



Canada's tar sands. Photo - contributed.

# Climate change and our Christian moral obligation

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Recently, 'climate change' has been receiving much public attention. The reasons are many, from increasing natural disasters to the November United Nations conference in Paris.

Although economic losses resulting from increasing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are large and important, they are dwarfed by the suffering of children and adults caused by destroyed homes, failed crops, disease, and flooded land. Worse still are long-term consequences: temperature rise above +2°C (now increasingly likely) "could threaten the water supply of half the world's population, wipe out up to half of animal and plant species, and swamp low coasts". To prevent this from happening, urgent and effective action is necessary: the greenhouse gas emissions must fall sharply within the next decade to head off a +2°C rise.

Because of the severe impacts on so many (especially poor) people, climate change is most importantly a moral, ethical and social justice issue—especially for Christians. This has also been recognized by numerous religious leaders, including Pope Francis in his recent encyclical on Environment, the World Council of Churches, the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, the Anglican Bishop of Quebec, and many others.

According to recent reports, the currently proposed greenhouse reductions would

result in world heating up +4°C by the end of this century. Since most of the emissions are contributed by few countries with 'Western' life styles, the actions of their citizens will be critical for limiting the increase to +2°C. If people in the advanced countries do not act decisively, the limit will be exceeded, regardless of what other countries do. Each of us therefore has personal responsibility in bringing down GHG emissions. The action on our part will also signal that the developed countries are ready to do their part for passing a livable world to our children.

While actions by individuals are necessary, they are insufficient because our economies and lifestyles are structured around limitless consumption of fossil fuels. Therefore, governments must play a key role in establishing a regime in which fossil fuel consumption is minimized as rapidly as possible—through incentives, regulations and laws—while maintaining acceptable standards of living. That this is feasible in Canada has been demonstrated by British Columbia, where a carbon tax has resulted in a significant reduction of per capita fossil fuel use while growing the provincial economy. Other very positive developments have taken place in Quebec and Ontario.

Notably absent has been the federal government whose actions included withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol, setting

low GHG reduction targets that would not be reached anyway, promising regulations that were not delivered, and foot-dragging at the international level. Indeed, Mr. Harper's government earned Canada titles of 'laggard', 'Fossil of the Year', 'free-riding on climate action', and 'the worst ranking among developed countries on climate policy'.

With the federal election coming this October, Canadians have an opportunity to choose a government that takes leadership nationally—and internationally fairly represents the majority of Canadians who in repeated surveys have demanded action on climate change.

Here are a few questions you can ask candidates in the October elections—and vote accordingly:

1. How will you and your party halt the expansion of tar sands development and pipelines?
2. How will you and your party act to put a price on carbon sufficient to keep the rise in global temperatures below +2 °C?
3. What will your party do to ensure that fair, effective and legally binding global agreement is achieved at the UN conference in Paris?
4. How will your party develop a renewable energy plan for Canada?