



COMMISSION 3

Welcoming the Other through

Human Development that Respects the Earth





PART ONE:

Advancing Human Development

No one government, no one organization, no one sector acting alone will advance human development

INTRODUCTION

The *Religions for Peace* 9th World Assembly convenes at a most opportune time in the history of international development work. Leaders throughout the world are now reviewing the progress that has been made in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and simultaneously engaging in consultations that focus on setting the priorities of a post-2015 development agenda.

This is a moment for reflection by people of faith, religious communities and religious leaders. It allows us to assess religions' roles and contributions in meeting the Goals and their targets; how much more needs to be done as this MDG era nears its end date; and what religions might do now to take on the development challenges of the coming years.

Now is also a moment for visioning a future where faith communities and religions can best come together to advance human development by promoting the rights and well-being of children and families and the rights and empowerment of women; by working to alleviate poverty; and by caring for the most vulnerable among us as our own.

By their example, advocacy and actions over the past years, religions brought their social, spiritual and moral values to the challenges of the MDGs. They also brought their grassroots networks, which provided channels for communication and education that were, more often than not, crucial to the success of programs and projects that were designed to meet MDG targets.

When religious communities advocated together through their leaders and grassroots congregations, their influence increased exponentially. When they acted together, their efforts were more efficient and sustainable. And when they leveraged their collective power using partnerships with governments, UN agencies, the private sector and civil society organizations, they helped change the world for millions of people, including women, children and young people, and many living in poverty or feeling the pain of conflict.

Whether religions used their particularly unique and powerful positions of influence to advance human development was their choice every single day, in countries throughout the world. There was no dearth of opportunities to show their faith – whether working to empower the poor within legal systems, standing up in the face of violence against women and children, caring for orphans and vulnerable children, or joining global, regional and national campaigns to protect the rights of all people to live free and healthy.

They could have embraced these struggles as their own, or turned away and tended to other things. When religions stepped up to their calling and made the choice to “*Welcome the Other*,” as so many did, the results for individuals, families and communities were significant. The progress generated by the MDGs is more than the sum of statistical successes. The real progress is how different daily life is now than it was before for millions of men and women, children and young people. The difference is felt in lives that have been saved and in futures that have been changed for the better.

But there is still unfinished business from the MDG era along with the anticipated work of the post-2015 development agenda. These challenges – continuing and new – are now before the World Assembly and its member religions, before our World Council and our Inter-religious Councils and our networks of women of faith and religious youth who are increasingly active in every region of the world.

I. THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Since 2001, the international community has been united under the MDG banner in an unprecedented campaign to free the people of the world from poverty. Organized around 8 goals and 21 targets, the MDG campaign was manifest at the global, regional and local levels. Religions and multi-religious networks were strong, responsive and reliable partners at all levels. They raised their voices to advocate for the most vulnerable, infused their values of responsibility to ‘the other,’ and mobilized communities of faith.

With less than two years to go before reaching the 2015 target year for achieving the MDGs, the most recent UN progress report tells of both “significant and substantial progress” and the areas where “accelerated progress and bolder action” are still needed.¹ (*See Boxes 1-3.*)

1 United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2013*, United Nations, New York, 2013.



BOX 1. THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- Goal 1:** Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2:** Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3:** Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4:** Reduce child mortality
- Goal 5:** Improve maternal health
- Goal 6:** Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
- Goal 7:** Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8:** Develop a global partnership for development

BOX 2. PROGRESS TO DATE

- The proportion of people living in extreme poverty has been halved at the global level.
- Over 2 billion people have gained access to improved sources of drinking water.
- Remarkable gains have been made in the fight against malaria and tuberculosis.
- The proportion of slum dwellers in the cities and metropolises of the developing world is declining.
- A low debt burden and an improved climate for trade are levelling the playing field for developing countries.
- The hunger reduction target is within reach.

From *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2013*.

BOX 3. WHERE PROGRESS AND ACTION ARE STILL NEEDED

- Environmental sustainability is under severe threat, demanding a new level of global cooperation.
- Gains have been made in child survival, but more must be done to meet our obligations to the youngest generation.
- Most maternal deaths are preventable, but progress in this area is falling short.
- Access to antiretroviral therapy and knowledge about HIV prevention must expand.
- Too many children are still denied their right to primary education.
- Gains in sanitation are impressive – but not good enough.
- There is less aid money overall, with the poorest countries most adversely affected.

From *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2013*.

As significant as have been the efforts and outcomes of the MDG era, the consultations of the past several years surrounding the post-2015 agenda are setting even more ambitious goals.

Global, regional and local consultations about the future priorities for international development have been remarkable for their number, diversity and transparency. As early as 2010, *RfP*, in collaboration with the UN Millennium Campaign and the World Council of Churches, convened senior religious leaders in New York during the time of the UN General Assembly for a multi-religious consultation on the MDGs. The consultation brought focused attention to some of the unfinished business of the MDGs, including the legal empowerment of the poor, gender equality, maternal health, gender-based violence and multi-sector partnerships.

Parallel processes have been underway on how the post-2015 agenda will be designed and how it will be organized, implemented and monitored. These processes are shared within this paper not only for information, but, most importantly, as potential entry points for advocacy.

In 2012, at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), governments established several inter-governmental processes addressing the design of the post-2015 agenda and how it might be implemented. These include the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing, and the UN General Assembly Special Event on the Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda.

In 2013, the UN system undertook several studies on how to transition from the MDGs to a post-2015 development agenda. There were reviews by the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, the UN Global Compact, and the UN Development Group. The UN has held regional consultations about the post-2015 development agenda in Bali, London, Monrovia and New York. Other consultations have been held online, via teleconferences and during ‘Twitter town halls’. They have included women and young people, representatives from academia, the private sector, civil society and international NGOs.

While final negotiations with UN member states on what the post-2015 agenda will be are ongoing, some common themes have emerged from the numerous reports and recommendations that have been issued from the panels, reviews, processes and consultations. These themes include:

1. The successes of the MDG era are to be sustained and built on; there is value in the lessons on what worked and what didn't for reaching the targets and achieving the Goals. The fact that global rates often masked disparities, for example, now argues for disaggregated data as necessary for seeing the reality of development at the local level. The fact that the MDGs did not include a mechanism for local monitoring or ways to hold governments accountable exposed a need for a people-centered process and a greater role for civil society organizations.
2. There is unfinished business from the MDGs that demands the urgent attention of the international development community. Recent advances in science and technology make possible a number of dramatic breakthroughs in health, such that no child or mother, for example, should have to die a preventable death. And such that no family should be left to face sickness and death alone, without comfort and care.



3. Despite the gains of the past years, there is ever-growing inequality in development outcomes – driven most determinately by poverty – within and between countries. This inequality threatens peace and security. As poverty begets poverty, compounding family impoverishment and cementing poverty in poor communities, the development community is called to action to break poverty's grip.
4. There are issues largely untouched by the MDGs that cry out for attention, chief among them violence, particularly against women and children. There is great need to prevent such violence, care for those who experience it, and restore to them their human dignity.
5. The ways of the past are of the past; for human development to be advanced, business as usual will not be enough. No one government, no one organization, no one sector acting alone will advance human development. Nor can any one of these multiple stakeholders ensure, on its own, the peace and security that are the necessary foundations for human development.
6. The development agenda for the post-2015 era should be based on the human rights principles of universality, non-discrimination, participation and accountability.

MDGS AND THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Problematic	Progress to date*	Actions needed*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish the unfinished business of the MDGs; • Ensure that international development in the post-MDG era will protect the human rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized; and • Provide for greater accountability and monitoring of progress at the local level, including through disaggregated and accessible data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proportion of people living in extreme poverty has been halved at the global level. • Over 2 billion people have gained access to improved sources of drinking water. • Remarkable gains have been made in the fight against malaria and tuberculosis. • The proportion of slum dwellers in the cities and metropolises of the developing world is declining. • A low debt burden and an improved climate for trade are levelling the playing field for developing countries. • The hunger reduction target is within reach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental sustainability is under severe threat, demanding a new level of global cooperation. • Gains have been made in child survival, but more must be done to meet our obligations to the youngest generation. • Most maternal deaths are preventable, but progress in this area is falling short. • Access to antiretroviral therapy and knowledge about HIV prevention must expand. • Too many children are still denied their right to primary education. • Gains in sanitation are impressive – but not good enough. • There is less aid money overall, with the poorest countries most adversely affected.

* From *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2013*.



II. THE PROBLEMATICS

LEGAL EMPOWERMENT OF THE POOR

Poverty extends its reach perniciously, breeding on itself as it distorts the lives and compromises the futures of children, young people and families, as well as the health and wealth of nations. The poor are more likely to be sicker, less educated, marginalized and discriminated against by service providers and legal systems. Every day, each of these factors compounds the others, making it more likely that poverty will become even more entrenched, and that the inequalities in development outcomes within and between countries will persist and fester, threatening peace and security for us all.

An estimated 70 percent of the world's population – some 4 billion people – is excluded from equal participation in their societies because they are poor. This includes the 1.2 billion people who live in extreme poverty, or on less than \$1.25 a day. Poor people are found in every region and every country. Almost 414 million people in sub-Saharan Africa, or nearly half the population there, live in extreme poverty, on the edge of subsistence.

Poor families include the millions who go to bed hungry every night. They include the 101 million children under age five who are underweight, and the 43 million who are overweight. Both extremes are signs of children being malnourished. They include the 26 percent of the world's children who show signs of stunted growth, with children in the poorest households more than twice as likely to be stunted as those from the richest.

Poor families include the young people and women who bear the brunt of economic slowdowns in countries in every region, as more jobs are lost and the jobs that remain are low-earning and at high risk, leaving those most vulnerable to poverty even more so.

In Argentina, Indonesia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Uganda, *RfP* has helped advance legal empowerment of the poor, with a focus on women and marginalized populations, through inter-religious and inter-faith councils and networks already existing within these countries. Efforts are grounded in the Multi-Religious Consensus on Legal Empowerment, a position statement affirming religion's role in a process through which the poor and excluded learn how to use the law and legal systems to protect their assets and advance their rights as citizens and economic actors.² The process focuses on four rights-based reforms: access to the justice system and rule of law, property rights, labor rights and business rights.

² *Religions for Peace*, Statement on The Role of Religions in Advancing Legal Empowerment of the Poor, New York, 2008.

POVERTY

Problematic	Progress to date	Actions needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An estimated 4 billion people, 70 percent of the world’s population, live in poverty, including the 1.2 billion who live in extreme poverty. • Poor people live in every region and every country of the world. • An estimated 414 million people in sub-Saharan Africa live on less than \$1.25 a day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proportion of people living in extreme poverty has been halved at the global level. • The hunger reduction target is within reach. 	<p>Rights-based reforms are needed in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to the justice system and rule of law; • Property rights; • Labor rights; • Business rights.

HEALTH

1. Child survival and protection

“ We grieve when we lose a child to an incurable disease, but we hold our heads down in shame when we lose a child to preventable disease or violence. We know that such a loss should not happen, that it is even worse than ‘senseless,’ that it is morally wrong, grievously wrong.

— Dr. William F. Vendley, Secretary General of Religions for Peace

There has been progress over the past 20 years in reducing mortality rates of children under 5, with a 41 percent reduction in under-five mortality between 1990 and 2011. However, these gains, while encouraging, will still fall short of what is needed to reach the target for MDG 4 – reducing under-five mortality by two thirds by 2015.

Behind every statistic on child mortality there are children. Nearly 7 million children under age five die every year. That’s nearly 800 young lives lost every hour, more than 19,000 young lives lost every day. Those are our children dying. They are dying, according to UNICEF, from such wholly avoidable and treatable illnesses as pneumonia and diarrhea, many children weakened by under-nutrition, too frail to stave off death.³ In 2010 alone, more than half a million children under age five died from malaria, also avoidable, also treatable.

These deaths are increasingly concentrated in the world’s poorest regions and countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, one of every nine children dies before age five, more than 16 times the average for developed regions. Within countries, these young children are dying in the poorest areas.

³ http://www.unicef.org/mdg/index_childmortality



The interventions needed to save these children are well known and widely practiced in richer countries. Existing high-impact, low-cost interventions including vaccines, antibiotics, micronutrient supplementation, insecticide-treated mosquito nets, improved breastfeeding practices and safe hygiene practices have already saved millions of lives. They could save more; some would argue they could save all.

Most young deaths occur in the first month of life, caused largely by premature birth, complications during childbirth and infections.⁴ According to a recent report from Save the Children, an estimated 1,049,300 newborns die on the day they are born.⁵

Two thirds of these young infants can be saved, two thirds of these families spared their grief. To question why they are not protected is to question the world's collective accountability. More immediately for this Assembly's discussions, it is to remind the world's religions of their moral responsibility to keep these infants from dying.

Here's what we know about saving young infants: Neonatal deaths can be averted with such simple, cost-effective interventions as attended births and post-natal home visits. They can be averted when mothers have adequate health care during pregnancy; when mothers have enough to eat and access to safe water throughout their lives, when their pregnancies are planned so that their bodies are mature enough and strong enough to bear children; when they go to school as young girls. When mothers are healthy, free of HIV, tuberculosis, malaria and other diseases of the poor. When any, many or all of these conditions are met, one-month-old babies can be spared needless death.

Together with the Center for Interfaith Action, *RfP* has undertaken an unprecedented global initiative that will engage religious communities and multi-religious networks around the world in saving the lives of children by promoting and teaching ten simple changes in behavior (*see Box 4*). Through their moral voice and social channels, religions can reach the places where the most hard-to-reach and vulnerable families live and empower them with the information and training that will save their children from disease and death.

RfP has also entered into partnership with the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) to undertake a similar outreach in six priority countries: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Uganda.

4 <http://www.healthynewbornnetwork.org>

5 "Newborn Health: The issue" @ <http://www.savethechildren.org>

BOX 4. TEN PROMISES TO OUR CHILDREN: RELIGIONS IN ACTION

United in our common goal to save the lives of children in need, we pledge to take action to advance the life-saving behaviors listed below. These priority behaviors – ten life-saving acts for children – can and should be adopted by local families and communities. Doing so will help save the lives and reduce the burden of disease for millions of children. These behaviors are endorsed by UNICEF and other major international aid organizations because they work. Our respective religious doctrines are different, but we are united in the moral conviction that we must save children from preventable death. Thus, we commit ourselves to ensure that our respective faith communities promote these behaviors sustainably, even as we also support additional needed efforts to strengthen public health systems. We ask all, throughout the world, who have held a child in love, with joy for its life, with tears for its pain, to join us in advancing these life-saving behaviors.

To save and improve the lives of all children, we pledge to promote, encourage, and advocate for the following actions by parents and children:

1. Breastfeed all newborns exclusively through six months of age;
2. Immunize children and newborns with all recommended vaccines, especially through two age 2;
3. Eliminate all harmful traditions and violence against children, and ensure children grow up in a safe and protective environment;
4. Feed children with proper nutritional foods and micronutrient supplements, where available, and deworm children;
5. Give oral rehydration salts (ORS) and daily zinc supplements for 10–14 days to all children suffering from diarrhea;
6. Promptly seek treatment when a child is sick; give children antibiotic treatment for pneumonia;
7. Have children drink water from a safe source, including water that has been purified and kept clean and covered and away from fecal material;
8. Have all children wash their hands with soap and water especially before touching food, after going to the latrine or toilet and after dealing with refuse;
9. Have all children use a toilet or latrine, and safely dispose of children's feces; prevent children from defecating in the open;
10. Where relevant, have all children sleep nightly under insecticide-treated mosquito nets to prevent malaria, and at the immediate onset of fever seek medical care for children to receive proper malaria testing and treatment.

We are committed to working in collaboration with intergovernmental, governmental and civil society bodies – many of which, including UNICEF and leading bilateral development agencies, have been strong promoters of positive multi-religious action. We urge them to support us to develop simple toolkits and roll-out mechanisms that leaders and congregations of each religion can use to harness their respective beliefs and believers in the implementation of these vital behavioral changes.



2. Maternal health and women's empowerment

Were there only one intervention possible in the world's efforts to advance human development, surely the fulfillment of the human rights of women would be an option with the potential for the highest rate of return. No community can hope to be strong, no country can hope to prosper, no region can hope to advance unless all of its people – women as well as men – are full and equal participants in its vital life.

No peace among nations can be secured and sustained until women are a full and equal presence at the peace tables.

No faith complete without women.

Women's value within any society can be measured by the education provided to young girls, the health services available to girls and women, and the legal systems, social structures and cultural practices that protect – or fail to protect – girls and women from neglect, abuse and violence. (See Box 5.)

This neglect is obvious in the statistic that 800 of the world's women die every day in pregnancy or childbirth, despite the existence of proven, well-known and relatively low-cost interventions that can save them. Some 90 percent of these lives are lost in Africa and Asia, where the majority of women die in unattended births, from severe bleeding, infections, eclampsia, obstructed labor and the consequences of unsafe abortions.

Gender neglect is also seen as a factor in maternal deaths in the review of the global progress on the maternal mortality MDG, which lags behind all other MDGs. Only half of all pregnant women in developing regions receive the minimum recommended number of antenatal visits (four) that are known to save lives of both mothers and their babies. Despite the fact that adolescent childbearing is risky for both mother and child, more than 15 million of the 135 million live births worldwide are to adolescents; the highest rate of births to adolescents is in sub-Saharan Africa, where child marriages (marriage before 18) are still common.

BOX 5. "THE RESTORING DIGNITY" PLEDGE

As a person of faith, I am aware that my religion recognizes the fundamental dignity of every woman and man. I know – according to my religious tradition – that the true dignity of every woman is given by and rooted in the Sacred. This dignity is inviolable.

I recognize with deep sadness that violence against women is still prevalent. It occurs in public and in the privacy of the home. It is unspeakably hurtful to women and girls. It also damages families, communities, and ultimately all of us. Violence against women takes many forms, including domestic violence, rape and its use as a weapon of war, the practice of forced marriages of girl children, the bearing of the brunt of extreme poverty and the selective aborting of unborn females, among others.

Eliminating violence against women and girls is both a religious duty and personal obligation. Doing so will also nourish all of us for healthier and more fulfilling lives.

3. HIV and AIDS

While scientists search for a vaccine that will stop the spread of HIV and researchers continue their quest for a cure for AIDS, advocates and activists continue to work towards putting an end to the global epidemic by scaling up access to antiretroviral therapy. They have their eyes on a near future date when there will be zero new infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths.⁶

There is progress to report in the world's response to AIDS.⁷ In 2011, as a result of an increase in the number of people living with HIV who were receiving antiretrovirals, there was a 25 percent decrease in the number of people who died from AIDS-related causes (to 1.7 million) from the peak in AIDS-related deaths in 2005. The number of people newly infected by HIV has also declined, dropping 21 percent from 2001 to 2011.

But the disease still robs. There were an estimated 34 million people living with HIV at the end of 2011, nearly 5 million more than in 2001. About 820,000 young people aged 15-24 were newly infected in 2011, nearly half a million of them women and girls. In certain regions, the Caucasus and Central Asia, the HIV incidence more than doubled since 2001, with 27,000 people newly infected in 2011.

Perhaps the most troubling of all trends is found when we look at what young people know about HIV and how it spreads. In most of the countries with generalized epidemics, fewer than half the young people surveyed have a basic understanding of HIV. In sub-Saharan Africa, the most HIV-affected part of the world, only 28 percent of young women and 36 percent of young men have comprehensive and correct knowledge about HIV.

'Getting to zero', according to UNAIDS, will require "commitment, innovation, sound science and community-centered strategies" as well as "a determination to embrace and respect human rights." UNAIDS has mapped out an approach for getting to zero, a strategy based on four pillars; within each of these there are challenges for religions and opportunities for multi-religious cooperation.

- › **Pillar 1 – Demand.** Strategic actions to enhance the demand for HIV testing and treatment services.
- › **Pillar 2 – Invest.** Strategic actions to mobilize resources sufficient for expediting the scaling up of treatment and enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of spending.
- › **Pillar 3 – Deliver.** Strategic actions to close gaps in the HIV treatment continuum.
- › **Pillar 4 – Making it happen.** Ensuring national preparedness to rapidly bring HIV treatment to scale and strategically focus resources on key settings and populations with high HIV prevalence and unmet need for HIV treatment.

6 UNAIDS, *Treatment 2015*, Geneva, 2012.

7 UN, *The Millennium Development Report*, 2013, pp. 34-37.



HEALTH

Problematic	Progress to date	Actions needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Nearly 7 million children under five die every year, mostly from preventable and treatable diseases, such as pneumonia and diarrhea.Most young deaths occur in the first month, mostly from prematurity, infections or complications during childbirth. An estimated 1 million infants die the day they are born. 800 women die each day in pregnancy or childbirth, 90 percent of them in Asia and Africa.An estimated 34 million people were living with HIV at the end of 2011, nearly 5 million more than in 2001; about 820,000 young people, 15-24 years old, were newly infected in 2011, half a million of them women and girls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A 41 percent reduction in under-five mortality rates since 1990 when there were 87 deaths per 1,000 babies born until 2011, when 51 babies died per 1,000 born. Yet, the MDG target will not be met.Progress on the maternal mortality MDG lags behind all other MDGs goals.There was progress in HIV and AIDS, as a result of an increase in the number of people with HIV who are receiving antiretrovirals, there was a 25 percent decline from 2005 to 2011 in the number of people who died from AIDS. The number of people newly infected declined by 21 percent from 2001 to 2011. <p>See: <i>The Restoring Dignity Pledge.</i></p>	<p>The interventions needed to save the lives of young infants, children under five, mothers, and those vulnerable to HIV and AIDS are well known and widely practiced in richer countries.</p> <p>For children under five: High-impact, low-cost interventions such as vaccines, antibiotics, micronutrient supplements, insecticide-treated mosquito nets, improved breastfeeding practices and safe hygiene practices. (See: <i>Ten Promises to Our Children.</i>)</p> <p>For infants in their first days and months of life: Attended births and post-natal visits and mothers who are healthy when they give birth.</p> <p>For women: Adequate health care during pregnancy and throughout their lives, access to safe water throughout their lives, a quality education, and pregnancies that are planned so that their bodies are mature enough and strong enough to give birth safely.</p> <p>For people vulnerable to HIV or living with AIDS: Universal access to HIV testing and treatment, especially for the most vulnerable populations.</p>

III. FAITH IN ACTION

Now – more than ever before – there is a need for multi-religious cooperation if the international development community is to meet the challenges to human development that are before us. The rights, needs and expectations of the millions of men, women and children who are marginalized and who have been left out of progress in the MDG era are now before this Assembly, our World and Inter-religious Councils, and our networks of women of faith and religious young people.

TO END POVERTY

Is there a religion among us that does not see poverty as the most fundamental threat to the right of every one to live a life of dignity? Is there one among us who does not recognize those living in poverty as the most vulnerable? Who among us does not see religions' responsibilities – in the face of all this poverty and its assault on human dignity – to “our other brothers and sisters?”

Civil society organizations, religions and people of faith have many ways they might intervene in the poverty cycle: from mobilizing campaigns around global commitments, to working with governments to ensure appropriate and equally accessible services, to local advocacy for more education for boys and girls alike, to empowering people who are poor with the skills and training that prepare them to be active and productive citizens.

The moral call to the development community, and the challenge to this Assembly, is to translate a commitment to empower the poor in terms of their legal rights into concrete actions that restore hope and possibilities to poor people who are striving to lift themselves and their children out of poverty. Among the ways we can do this:

- › Engage in global, regional and national processes to advance this agenda;
- › Raise public awareness about legal empowerment at the global, regional and national levels;
- › Mobilize the strength of communities to provide legal education to the poor; and
- › Advocate for the reform of legal systems and laws to empower the poor.

TO PROMOTE HEALTH

In 2010, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched Every Woman Every Child, a global movement of partnerships advocating for maternal and child health. In his call to action, he set out these expectations of civil society:

- › Develop and test innovative approaches to delivering essential services, especially ones benefiting the most vulnerable and marginalized;
- › Educate, engage and mobilize communities;
- › Track progress and hold all stakeholders (including themselves) accountable for their commitments;
- › Strengthen community and local capabilities to scale up implementation of the most appropriate interventions; and
- › Advocate increased attention to women's and children's health and increased investment in it.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

The development community now argues that it will be possible in the post 2015 years to reach the “zero goals.”

- › No child will die a preventable death.
- › No woman will die in childbirth or from complications of pregnancy
- › There will be no new HIV infections, no HIV and AIDS discrimination, and no AIDS related deaths

If this is true, and a realistic and practical goal, what will be religions’ unique contributions to the efforts?

If this is more aspirational than realistic and practical, which of the world’s “others” will be left out?

PART TWO:

Protecting the Earth

It is vital that a spirit of cooperation, rather than competition, prevails in climate talks

INTRODUCTION

In September 2012, on the eve of the Inter-Religious Dialogue on Climate Change and Biodiversity Conservation, Sewalanka Foundation organised a tour of northern Sri Lanka to speak to villagers about their experiences of climate change. The northern region has only just come out of a thirty year war. In village after village, visitors heard stories of how the climate was changing – droughts, loss of crops and topsoil, salt coming up in the wells, reefs dying off, massive erosion on the coast and flooding.

There was a mixture of anxiety, confusion and resignation amongst the resettled people. Will the climate instability drown their hopes for a peaceful and sustainable future?

In each case the villagers turned back to the temples and churches, to assemble, to pray, to listen to scriptures, to follow fire rituals, and to sustain faith in the message of their religious leaders that all this suffering has a meaning.

Religious leaders all over the planet are faced with the vulnerability, impacts, costs and human suffering which climate change brings down on the planet. In times of crisis, people turn to religious institutions and seek divine sources of mercy and compassion for guidance, succour and assistance. Religious institutions of the world find themselves at the front line of climate impacts.

I. FROM WITNESS TO COMPASSIONATE ACTOR

Climate change poses great physical dangers: declining agriculture and fisheries, water scarcity, mass migrations, extreme weather events and the burden of these impacts falling mostly on the global poor. The only viable solution is to ensure a globally binding agreement on greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions to avert further catastrophes and an unsustainable climate that will plague future



generations. As we are already past the point of being able to reverse the process of destabilisation of the climate, we have to accept that we cannot get back to 'safety'. Moving forward, we have to find a solution to both the causes and the consequences; enhancing global solidarity and sharing resources to try to finance and adapt to the inevitable consequences we have generated thus far. The longer we delay, the more expensive and difficult are the required responses.

Inherent in understanding both the causes and consequences is the problem of equity and responsibility. Climate change arises from an inequitable abuse of the atmospheric commons. Some people are releasing more GHGs into the atmosphere than others; and as these gases cannot be absorbed by natural systems, they are causing global warming.⁸ There is furthermore a relationship between the scale of emissions and the convergence of wealth, power and global influence. Those who are most vulnerable have the lowest emissions and the least political influence. The nature of the problem means that the forum for resolving both the emissions crisis and the equity crisis naturally belongs to the main multilateral system of governance: the United Nations.

Climate change is not something anyone planned or intended. It arises primarily from the burning of fossil fuels, which most people associate with modernisation, mechanisation, energy, transport, health services, infrastructure and comfort. The problem has been unfolding since the 19th century and accelerating since the 1950s.

With the scientific evidence initiating in the 1950s and peaking with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 1st Assessment report in 1990, the global community began to realise that the climate problem was bigger than originally understood and would require a multilateral platform to come to a set of agreed upon, appropriate and binding actions on national governments. In 1992, during the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, known as the Earth Summit, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted by the state parties and came into force in 1994. The UNFCCC remains the main global forum for trying to respond appropriately to the threats of climate change and alter our behavior sufficiently to avoid global catastrophe.

In 2013, the UNFCCC is faltering in its attempts to achieve the urgent and serious goals set for it by the global community back in 1992.⁹ While the UN system has contributed much to peace and development, it has been relatively less successful as a platform for obliging state parties to achieve and enact a binding agreement to protect the planet from the human causes of climate change. These failures threaten the early extinction of the human species as the ultimate worst-case scenario of the current trajectory.

8 For a summary of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change see <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg1/ar4-wg1-spm.pdf>.

9 There are many analyses of the UNFCCC process. There is general consensus that the process is dragging on without adequate results. Here is one analysis from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_United_Nations_Climate_Change_Conference IIED provides this review of the financing mechanisms within the UNFCCC: <http://www.iied.org/rich-nations-fail-meet-8-climate-finance-pledges-analysis-shows>.

The over-riding diplomatic concern with protecting short and medium-term national interests, with an emphasis on economic competitiveness and conserving current power balances is placing the whole planet at grave risk. Faith movements have a different set of values and priorities than do the politicians; and it may be precisely those perspectives that offer solutions to the crisis. These solutions may be key in helping us reconfigure human society and global governance of our planet.

Increasingly, faith-based leaders, practitioners, organisations, institutions and networks are accepting that they need to move from being witnesses of this unfolding drama to being compassionate actors. The planet seeks moral authority and global capacity to transform the discussions of the problem into positive changes and effective actions. Faith communities are well placed to speak to the human behavioral, moral and ethical issues which underpin the current paradigm and mindset.

In his 2011 address to 130 African religious leaders gathered at the UN Environment Programme headquarters in Nairobi, UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner highlighted the crucial role of religious leaders in getting passed the current negotiations impasse.

Mr. Steiner told delegates that it is vital that a spirit of cooperation, rather than competition, prevails in climate talks. “In the climate negotiations, the world’s people are being silenced by arguments, facts and figures that are disempowering. You have immense power to bring back a sense of responsibility to these negotiations.”¹⁰

Mr. Steiner elaborated on the complexity of the contradiction. The atmosphere is the ultimate type of ‘commons’ – a universal space that no one owns but on which we all rely. Inequalities in resources and energy capacity mean that a small percentage of the planet’s human population are driving climate change, which accelerates the vulnerability of the majority of humans and other species. The UN member states likely do understand the urgency and seriousness of the current and future crisis, but the UN platform is not able to secure an effective binding agreement that would set the global good ahead of the needs of powerful state interests, interests associated with politicians and political parties, rather than the citizens and non-human species within the national territories. The problem requires that those with the most wealth and power need to accept their duties and act in a manner that respects and is compassionate to the needs of those with less wealth, power and influence.

Unfortunately, the energy and climate issues are not isolated from larger and more complex political and economic issues. They form part of a complex set of relationships and systemic ordering of the global political economy, of power and influence. To talk about a solution to the climate questions opens up issues of who has the power to decide, who has the duty to act. We must consider issues of global equity – north and south, rich and poor, historical polluters vs. future polluters, and there are issues of human rights and gender justice. Behind these complex issues, there are ingrained and defensive sources of the powers associated with certain industries (e.g., energy sector, auto-industry, fossil fuel industry, transport sector) and their influence over various political leaders and political parties, including their ability to influence governments and global elites who ultimately control policy decisions.

10 SAFCEI Press release, <http://safcei.org/african-faith-leaders-a-renewed-moral-vision-is-vital-to-progress-in-climate-talks/>.



It is arguable that over the last fifty years, the fossil fuel industry and our reliance on fossil fuels have restructured the relationship between the private sector and the state; that the state has been transformed by this dependency relationship, and thus, also the question of who ultimately is the custodian of human and other sentient beings' welfare is up for investigation.

In a noteworthy anecdote about responsibilities, when running a workshop for indigenous peoples in Gabon in 2010, the author observed there was a moment of confusion amongst the Baka Pygmy elders. We had just finished explaining carbon cycles in nature and how greenhouse gas emissions from urban economies were creating a thickening of the atmosphere and a disturbance of the global environment and natural cycles. The Baka asked for a slow re-translation to ensure they had correctly understood. They were amazed and perplexed. For several years, they had seen the forest changing, that the seasons were not normal and that nature was becoming increasingly disturbed and disjointed. The elders had believed that they had disturbed the sacred relationship between humans and the forest, and they had thus been carrying out extensive rituals to try to understand what they had done wrong and atone for this.¹¹

In the Baka understanding of the world, they have custodianship duties bestowed on them by the forest (as expressed and communicated by *Edzengui*, the physical manifestation of the forest's spirit). It is typical in indigenous peoples' cultures that there is a sense of sacred duty linking the resources that sustain life, given by God / the ancestors / divine natural forces, and the responsibility of humans to act as responsible and moral custodians of the bounty. If nature goes out of kilter, there are duties bearing on the human custodians to assist in rectifying the problem, whether species specific recovery or eco-systemic.

It is this sense of custodianship and duty that is absent amongst those who are the perpetrators of the climate crisis; unlike the Baka elders, they do not feel any moral obligation, no sense of moral dread.

To entertain a question about the relationship between religion and climate change is to re-open questions about religion and power, religion and politics, religion and the state, religion and the economy, religion and global governance. To consider issues of morality and governance obliges us to draw on our respective religious and spiritual understandings of morality, ethics and the human mind.

The UN itself was born within a conceptual dichotomy. It was founded on two opposing principles: 1) The state is sovereign and all powerful over matters concerning the national territory. Decisions can only be made within the United Nations when the designated representative of the sovereign state voluntarily agrees to comply. 2) Human Rights are universal and trump the powers of the sovereignty of the state. Any state that grossly violates human rights is subject to international law, sanctions and interventions as required. In the newest iteration of the UN Human Rights Council, states are obliged to transparently attest to their human rights practices and civil society has the opportunity to present evidence to the contrary.

Climate change obliges us to question the logic of state sovereignty. A national state is not emitting into its own atmosphere, it is emitting into a common atmosphere where all humans and species are subject to the consequences, without having caused the emissions or benefitted from the advantages

¹¹ See IPACC's report on REDD+ workshops in Africa: <http://ipacc.org.za/uploads/docs/AIPREDDV2.pdf>.

they generated. Human rights now and human rights in the future are severely at risk from historic and current emissions.¹² As suggested by UNEP's Steiner to the African religious leaders in 2011, the nature of the climate problem and the structure of the UN may be at odds with each other.

Climate change is driven by human behavior; human behavior may indeed be influenced by self-interest and even short-term interests, but human behavior also occurs in a social context and is shaped by ethics, values and beliefs. If our behavior is unsustainable, devoid of compassion, and steals from future human generations, as well as non-human sentient beings, then it is clearly wrongful and unwise. Creating the climate crisis with full knowledge of the causes, while alternative clean solutions are available, and simply failing to uphold the global good at the expense of national interests, and one might argue, class interests, suggests we have entered into some kind of self-destructive moral dead-end.

II. FAITH-BASED INITIATIVES IN CLIMATE ADVOCACY

There are a plethora of cases of faith-based responses to the climate crisis. These range from individual congregations taking steps to reduce their carbon footprint all the way up to global networks directly engaging in the UNFCCC negotiations process. We are also seeing a pattern of greater inter-religious cooperation on climate justice advocacy, which bodes well considering that such climate stresses are also likely to exacerbate inter-communal conflicts.

The scale of the threat to humanity and life on Earth is stimulating a new era in religious reflection, relevance and cooperation. At a time when religion is associated in the mass media with intolerance, extremism, chauvinism and violence, the faith-based climate advocacy is suggesting quite an opposite trend of greater solidarity, inter-religious dialogue, and the possibility that the faith-based social movements are going to be catalytic in the global paradigm shift away from a competitive international system based on infinite growth models and the supremacy of self-managing economics, to a new type of multi-faith, spiritually inspired rediscovery of our place in the web of life, a rediscovery of each other, and a refreshed paradigm of compassionate and inter-dependent living, what Maasai leader Jeniffer Koinante called an ethical system of '*enoughness*'.¹³

In 1986, there was a major gathering of religious authorities in Assisi, Italy, where the WWF celebrated its 25th anniversary. The event, which was initiated by the Duke of Edinburgh and WWF International, resulted in the seminal Assisi Declarations, a set of calls from Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Islamic leaders to their respective spiritual communities to commit to a sacred duty of nature conservation. Baha'i, Jain and Sikh movements later added their own declarations.

¹² For a seminal publication on climate change and human rights, see http://www.ichrp.org/files/reports/45/136_report.pdf.

¹³ See http://www.ipacc.org.za/eng/news_details.asp?NID=282.



The Assisi process led to the formation of the Alliance of Religions for Conservation (ARC) a major global initiative for faith-based environmental engagements.¹⁴ ARC's focus has been on practical projects and assisting faith leaders and congregations to develop theological expressions of the duties of humanity to nature.

As early as 1988, the World Council of Churches (WCC), a global ecumenical network of over three hundred Christian churches and denominations in 110 countries, was engaging on issues of climate change and was active in the preparations and advocacy by the civil society at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992.

The Earth Summit was considered widely as a landmark shift in UN thinking, and more generally in how the environment, sustainability, rights and governance would be seen in coming years. Civil society had previously not been given so much access and status in a United Nations treaty process. The Earth Summit, as expressed through Agenda 21 and the formation of the Major Groups, enshrined the principle that our future would need to be determined by cooperation between all parts of the human society – civil, private sector and state. Notably, the faith-based movements and constituency were not acknowledged by the Rio process and remain technically shut out by the United Nations within the formal Rio Conventions processes.

One of the most powerful and influential voices of global leadership has been His All Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, the Orthodox Archbishop of Constantinople. In 1991, Patriarch Bartholomew convened an ecological conference entitled 'Living in the Creation of the Lord'.¹⁵ Since then, he has also organized eight international, interdisciplinary and interfaith symposia on various rivers and oceans in order to draw attention to the plight of the world's waters. In November 1997, the Patriarch pronounced that destruction of the environment and nature was a sin:

“ For humans to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation, for humans to degrade the integrity of the Earth by causing changes in its climate, stripping the Earth of its natural forests, or destroying its wetlands...for humans to contaminate the Earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life with poisonous substances-these are sins.¹⁶

For Conference of the Parties (COP 14) in Poznań, Poland, the Church of Sweden brought together faith leaders from across the planet to generate a multi-faith statement on climate. This led to the *Uppsala Interfaith Climate Manifesto* (2008) signed by twenty six global religious leaders and delivered to the Polish COP.¹⁷

In 2009, *RfP* held a consultation of senior religious leaders in New York and a Global Interfaith Gathering to ensure that the voices of the religious communities are heard during the high-level event on climate change for Heads of State and Government that was convened by the UN Secretary-General during the sixty-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly. During Climate Week, *RfP*

14 For more information on ARC, see <http://arcworld.org>.

15 See <http://www.patriarchate.org/documents/ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-insights-into-an-orthodox-christian-worldview>.

16 <http://www.earthlight.org/news28.html>.

17 The manifesto is available on <http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?id=664984>.

ensured that the religious communities were represented in many of the high profile events to advocate to governments to seal the deal at COP 15 on a climate agreement that is fair, ambitious and binding and secures climate justice for all. Building upon the momentum created in September during the Climate Week, *RfP* facilitated the participation of religious leaders of different religious traditions in the Interfaith Ceremony as well as other events during the COP 15 in Copenhagen.

In 2010, the *Geneva Interfaith Forum on Climate Change, Environment and Human Rights* was established by WCC, the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, the *Centre Catholique International de Genève*, and the Indigenous Peoples Ancestral Spiritual Council. Brahma Kumaris have been an important ally in the past few COPs, bringing their strong tradition of meditation, reflection and peace building into the global networks of cooperation on climate advocacy.

Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute (SAFCEI), a multi-faith platform focusing on environmental sustainability, community involvement in custodianship (eco-congregations), including *RfP* South Africa, and *We have Faith – Act Now for Climate Justice* campaign played a major role in mobilising African faith leaders and congregations to engage in the 2011 UNFCCC COP 17 in Durban, South Africa. Among the various events and initiatives organized by the religious communities was a youth caravan that travelled from Nairobi, Kenya, to Durban, collecting signatures on a petition which they loaded into a wooden arc. *RfP*, Caritas Internationalis and WCC also held a consultation in which religious leaders discussed the ethical and spiritual dimensions of climate change and food security and shared best practices on advocacy, awareness raising and social/community mobilization. The *Advocacy and Action for Climate Change: A Resource Guide for Religious Communities* produced by *RfP* was also launched on the occasion. A Spanish version of the resource guide was launched at the Rio +20 on June 2012 at a side event on the *Ethical and Religious Perspectives on the Future We Want*.

One of the newest initiatives in climate advocacy has been triggered by International Network of Engaged Buddhists (iNEB) in cooperation with Sewalanka Foundation of Sri Lanka and its inter-religious network of solidarity across Asia. On 23-27 September 2012, INEB and Sewalanka Foundation jointly hosted the Inter-Religious Dialogue on Climate Change and Biodiversity Conservation.¹⁸ The conference was conducted with support from the IUCN national office for Sri Lanka, the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP), and technical support from WWF Nepal.

The Anuradhapura conference drew together over 150 delegates from the scientific community, Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, Hindu and animist practitioners, clergy and civil society leaders from across South Asia, South East Asia, East Asia, and delegates from Australia, Europe, Africa and North America.

As an outcome of the conference, a network, tentatively named the Inter-religious Climate and Environmental Network (ICE network), has been set up supported by INEB Secretariat in Bangkok. Islamic organisations in Indonesia are offering to host the next conference in 2014 ahead of the IUCN's influential 6th World Parks Congress in Sydney, Australia.

18 Report is available here: <http://safcei.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Sri-Lanka-Interfaith-Dialogue-on-Climate-Change-report.pdf>.



III. CONCLUSIONS

Climate change has a slow onset, complex interlocking results, and is due to be with us for centuries to come. The global system is failing to address the drivers of climate change which set to undermine progress in development, human well-being, biodiversity conservation and global peace.

The challenge for the faith movements, religious institutions and spiritual communities of the planet is to understand the seriousness of the task at hand, to take the time for theological and philosophical reflection, and to mobilise the clergy and the laity to enact skilful change, inspired by compassion and a reverence of the living world and its abundance. Changes at local level will contribute to responding to the climate crisis. At the same time, we need to engage with multilateral governance, including substantial engagement with the United Nations to ensure that this civilizational challenge becomes a transformational moment in the lives of humanity. Only a binding agreement on greenhouse gas emissions reductions can bring sufficient changes and remove the primary driver.

In the unfolding of the climate impacts and increased vulnerability, we can anticipate that people will turn to their religious institutions for succour and assistance. Even with that supportive relationship, if we fail to get to the causes driving climate change we are wilfully driving our planet to a breaking point. Succour and emergency aid can treat symptoms but not causes.

Religions are built on the principle that sacrifice brings transformation, brings wisdom and blessings. Always wanting more, the crude agenda of the materialist modern world, is not generally believed to bring happiness or satisfaction. We now know it also undermines sustainability. Reverence for God, for our religions and for nature can inspire us to make sacrifices that allow intentional changes to be made, precisely the intentional changes that would be required to radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and stabilise the global situations as much as is possible.

In a Buddhist idiom, the ego is never satisfied and the more we feed its cravings, the greater those cravings become. It is only by giving concentrated attention to our ethical conduct, in knowing our own minds better, and in choosing the compassionate and skilful path that we find also the path to ultimate liberation.

There are skilful actions which congregations and leadership can undertake to educate the clergy and laity, to bring about immediate changes in how we produce energy and the emission that arise from our daily lives. In theory, if we all responded to the challenges of climate change, the failure of the UN system to come to an ethical and noble solution would not matter. Yet, it does matter. The UN is the highest expression of our duty to the planet, to equity, and to keep our governance capacity at the same scale as our environmental impacts.

For the faith movements of the world to truly bring change to the multilateral environmental negotiations, agreements, norms and principles, requires bringing forth that which is best in all of our religions. It is perhaps one of the most important lessons in this chapter that each of the movements described, and many others not discussed here, have highlighted the importance of inter-religious, multi-faith cooperation in climate advocacy. This is in part due to the global scale of the crisis and

the need for a unified message and approach. It is also to do with the global nature of the relationship between the perpetrators of the harm and the victims of the impacts. Moreover, it is about modelling what we are talking about.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGY

The challenge of climate change for the human population can be represented as below:

MATRIX OF CLIMATE JUSTICE RESPONSES AND STRATEGIES

High greenhouse gas emissions	High greenhouse gas emissions	Threats to food & water security	Conflict from climate stresses
↓	↓	↓	↓
Education for public and clergy	Advocacy (national & multilateral)	Adaptation	Preventative peace promotion
↓		↓	
Mitigation (less emissions, more carbon conservation)	+ Inter-religious advocacy coordination + Theological review of man, divine obligations and nature conservation	Faith-based and inter-religious resilience projects (e.g. organic farming, soil conservation, water conservation) + Emergency humanitarian services	Inter-faith tolerance and cooperation promotion



CLIMATE STABILITY ADVOCACY

Problematic	Progress to date	Actions needed
<p>A call to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage in national and multilateral advocacy to promote ethical and political commitments to a binding agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Help faith institutions and networks understand the causes and impacts of climate change to be effective conduits of education and prevention of conflict and promote community resilience. Engage in a global theological and spiritual reflection on sustainability and our duty to other species and the well-being of the planet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No binding agreement at the UNFCCC. Kyoto Protocol risks being dismantled. Problem of developing countries reaching the same emissions levels as Annex 1 Developed Countries. Economic national interests are being set above global common good – protection of the current and future climate of the planet. Christian networks have been engaged in climate advocacy at multilateral level, notably WCC and allies. Failure of the mitigation negotiations has opened up adaptation strategies in policy but still underfunded and not fully coherent. Gender awareness of climate impacts is emerging. New IPCC report of 2013 is likely to warn of much more serious consequences and new timelines on climate change and vulnerabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental sustainability is under severe threat, demanding a new level of global cooperation. Sustained civil society pressure on national states and UN system to come to binding agreement as soon as possible. Actions to build social – ecological resilience, food security and new approaches to agriculture and fisheries. Inter-religious coordination on climate advocacy, at different scales and forums. Collaboration between conservationists, climate scientists and faith institutions and networks to coordinate advocacy and public education – contribute to adaptation, mitigation and conflict prevention.

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