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Missionary Society of St. Columban
Oil and Natural Gas Methane Rulemaking Hearing
Environmental Protection Agency
Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2021-0317
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Good afternoon. My name is Cynthia Gonzalez. I live in El Paso, Texas, and I work for the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach with the Missionary Society of St. Columban. The Missionary Society of St. Columban is an international humanitarian Catholic organization. Our society consists of priests, lay missionaries and associates present in 17 countries around the world, including the United States.

Internationally, we work alongside some of the world's most vulnerable communities to climate change. Many communities we work with are already experiencing death or are being forced to migrate due to severe storms, flooding, and drought. As we know, scientists have identified methane as one of the main contributors to climate change. By addressing methane emissions, we can positively reduce the impacts of this climate crisis.

At the recent UN Climate meeting (COP26), the United States and nations of the world committed to work on addressing the impacts of methane in our environment. The EPA must support this commitment by proposing and implementing more strict methane rules. We thank EPA for putting forward the proposed rule we are discussing today, which will reduce 41 million tons of methane emissions from 2023 to 2035.

We strongly support the rule; however, we urge the EPA to set stronger standards.

In the United States, strict methane rules are urgently needed to protect the health of many communities, especially minority communities, Latino, African American and Indigenous communities.

We ask EPA to strengthen the proposed rule to address climate change and protect the public health of vulnerable communities through supplemental rulemaking or other action, in order to:

1. End the wasteful and dangerous practice of routine flaring at oil and gas facilities, as states like Colorado and New Mexico have done already.
2. Require regular monitoring at all smaller, high-polluting, and leak-prone wells,
3. Work to incorporate emission monitoring results generated by community groups and other third parties into its standards.
4. Continuously engage with front-line community workers and other community-based organization as we believe community participation is critical to address gaps and measure success.

5. Lastly, we urge EPA to finalize this rulemaking as quickly as possible. Our planet is in a climate crisis. The lives of many in the United States and abroad are already in danger.

I would like to share a message from one the communities we serve in the country of Fiji:

"I [am] from Fiji, a small island nation in the vast Pacific Ocean. Most people don't even know that it exists because it's just a tiny drop on the world's largest ocean. My life and my community's life is greatly impacted by climate change because our livelihood and survival greatly depends on the land and sea. I was born and raised near the sea, and we were taught to appreciate and value God's gifts to all living beings. For the last 5-10 years, I can see and experience the negative impacts of climate change in our village. First, the flooding of about one third of our village during high tide is a problem that my parents never experienced 20 years ago. Second, natural disasters such as cyclones and flooding are now annual occurrences, whereas 20-30 years ago those natural disasters struck every 5-10 years. These annual disasters affect our livelihood by destroying our crops. Lastly, crops and seafood are not abundant anymore due to the sudden changes in the weather pattern. I [...] the world to know that our small country in the Pacific Ocean matters too. We have as much right to this earth as the big and highly developed countries do. They need to slow down, think, and take responsibility for their actions. -Paulo (Ovalau, Fiji)

The United States and the EPA must ensure we meet our international commitments and obligations. Thank you again for your work on this proposed rule and your continued work to protect our planet.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.