



Bahá'í
International
Community



UNITED NATIONS COP27

Realizing Ambition through Ethical, Intergenerational and Multisectoral Responses to Climate Crises

Sharm El-Sheikh - Wednesday, 9 November 2022

Background

The 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) took place from Sunday, November 6, 2022, to Sunday November 20, 2022 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt under the presidency of Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sameh Shoukry. With a clear recognition of the gravity of the global climate challenge and appreciation of the value of multilateral, collective and concerted action as the only means to address this truly global threat, Egypt's COP27 presidency vision was to move from negotiations and planning to implementation. *Now is the time for action on the ground.*

With that vision in mind, *Religions for Peace* International, in collaboration with the Bahá'í International Community, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Tzu Chi Foundation, organised a side-event titled “Realizing Ambition through Ethical, Intergenerational and Multisectoral Responses to Climate Crises”. With the goal of providing a platform for a diverse group of stakeholders to present expert interventions on the leap from science to policy and the necessity of centring human values over short-term gains, this event addressed root causes of climate crises and highlighted collaborative actions rooted in ethics, values and integrity that result in innovative and durable solutions.

The Panel

After a Moment of Silence, **Prof. Azza Karam, Secretary General to *Religions for Peace International*, opened the event with welcoming remarks and a framing provision.** Quoting the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Prof. Karam said, “We're on a 'highway to climate hell,' the important question to be asked is ‘why is it relevant to engage with faith-based organisations in combatting the impact of climate change? What is the added value of doing so?’”. Prof Karam provided the following reasons as to why engaging religious communities is critical to address climate change.

- Religious institutions are large landowners on a global scale. These institutions have a critical role in promoting responsible land stewardship to mitigate the effects of climate change and dictate how to respond to environmental climate change impact on the land.
- Religious institutions and faith-based organisations can influence behaviour. As faith traditions are characterised by ethical frameworks and moral guidelines at the core of their belief, they can change the behaviour of people for the better. Religious institutions and faith-based organisations may not have the same political or legal power as governments and the United Nations, but they are able to *influence* people and communities, even affecting politicians and the outcome of elections.
- Religious institutions are the oldest service providers. From the provision of humanitarian aid to organising community service, religious institutions have had a central role since the

beginning of society. Climate change emergency response and knowledge dissemination can reach further through the formal and informal networks of faith communities and religious institutions.

Prof. Karam concluded the framing of this panel by pointing out that the challenge of solving the climate change issue is not the lack of scientific knowledge but rather the need for improved cooperation. Religious institutions should work together so that the impact of their work is multiplied and reaches further, faster and more efficiently. There is also a need for multi-sectoral cooperation as we cannot afford to work alone any longer. The weakness of multilateralism lies in the challenge to understand *how* to work together but the urgency of the climate crisis requires us to find effective ways to do exactly that, collaborate.

Prof. Karam then introduced the **climate attaché at Vanuatu's United Nations Mission in New York, Mr. Malcolm Dalesa**. Mr. Dalesa's role is to support and amplify the global campaign seeking a climate change advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In his intervention, he emphasized the need for governments, faith-based organisations, the United Nations, and civil society to work together at both the local and national level. As the Vanuatu archipelago is vulnerable to the effects of climate change, the government of Vanuatu is mobilising its ministries to complementary, collaborative work, focusing on the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level. Vanuatu is a leading nation in engaging youth for climate action as well promoting public-private partnerships with civil society for climate change policy development. Certain of the necessity of this COP being a huge step towards addressing the climate crisis, Vanuatu's objective for COP27 was to bring together youth, civil society organisations and governments through multi-stakeholder approaches.

After the opening remarks, Ms. Bani Dugal, Co-President of *Religions for Peace* and Principal Representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations, introduced **Mr. Daniel Perell of the Baha'i International Community** as **moderator for the Interactive Session**. Mr. Perell opened the session by stating that it is clear to him that everyone is aware of the challenges that climate change is posing on the world and that we, collectively, are also increasingly aware of the *future we want*. Thus, if we agree that the status quo is insufficient, and if we agree on a better future for all without discrimination: how can we truly center human values and this vision for the future and let short term gains not be the metric which guides us? Here, the faith communities, in addition to many other well-wishers of humanity, are providing some fundamental contributions. Mr. Perell then announced the playing of video-statements from two session participants.

- **H.E. Ms. Maria Fernanda Espinosa, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and of Defence of Ecuador, Former President of the UN General Assembly, Former UN PGA, Member of the Group of Women Leaders, Ecuador.** World leaders have a clear understanding of the policy needed for future generations. What is needed are investments towards a just transition from fossil fuels to clean energy, including subsidies towards clean energy innovation. The existential threat of climate change has galvanized member states to a level of agreement which presents remarkable opportunities. Yet despite these agreements, there is still a gap between knowledge and action. Taking the leap from knowledge to action requires courage. It also requires putting long-term needs before short-term gains. There is therefore a need to think about incentivizing long-term gains. Furthermore, it is imperative that our multilateral system becomes value-based to nurture a new form of politics rooted in new norms for collaboration and scientific approaches

paired with integrity and courage. Faith can galvanize humanity to change behaviour, policy, and politics and to bridge science and policy.

- **H.E. Judge Mohamed Abdelsalam, Senior Representative of His Eminence Grand Imam of Al-Azhar; Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Elders; Co-President, *Religions for Peace*, Egypt.** Judge Abdelsalam noted that climate change represents an increasingly alarming phenomenon for humanity. Climate change should be treated with equal urgency as unemployment, poverty, and economic recession. Despite promotion of inclusivity and sustainability, materialist development views are incapable of achieving critically objectives, namely the restoration of development-related values in human consciousness and changing the daily attitudes and life patterns of people. Climate change poses an existential threat. Humanity needs to embrace compassion and social responsibility over materialism and narrow individualism. All heavenly religions, including Islam, have confirmed through the speeches of religious leaders around the world, that it is necessary to protect the earth. As God says in the Qur'an: "I will place a steward on earth". Thus, we should all take care of our natural resources and share them equally amongst each other. Judge Abdelsalam expressed his hope that new strategies and action plans that seriously and efficiently contribute to rescuing our planet from the climate change disaster would come out of COP27. He concluded his statement by stressing that climate change is a joint threat that must be confronted by all.

After the video statements, Mr. Perell introduced **Bishop Julio Murray Thompson, Bishop of Anglican Diocese of Panama and Chairman of the Anglican Communion Environmental Network.** Bishop Thompson noted that we live in challenging times and the impact of these challenges—including climate change—on human lives needs to be presented to government leaders. The Anglican Communion teaches a holistic engagement with the world through the eyes of Jesus. Through this perspective, a positive message can be delivered to the poor who are often the most impacted by climate change. However, the world is still waiting to see the policies and the actions discussed at previous COP conferences to be delivered. The problem is patently clear: most polluters come from wealthy countries. Emissions generally rise with wealth, but with wealth also comes power and political influence. Faith communities are connected both at the local and global level through teachings and scriptures. Even though paradoxes are imminent in and between faith traditions, ethical and moral instructions are a commonality and as such, it is crucial that we identify our moral imperative as imputable. As climate change accelerates inequity, there is a need to evaluate corporations for their policies aimed at minimizing costs and maximizing profit. The result of these methods is that 7.5 billion people are paying the price of a degraded planet so that a small number of people can profit. Climate change represents a great moral failing of our system. Religious institutions are responding based on the foundation of their belief that *the earth belongs to God, and the people belong to God.* The Anglican Communion believes in metanoia and transformation, setting out on a new life-giving path and working courageously together as people of faith towards an add-add solution and not a win-win. Bishop Thompson concluded by emphasizing the importance of working with indigenous peoples as their cultural knowledge and spirituality teaches us how to maintain our relationship with mother earth. At the same time, it is also important that we hold governments accountable for their corruption and bureaucracy which cause delays to urgently needed solutions.

Second to speak in person is **Ms. Amal Sarah, Youth Climate Leader from Church of Pakistan:** "This afternoon when we reflect on climate crisis, I need to emphasize words from the holy Bible, the Book of Songs chapter 24 verse 1: 'The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it'. This verse simply clarifies that the earth belongs to God. So, what does God command us? He wants us to care for it... God has made us and sent us to this world

to become the stewards of mother earth". Ms. Sarah explains that stewardship is a responsibility and as such climate change presents us with the confrontation that we, as humanity, have not been good stewards. The speaker originates in Pakistan which recently suffered from immense floods with disastrous consequences. Observantly, the elite class of Pakistan maintains a non-climate friendly lifestyle; making the need to become responsible stewards even more evident as the vulnerable and poor populations (for example livestock farmers) see their livelihoods completely destroyed by climate change impacts whereas those with the highest footprint are not concerned with changing their lifestyle to aid mitigation. The climate crisis is therefore an *ethical crisis*. The best response to this ethical crisis is the change of behaviour which will influence the following mitigating sequence: awareness raising (especially for those unaware of the climate crisis such as the illiterate), participatory approach to needs assessment for vulnerable populations, implementation of policies at grassroots level, and continued integrated education on sustainable energy use, manufacturing, and infrastructure development.

The panel then continued with **Gopal D. Patel, a faith-based environmental activist, campaigner and consultant, and a senior advisor at the Center for Earth Ethics Earth, WWF Beliefs and Values Programme, the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology and the Parliament of the World's Religions**. Speaking from his global work experience with multisectoral organisations, Mr. Patel drew attention to an increase in attention for nature-based solutions. Recently the Center for Earth Ethics hosted five international dialogues on ecosystem restoration. The questions at hand were "How do we normalize the understanding of rituals that we use to connect with the environment?" and "How do we re-establish or cultivate a (new) relationship with the environment through our own inner work?". It is often said that our relationship with the outside world is a reflection of our relationship with ourselves. In addition to a vibrant discussion on the meaning and impact of ritual, the five dialogues brought to light an interesting commonality in all efficient nature-based solutions and approaches: the principles of 'humility' and 'relationships'. Both principles are central to faith traditions. Rituals can help humanity once again understand the forgotten knowledge that we are all interconnected. Humans are always living in a direct relationship with the land. Therefore, the way in which we treat the land will directly impact humanity. Once we fully realise the interconnectedness of life, we can truly integrate it into our global biodiversity frameworks to build sustainable ways to counter climate change and mitigate its impacts.

- The panel concluded with a video by **Dharma Master Ms. De Yuan, Jing Si Abode of the World of Tzu Chi, Taiwan**. Her message was short yet impactful. At the core of Buddhist teachings lies the principle and the way of compassion. Compassion goes beyond loving because it requires the need to understand that everything is equal (in value). That realisation is followed by action: the Buddhist teaching inspire us to take action for the community and earth, as they are equal to us, and we approach them with compassion. As we are witnesses to the bounty of the earth each day while life slips away from us day as well, we come to understand that we need to honour that life is sacred.

Concluding remarks were made by **Ms. Bani Dugal, Co-President, Religions for Peace and principal Representative of the Bahá'í Community to the United Nations**, who summarised the panel and drew attention to a key element addressed by all speakers. The gap between intention and action represents one of the most central challenges to climate change. Echoing Prof. Karam's words, Ms. Dugal also underscored the importance of faith actors and faith-based organisations working together to engage with multi-sectoral collaboration, because if we work alone as religious organisations, we do not see the same result as when we partner.