



THE SALVATION ARMY
INTERNATIONAL POSITIONAL STATEMENT

CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



STATEMENT OF POSITION

The Salvation Army believes people are made in the image of God. He has entrusted us to reflect his personality by caring for the Earth and everything in it.

The Salvation Army recognises environmental degradation as one of the most pressing issues facing the world today, affecting us all. Its effects fall disproportionately on the most vulnerable, particularly in terms of health, livelihood, shelter and the opportunity to make choices. The very survival of humanity depends on the health of the whole ecosystem.

In addition to being compelled by lived experience, The Salvation Army also accepts the scientific evidence that demands action on all levels to lessen the effects of environmental damage. It is committed to sustainable environmental practices which are required to safeguard the integrity of creation.





BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Earth is suffering unprecedented and devastating levels of degradation resulting in unnatural changes to biodiversity, air and water pollution, ozone depletion, land destruction and eradication of wildlife.

Species extinction of both flora and fauna is increasing because of loss of habitat and climate change.

Current scientific opinion confirms¹ increased temperatures leading to more extreme and less predictable weather patterns due to human activity.

Although sustainable clean energy sources like solar and wind power are now available, pollution-producing carbon-based fuels like coal, natural gas and oil still account for the majority of the total world energy supply.²

Environmental degradation is, however, more than merely an issue of energy efficiency or carbon emissions. It also impacts factors such as food and water insecurity,³ poverty and migration.

Many environmental challenges result from unsustainable production and consumption patterns. These include the continuous and increasing conversion of natural ecosystems for agriculture, the fragmentation of habitats,

overfishing, unsustainable agricultural practices and endangerment of renewable resources. Producing goods and transporting them to consumers uses large quantities of fossil fuels and produces pollution, particularly carbon dioxide, while at the same time waste generation is projected to exponentially increase.⁴

The United Nations forecasts that by 2050 there could be 25 million to 1 billion people forcibly displaced due to changes to the environment.⁵ Pollution of air and water, uneven food production⁶ and the desertification of significant tracts of land threaten the health, well-being and very survival of millions of people.

These issues should concern all people everywhere. The solutions are not simple and will require a concerted and intentional effort over a long period of time.

1 <https://www.nasa.gov/press-release/2020-tied-for-warmest-year-on-record-nasa-analysis-shows>

2 <https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics?country=WORLD&fuel=Energy%20supply&indicator=TPESbySource>

3 [https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/chapter/summary-for-policy-makers/#:~:text=This%20Summary%20for%20Policy-makers%20\(SPM,Action%20in%20the%20near-term](https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/chapter/summary-for-policy-makers/#:~:text=This%20Summary%20for%20Policy-makers%20(SPM,Action%20in%20the%20near-term)

4 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/233613/waste-generation-worldwide-by-region/>

5 <https://www.climateforesight.eu/migrations-inequalities/environmental-migrants-up-to-1-billion-by-2050/>

6 http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/esag/docs/AT2050_revision_summary.pdf

GROUNDS FOR THE POSITION OF THE SALVATION ARMY

The Salvation Army's response to environmental issues is based on the following biblical principles:

God is the Creator, Preserver and Governor of all things.⁷ By its very existence, the universe praises God and displays God's glory. The well-being of the system has always mattered to God. Before the creation of people, God declared the goodness of the starry heavens and earth's lands, seas, plants and animals.

God created humanity from the dust of the Earth and, bearing God's own image, entrusted humanity with rule over the plants and animals (Genesis 1:26-28) and gave humans the right and responsibility to work the land and care for it (Genesis 2:15).

In the beginning, the Creator's dynamic, divine design is revealed in God's Word and glorified in the world as humanity co-creates, cultivates and communes in flourishing harmony with God, one another and all creation. 'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good' (Genesis 1:31).

According to Scripture, the time came when humans treated their rule as unaccountable freedom. They ate fruit God had declared off limits (Genesis 3:1-6). In other words, the first manifestation of sin in the world was for humans to relate to the Earth simply as they desired, without accountability to God. Once sin entered the world, the harmony of Eden was broken.

The interdependence of humanity and the rest of creation continues, but frequently with tension and negative consequences. 'We know that the whole creation has been groaning,' says Romans 8:22. In some measure, human sin has harmed creation profoundly, and because of damage to the environment, people consequently suffer (e.g. Isaiah 24:4-6). 'The creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it' (Romans 8:20).

Scripture also teaches, however, that 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it' (Psalm 24:1). God plays an active role in earth's ecosystems, clothing the fields in splendour (Matthew 6:25-30), for instance, and bringing the rain on the godly and ungodly (Matthew 5:45). Time after time the Bible shows that God has neither abandoned a sin-scarred world nor retracted the command for people to care for it. Instead, the whole of Scripture testifies to God's redemption, renewal and reconciliation of all things in Christ (Colossians 1:15-20).

The *Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine* puts it like this: 'God's authority over the created order does not mean rigid and overbearing control but rather a caring, dynamic, interactive relationship with his creation. He works in co-operation with his creation to fulfil his purposes for it. ... Our challenge is to treat the earth well in the light of increasing population and diminishing resources. The world was made to praise God and reveal his glory (Psalm 19:1-6); our stewardship of it furthers that end.'⁸

⁷ The Salvation Army doctrine number 2, <https://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/faith>

⁸ *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*, International Headquarters 2011, page 33

PRACTICAL RESPONSES

In its operations, among its people and through its public influence, The Salvation Army seeks to foster a culture of sustainability with a focus on long-term environmental solutions.⁹

It can do this in various ways, including the following:

1. Raising awareness of the injurious impact people's actions are having on God's earth and of healthier practical alternatives that can be chosen.
2. Providing biblically-sound knowledge of human responsibility and nurturing attitudes that will lead towards better stewardship of the environment and its resources.
3. Encouraging Salvationists to consider a vocation in environmental science.
4. Enacting sound environmental policies and practices within The Salvation Army, including:
 - the construction and maintenance of buildings,
 - assessment of the impact of vehicles used for transportation,
 - scrutiny of long-distance travel,
 - purchase of supplies that have been assessed for their environmental impact,
 - environmentally responsible waste management, and
 - development of innovative ways to enhance the sustainability of our use of the Earth's natural resources.
5. In the spirit of learning and modelling good systems of accountability, tracking and reporting on our progress according to our agreed environmental policies.
6. Providing practical care for those who are impacted by adverse or damaging environmental situations and advocating with them for positive change and environmental justice.
7. By our practice, trying to be an example to others within our sphere of influence.
8. Seeking opportunities for cooperation and coordination with governments and organisations of goodwill who are working towards a common goal of sustainable lifestyles and environmental care.

⁹ The Salvation Army International Headquarters Environmental Policy





For Further Study

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). www.ipcc.ch/

U.S. Energy Information Administration. www.eia.gov/forecasts/ieo

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). www.unep.org

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). <https://www.unfpa.org/climate-change>

From other churches:

Anglican Communion. <https://anglicanalliance.org/lambeth-conference-resolutions-and-statements-on-the-environment-and-climate-change/>

Lausanne Movement. https://www.lausanne.org/?sfid=27242&sf_s=creation%20care&sf_post_tag=creation-care-new

Lutheran World Federation. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/climate-justice>

Roman Catholic Church. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

World Council of Churches. https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/Cultivate%26Care_fin_0.pdf

World Methodist Council. Climate Justice for All. <https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/cj4a/>

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The views expressed in this international positional statement constitute the official position of The Salvation Army on the issue addressed, and they may not be modified or adapted in any way without the express written permission of International Headquarters.

