

# Pre-Assembly Regional Consultation Reports

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Advancing *Shared Well-Being* by  
Protecting the Earth

Religions for Peace 

## AFRICA

The Earth and all its rich resources are a gift from our creator. As stewards charged with the care and sustainable management of the earth, it is our religious duty to call for the correct and prudent use of these resources. However, because of poverty and a general poor state of economic livelihood in most of rural Africa, societal priorities have shifted to the day-to-day survival of the community members in contrast to learning about Climate change and its related negative effects. In order to arrest some of these paradigms, we advocate for:

- Religious leaders in Africa call on their counterparts in other parts of the world to vigorously campaign for a change in consumption patterns to reduce resource consumption.
- Religious leaders globally to make protecting the earth primarily a personal undertaking; challenging each individual daily to consciously take personal actions that are dominative to the future wellbeing of the earth.
- Active involvement in concerted and integrative global and national efforts for the preservation of rainforests and water catchment areas; and the adoption of alternative agricultural activities that are environmentally friendly.
- Active involvement of faith leaders, women and youth leaders in the negotiation and social audit, for ethical exploration and management of natural resources including – land, water, marine life and minerals; and further ensure the rehabilitation and restoration of land.
- Promotion of the use of environment-friendly alternative sources of energy that allow utmost protection of the environment. There's also need for increased and affordable access to alternative energy sources for domestic and commercial use.
- Calling for the universalization and implementation of legal instruments, including treaties at the regional and international level that provide for working policies on climate justice, climate change adaption, mitigation and financing and environmental remediation of contaminated areas. Adoption of specific regional and national days for environmental activities and campaign backed by faith communities, women and youth including messaging in places of worship and ensure visibility of the same at the local, national and regional level.
- Development of a global Multi-religious "Faiths for Earth" simplified campaign; draft and disseminate a resource guide for religious communities on climate change to build their capacity on matters protecting the earth.
- Faith leaders to call out for Private Sector involvement especially Manufacturing Industries in environmental protection and climate change action for a more personal commitment from these industries.
- Religious Leaders to adopt simplified teaching aids like tree planting in order to sensitize the congregations, and to champion for the development of environment-friendly local remedies and technology for climate dividend.

As an example of the work being undertaken around climate protection, *RfP* Mongolia shared the ongoing project that helped to establish the first ever interreligious climate initiative in their country. The *RfP* Mongolia National Chapter implemented the environmental project entitled 'Impact of Climate Change on Nomadic Way of Life' in which Buddhist, Islam and Bahai youths participated. Within a framework of the project, workshops on 'Interfaith Dialogue on Environmental Protection' were organized. At the workshop, participants from the Centre of Mongolian Buddhists, Mongolian Muslim Association, Mongolian Bahai Association, the Zanabazar Buddhist University and the National University of Mongolia attended and collaborated to establish environmental projects between their organizations. The participants expressed their willingness and support for future interfaith activities for environmental protection, advocacy of interreligious activities in future.

The participants introduced a proposal to publish a book of different religious teachings, traditions and practices on environmental protection. Furthermore, they advocated for the continuation of these interfaith workshops, with future installments involving government officials, politicians and scholars. This project 'Religions in Mongolia for Environment Protection' is developed on the proposals of aforementioned workshop 'Interfaith Dialogue on Environmental Protection'. The project aims to strengthen interfaith activities in Mongolia and to promote the *RfP* as a leading organization in the multi-religious fieldwork in Mongolia. It may further be promoted in three Buddhist Russian Republics: Buryatia, Kalmykia and Tuva in collaboration with *RfP* Russia in future.

Asia Women of Faith Network promoted following observations and recommendations:

- *RfP* members are strongly encouraged to make spiritual reflections and public pledges on the need to protect our environment.
- *RfP* should consider the use of environment friendly practices to reduce its carbon footprint in all its conferences and meetings.
- Every time *RfP* and *RfP* Asia have a conference there be a public tree planting ceremony in the host country at the time of the conference. This ceremony is then to be promoted locally and world-wide.
- *RfP* should do media campaigns on awareness on waste pollution advocating the principle of reduce, reuse and recycle.
- *RfP* women should share best practices on climate change mitigation by making short video clips and post them on social media.
- Due to the urgency of Climate Change that *RfP* strengthen its partnership with Green Faith and its Living the Change initiative for religious people (<https://livingthechange.net/index.html>) and similar organizations.

# Religions for Peace

## EUROPE

### Observations

The issue of climate change is one of the most important of our time, however there is still a lot of confusion about its causes, legitimacy, and what we can actually do as individuals to help address the impending crisis. Many people within communities and societies are extremely anxious over the impact of climate change and feel helpless, causing fear and insecurity.

There are already many existing and well-established interfaith initiatives which have been doing excellent work in this area for many years, such as the Rainforest Initiative, and Inter-religious Climate Network, and we should seek to work with, and learn from, them.

It is noted that there are other environmental concerns not mentioned in the commission paper, such as the issues brought about by technology (for example increased mining for rare-earth metals and dealing with electronic waste), and the increasing number of satellites and space debris in orbit around the earth.

### Opportunities

All religions have rich resources to offer personal support to people who feel hopeless and anxious, and to encourage hope and positivity about the future. It is also well known that all religions have in their traditions teachings about revering and protecting the earth, and the divine nature of all life; and it is an important role of religious leaders to encourage positivity and action amongst their religious communities. Protecting and caring for the earth should be seen as a spiritual and religious duty.

At national and regional levels religious organizations and communities should build partnerships with climate change specialists and carry out workshops and educational programs which link religious values to climate change initiatives and educate religious communities about actions that can make a real difference. Climate change organizations often welcome the input of religious leaders with similar aims and concerns. Furthermore, working with students, young people, schools, and colleges on climate change activities can be particularly fruitful. There are already excellent examples of these types of partnerships within the *RfP* network we can learn from and collaborate with.

The symbolism of senior religious leaders being proactive and doing very practical things together can be particularly powerful – such as litter picking, water cleaning, planting trees, riding bicycles etc. This can generate media attention and send a positive message not only to religious communities but also to wider society.

One issue that could be focused on is diet, and the over consumption and production of meat. Meat production has a significant negative impact on biodiversity and uses huge quantities of water to produce. An initiative which presents cutting down on meat consumption in a positive way, instead of forced abstinence, could be effective.

However, we should be mindful of potential negative effects of urging people to take action on climate change. Appearing morally superior and out of touch with the challenges many people face in their daily

# Religions for Peace

lives may perpetuate negative stereotypes about religion, make people feel insecure and resentful, and feed into populism and extremism.

Whilst individuals and communities can contribute to averting the climate crisis, regulation by governments is also extremely important. Therefore advocacy, lobbying, and building strategic alliances with organizations with shared aims and values, is imperative. One area of possible focus is supporting and developing more initiatives around green energy.

We also need economic models and practices in our societies which encourage sustainable living and discourage consumer waste and disposable living. As religious leaders we can enter into constructive dialogue with economists and politicians about how this can be achieved.

There is also a significant economic challenge to addressing climate change, and religious leaders and communities should petition governments in Europe to commit more spending to climate change activities; and accept that countries in better financial positions need to do more and contribute more.

In order to carry more weight and remind governments and institutions of their responsibilities, in declarations and statements we should refer to the Paris agreement and the SDGs which focus on climate change. Language around climate change is also extremely important, and for example some new outlets now refer to it as 'climate crisis', as opposed to 'climate change'.

## **Actions**

We should lead by example, and therefore encourage and showcase examples where faith communities use and produce green energy, and have turned religious spaces and buildings into examples of eco living, using solar power, wind power, biogas, etc. A resource could be produced to offer advice on how to do this and showcase good practice.

We encourage *RfP* International to carry out a review around the language they use when talking about the current climate crisis, and to ensure that the language used always conveys the utmost urgency and seriousness of the situation. A guide on appropriate language could be produced for all *RfP* affiliates and partners.

An initiative which examines religion and meat production and consumption could be initiated; which initially offers some assessment of whether this would be a positive avenue to pursue in a multifaith context.

## LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

### Observations

There is an alienation of the environment that can be defined as an expression of the human being who alienates himself with God; that is why the human being exploits/mistreats himself, his brothers and the creation. The relationship for which the human being was created has been broken. Thus, the exploitation of nature is a consequence of the incorrect understanding of human identity as a creature. To this, the deterioration of creation adds to poverty and social inequality: aspects that Laudato Si already highlighted.

### Opportunities

An eco-theological understanding of the relationship between human beings and the Creation.

It is necessary to include the entire environment when we define Earth.

To recognize the link between poverty, quality of life, inequality, injustice with climate change and human consumption. All this requires better approach and the search for the religious teachings related to the survival of the Earth.

### Action Proposals

If God's union is the goal of all religious traditions, an adequate spiritual effort must be made to heal the human spirit, restoring the proper balance with the creation.

We must embrace the traditional religions of the Earth, to live harmoniously with the environment.

Leaders around the world must demonstrate and be recognized by their "best practices" by applying the Spirit's teachings on environment and the care of the Earth as the common home.

## NORTH AMERICA

### Key Concerns

- Several groups suggested that this theme should preface all other discussions because issues surrounding the Earth and environment impact all other issues.
- Groups are concerned with sustainable waste disposal and management. This is seen as part of a broader issue with wants overtaking needs, and humans overconsuming beyond the Earth's means.

### Role of Religious Resources

- Highlight the stewardship of the earth and environment that is already present. Several groups pointed to Pope Francis's Encyclical on the Environment as a model for other religious representatives.
- Illustrate the urgency on this issue through religious text. Show how caring for the planet is a "service to God."
- One participant, Grandmother Marie-Josée Tardif (Algonquin), stressed how femininity is intertwined with Mother Earth, and respecting the planet fundamentally entails a respect for women and feminine traits.

### Further Capacity Building

- One group suggested that *RfP* could develop a database of religious "green resources," including a list of how organizations in North America could improve their ecological footprint.
- Another group suggested that on a practical level, religious spaces often serve as shelters during natural disasters. As climate change leads to more disasters, these spaces must better prepare themselves to accommodate even more people.