energy and nuclear weapons focusing on the relative benefits and dangers of nuclear fuel to the whole earth community.

From our mission standpoint of promoting peace, social justice and the integrity of creation, we have examined the burden that nuclear energy use inflicts upon present and future generations and have identified multiple serious threats that begin with uranium mining, the front end of the nuclear energy cycle, and end with the problem of "spent fuel" disposal, the back end of the nuclear fuel cycle. We believe that the radiation and proliferation hazards endemic to nuclear energy production breach the safety and security of human life and endanger the integrity of creation.

A careful examination of the most obvious dangers in each step in the nuclear production cycle and a serious reflection from an ethical point of view has confirmed that:

- The nuclear fuel cycle is a danger to public health and heavily pollutes the environment.
- The nuclear fuel cycle is unsafe because it produces large amounts of radioactive waste for which the world has not yet found a safe repository.

- During the mining, milling, transportation and enrichment processes in particular, workers and their families, most of them native peoples, are continuously exposed to radioactivity.
- Nuclear power and nuclear weapons are so closely linked that it is impossible to separate the two. Increased reliance on nuclear energy increases the likelihood of nuclear weapons proliferation.
- The nuclear fuel cycle, especially the enrichment stage, could be exploited by terrorist groups and unstable governments to produce dirty bombs or weapons of mass destruction.
- Depleted uranium, a dangerous by-product of the nuclear enrichment process, that enters the body through wounds, inhalation of airborne particles, or ingestion of residue, is deployed in weapons, exacerbating conflict and post-conflict dangers, especially for children.
- The U.S. government is heavily subsidizing the nuclear industry and by so doing, diverting funds that could be promoting development in the renewable energy sector.
- The goal of reducing carbon emissions to zero cannot be achieved through the use of nuclear energy because fossil fuels still play a major role in powering the nuclear fuel cycle.

Based on the Gospel, the tradition of Catholic social thought, and new insights into the inextricable dependence of humans on the long-term sustainability of the entire community of life, we believe that these threats far outweigh the benefits of using nuclear energy to mitigate global warming.

The survival of future generations, and perhaps our own, and a sustainable future for the whole community of life require that we dramatically reduce carbon emissions from human activity in the global North, through an unwavering shift to renewable sources of energy and an even more rigorous transformation of our lifestyles.

"In my view, the human community and the natural world will go into the future as a single sacred community or we will both perish in the desert."
Thomas Berry

Maryknoll is the shared name of three organizations, the Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, and the Maryknoll Mission Association of the Faithful, whose combined memberships serve in over 30 countries around the world.