

Machar Statement on Climate Change Prevention Advocacy
January 19, 2015

The issue of climate change is perhaps the critical issue of our times. The burning of fossil fuels presents a grave threat to human civilization and the environment of the planet we inhabit. We join with many other Jewish and non-Jewish congregations in urging that we have, as a society, a moral obligation to reduce the burning of fossil fuels, both through conservation and through increasing use of alternative sources of energy.

As a congregation, Machar supports educational efforts on the subject of climate change, efforts to rally support for appropriate policy responses, and the implementation of policy changes at the local, state, federal and international levels to address this problem.

How is this issue consistent with Machar's mission and values?

The recently issued report by the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change makes clear the scientific support for the reality of the problem of climate change, and clarifies powerfully how much is at stake if climate instability is not aggressively addressed. It states: "Continued emission of greenhouse gases will cause further warming and long-lasting changes in all components of the climate system, increasing the likelihood of severe, pervasive, and irreversible impacts." The report warns that policy choices will grow increasingly harsh if emissions continue on their present course.

Action by Machar to respond to this issue is consistent with the core principle of the Society of Humanistic Judaism that "we take collective responsibility for the state of our world" and affirms that we as humans "have the responsibility for solving human problems." At this moment, there is no issue that evokes those principles as strongly as the threat posed to our planet from climate change.

What actions can we support that will help to address the problem of climate change?

Machar supports a wide range of activities to further the goals of reducing emission of greenhouse gases and promote the use of alternative fuels at local, state, and federal levels. We also support efforts to educate our community and the public on this issue and to build support for action.

Machar supports a variety of initiatives at the local and national level that are intended to reduce the use of carbon-based energy sources, raise the use of alternative energy sources, or reduce the use of energy generally. In addition, we support measures designed to raise the awareness of climate issues among the public generally, educate members of the public on specific climate issues, and raise participation in efforts to reduce carbon emissions. A number of measures are currently under consideration by Maryland, Virginia, the District of Columbia, or by the federal government, and we support those efforts, some of which are discussed below. We also support carbon-emission efforts not currently under consideration, but which may be developed at some point in the future, so long as they meet the general criterion of helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

For example, in Maryland, a broad and diverse coalition of environmentalists, public health officials, business leaders, and others, is supporting a proposal to double the state's clean electricity standard by 2025. Supportive actions could include letter-writing and other forms of lobbying the Maryland legislature. The Sierra Club and other environmental groups will be working to raise the Maryland Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) – that is, the share of energy sold by utilities in Maryland that must come from renewable energy sources – to 40% by the year 2025. Similarly, many groups are seeking to renew the EmPOWER program that provides rebates for energy efficiency measures by residences and businesses; and seeking to cap incineration sources in the RPS to ensure

that incineration does not displace the use of solar, wind and other clean energy sources. Many groups support further funding and implementation of Bus Rapid Transit. Machar supports all these measures in Maryland and surrounding states, and will support other similar proposals to reduce fossil fuel usage and increase the use of clean energy sources. At the federal level, we support efforts of the Obama administration to place regulatory caps on emissions from electrical generating facilities and other utilities, and we support recently renewed proposals for a general tax or cap on carbon fuels usage.

Life on this planet will become progressively harsher unless we embrace new practices and values to guide our communal and individual lives. As members of Machar we support working together, not simply as political members of this society, but in our own lives to instigate sustainable alternatives and to mitigate climate change with humane and ethical responses.

In addition, many environmental groups support the efforts of the national organization 350.org to promote a campaign urging universities, pension funds, and other major investors to divest from the largest fossil fuel companies. The goal of this movement is to help in building a national and international movement in favor of clean energy sources. The fossil-free movement stimulates interest in a fossil free society and stigmatizes the political influence of the fossil free industry for its disproportionate wealth and power used to mislead the public and undermine support for clean energy. Machar endorses this program, and calls on Montgomery County (and other jurisdictions) to limit their investment of retirement funds to fossil-free stocks and bonds.

These proposals are meant only as examples of efforts we support. We support continuing efforts to reduce greenhouse gases, and expect that Machar will be involved in these efforts through such activities as demonstrations, lobbying, circulation of petitions and letter-writing campaigns, and other similar actions.

The Board of Machar:

1. Endorses educational efforts and advocates policies that promote clean energy (i.e., wind, solar, geothermal power), energy efficiency, and decreased reliance on fossil fuels (e.g., coal, oil, natural gas).
2. Further endorses fossil fuel divestment campaigns, such as that of 350MoCo*, that highlight the fossil fuel industry's culpability in preventing governmental responsiveness to the crisis of climate change.

* 350MoCo is a Montgomery County, Maryland affiliate of 350.org, a national climate change advocacy organization. 350MoCo is leading the Montgomery County Fossil Fuel Divestment Campaign, which requests the County Executive and the County Council to “(1) immediately freeze any new investments in fossil fuels; (2) divest from direct ownership and any commingled funds that include fossil fuel public entities and corporate bonds within 5 years.” A bill was introduced in the District of Columbia, the “Fossil Fuel Divestment Act of 2013,” which includes the same provisions.