



# Environment, Religion and Culture in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



A Discussion Note prepared for the Second International Seminar on Environment, Culture and Religion – Promoting Intercultural Dialogue for Sustainable Development (23 – 24 April 2016, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran)

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# Foreword

In September 2015, Governments adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centered set of universal and transformative goals and targets. Governments envisage a world in which every country enjoys sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all. A world of over 9 billion people in which consumption and production patterns and use of all natural resources — from air to land, from deserts to forests, from rivers, lakes and aquifers to oceans and seas and from frozen tundra to expanding towns and cities — is sustainable. One in which democracy, good governance and the rule of law, as well as an enabling environment at national and international levels, which are essential for sustainable development, includes sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty and hunger as well as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. One in which development and the application of technology is climate-sensitive, respects biodiversity and is resilient. One in which humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected.

Today, over 80 percent of people worldwide identify with an estimated 4,300 religious or spiritual communities and even more cultural traditions which influence how these people see and treat the world around them: what they eat and drink; when they work and have children; where they live and travel or even when they select a particular course of education and pass time. Religious values and practices are deeply entwined in the fabric of daily lives, and the leaders of churches, mosques, temples, and other religious communities play an important role in shaping attitudes, opinions, and behaviors for management and use of

the environment and natural resources and for sustainable development overall. Faith leaders, representing 24 belief traditions from around the world, including Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism and Shintoism, declared in Bristol in September 2015, their support in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Culture, in its manifold expressions ranging from cultural heritage to cultural and creative industries and cultural tourism, is both an enabler and a driver of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The social cohesion and wellbeing of many cultures face common threats from, for example: urbanization and relocation, which impact traditional ways of life and livelihoods; and well-intended but misguided development initiatives, which threaten the human rights and sustainable practices. It is, therefore, so important to understand all aspects of people's cultures – not just the economics or logistics, but the beliefs and spiritual practices. Diversity must be promoted, while respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. This is the spirit of the UN Decade for the rapprochement of Cultures.

There is growing recognition that traditional knowledge and customary sustainable use underpin indigenous peoples' and local communities' resilience to environmental change, including climate change, as well as contribute directly to biological and cultural diversity, and global sustainable development. Sustainable livelihoods, cultural heritage and the knowledge of indigenous peoples can be threatened for example, by action to combat biodiversity loss and climate change. Conversely, when respectful relationships

are built with indigenous peoples, their sustainable management of their resources can enhance national and global action on climate change, as well as significantly contribute to conservation, sustainable use and the equitable sharing of benefits arising from biodiversity.

This publication helps explore the nexus between environment, religion and culture, giving some examples, in order to arrive at a more comprehensive and sophisticated understanding and appreciation of how culture and religion can contribute to the protection and preservation of the natural environment. It also aims to stimulate dialogue and plant the seed for something fundamental to a successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Such a dialogue – “The Second International Seminar on Environment, Culture and Religion – Promoting intercultural Dialogue for Sustainable Development” took place in April 2016 in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran and explored the role of religion and culture in the implementation of the sustainable development goals; the role of different value systems and cultural diversity as resources for conservation, climate justice action, bridging between science and other knowledge systems. Attention was given to issues of education, traditional knowledge, rights of indigenous peoples, peace building, gender, sustainability and economics, participation, civil mobilization. The Seminar concluded with a summary of findings among which it underlined the need for the continued dialogue on environment, culture and religion to address the implementation of the 2030 sustainable

development agenda. The Tehran Summary is included in this publication.

The publication gives a brief outline of the integrated approach and the inter-linkages of the different religions; of religion, culture and the environment; and of the environment and socioeconomic dimensions of sustainable development. It uses the five specific areas critical to success - people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership - that will guide the action plan for the 2030 agenda whose objective is to leave no one behind; reach those furthest behind first; to demonstrate that the sustainable development goals are central to all faiths and how interrelated they are. Under each specific area, a description of the issues is elaborated followed by an explanation as to how environmental sustainability can attempt to resolve the issues and how religion and culture interpret these issues, citing some examples of how some faith based bodies and non-governmental organizations have attempted to address them. It concludes with a set of recommendations on finding lasting solutions to these issues, to help free humanity from want and deprivation, and strengthen human well-being and duty of care.

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# Executive summary

Critical action is needed by the international community to address urgent and increasing environmental degradation, and related challenges of social and economic unsustainability. Religion and culture can significantly address climate change, biodiversity and ecosystem loss, pollution, deforestation, desertification and unsustainable land and water use, and other urgent issues identified in a shared vision by all nations in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**“Protecting our environment is an urgent moral imperative and a sacred duty for all people of faith and people of conscience.”**

– Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General.

Through integrating environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda, religious and cultural communities can also promote strong, inclusive, green, sustainable and transformative economies, based on circularity, sharing and collaboration, and alternative measures of growth and wellbeing. They can be instrumental in educating for more sustainable lifestyles and behaviours to achieve sustainable consumption and production, and in considering the impact of their actions on others. They can significantly contribute to ending extreme poverty, leaving no one behind when addressing multi-dimensional poverty and related challenges such as the rights of women, youth and minorities, and access for all to basic services. They can

promote innovative nature-based solutions, respect for traditional knowledge and cultural diversity, exercise environmental stewardship and duty of care, build an ethic of global and local citizenship, promote good governance, tolerance, and reconciliation, and build safe, inclusive and peaceful societies.

It has become more urgent than ever to promote and disseminate morals, values, behaviours and creative solutions conducive to attaining the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This universal agenda, and the emerging understanding of the points of religious agreement in environmental ethics, can be the corner stones for a common vision that enhances the role of religion and culture in achieving sustainability. Inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue can converge on a few insights, among them that of nature as sacred, and the rights of nature, both of which are shared by most organized religions and indigenous peoples, and many natural scientists.

Among the many positive actions – large and small – are the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, and the Paris Climate Change Agreement; the actions of faith based declarations and statements, especially in relation to climate change; the actions of indigenous cultural leaders in support of greater rights and respect of cultural diversity; and the 7 million voices that engaged in vision setting in the run up to the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. These have all come together in a historic year of 2015, and provide tremendous opportunities for building a global partnership for shifting the paradigm and addressing the crucial challenges of our era, both for humanity today as well as for future generations.



It is recommended that religious and cultural leaders and organizations should actively engage in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs in their communities, on their own footprints, and in cooperation with each other. In so doing, they should leverage the considerable financial, moral and ethical influence at their disposal. Inter-faith religious scholars should continue to engage in dialogue with the scientific community to progressively evolve religious thinking and scientific discovery. Governments should firmly embrace the notion of unity in diversity, and introduce new policies, laws and financial incentives, that lay the foundation for achieving the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Stronger

multistakeholder partnerships should be strengthened, binding the religious, cultural and secular communities for a collective effort to combine wisdom, and find lasting solutions for sustainable development. The United Nations System and in particular, the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation should continue their efforts to monitor, mentor, and motivate urgent action towards the shared vision.



## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT



The second International Seminar on Environment, Religion, and Culture, entitled: *“Environment, Culture and Religion – Promoting Intercultural Dialogue for Sustainable Development”*, is to be held on 23-24 April 2016, in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran. The 2016 Seminar intends to build on the first international seminar in 2001 by examining the nexus of environment, religion and culture, as a direct response to the *“Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”*, the declaration adopted by world leaders at the United Nations Summit in New York in September 2015. The 2030 Agenda incorporates 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are indivisible and integrated, and universally applicable.

**The main objectives of the April 2016 Seminar are to:**

- Identify, analyze and discuss the religious, ethical, cultural and environmental elements of the 2030 Agenda and mobilize the respective communities to join forces in the implementation of all the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Discuss and strengthen the means of implementation and endeavor to promote and enhance the global partnership for sustainable development.
- Facilitate inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue on finding lasting solutions to planetary issues and strengthen human wellbeing and duty of care.

It is informed by, among others, the 4 November 1998 General Assembly (GA) resolution 53/22, which proclaimed 2001 as the UN Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

The GA called on governments and the UN to plan and implement cultural, educational and social programmes to promote the concept of

dialogue among civilizations, including through conferences and seminars and disseminating information.

The GA resolution has over time, influenced international processes and action, for example, in 2000, UNEP published *The Earth and Faith*, a seminal effort at interconnecting these issues. The reported, published in collaboration with many partners, collected many examples of scripture and action by Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) towards environmental sustainability.

The resolution also became the backdrop for several international conferences on Dialogue among Civilizations, including: Vilnius, Lithuania (April 2001); Tokyo and Kyoto, (July-August 2001); and Tehran (18-20 June 2001), which adopted the Tehran Declaration on Environment, Religion and Culture. The Tehran Declaration committed participants, among other things, to promote education on the environmental content of religion and to promote environmentally responsible behaviour (see notes on this meeting in Annex 1). The International Conference on the *“Dialogue among Civilizations, Cultures and Peoples”* convened at UNESCO headquarters in Paris on 5 April 2005 called for the establishment of a Global Forum for the Promotion of Dialogue among Civilizations and Cultures. Subsequently, the International Conference on Environment, Peace, and the Dialogue among Civilizations and Cultures, which was held in Tehran in May 2005, highlighted, among others the need for a new shared vision of a common destiny to create a culture of universal peace and solidarity, and therefore an environment free from poverty, war, fear, violence and insecurity (Box 1).

The mutually reinforcing relation involving sustainable development, culture and

**Box 1. Extracts from the Communiqué of the International Conference on “Environment, Peace, and the Dialogue among Civilizations and Cultures (Tehran Communiqué ) – May 2005**

- ✓ the environment provides an important aspect of holistic dialogue that can contribute to understanding by, among other things, supporting a revitalized framework for effective multilateralism, confidence building and strategies for conflict avoidance, and effective decision-making.
- ✓ an inclusive approach based on dialogue can be a catalyst for cooperation to ensure that problems of shared resources can produce effective shared solutions.
- ✓ there is a need for the reconstitution of ethical and spiritual messages that are common to all faiths concerning the protection of the environment and the central message of peace, tolerance and harmony.

(Source: IISD. Dialogue among civilizations bulletin Volume 108, No. 1, Friday 13 May 2005.)

preservation of cultural heritage has also been underscored through the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, and the UNESCO cultural heritage conventions and recent declarations, such as the 2011 UNESCO initiative “Culture: A Bridge to Development”; the Hangzhou Declaration (“Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies”), which was adopted in May 2013; the 2013 Ministerial Declaration of the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); and two thematic debates on culture and sustainable development in the post-2015 agenda, which were held at the UN

General Assembly in New York in 2014. Additionally, the global campaign, “The Future We Want Includes Culture”, was led by NGOs from some 120 countries (#culture2015goal).

These and many other efforts have helped to increase awareness and understanding of the role of religion and culture in sustainable development in both developed and developing countries.

This Background Paper helps explore the interlinkages involving religion, culture and the environment, highlighting examples and insights, and providing diverse communities (religious/spiritual or secular in outlook) with a deeper understanding of their role and responsibility towards a shared vision of human destiny. It also aims to stimulate dialogue at the April 2016 Seminar. The paper provides a brief overview of the integrated approach and the interconnections of the different religions, of religion, culture and the environment, and of the environment and socio-economic dimensions of sustainable development. In subsequent five sections, the paper unpacks the SDGs, using the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development five (“Five P”) integrated and indivisible areas of focus that will guide action for sustainable development over the next 15 years: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. This is with the understanding that they are interrelated and interconnected, and that achieving one requires the achievement of the others. Each of the 5 P sections start with a brief factual description of the issue, explains how environmental sustainability can help achieve change in those issues, describes how religions and cultures view the issue, and then provides a few examples of how FBOs and NGOs have addressed the issues. The background paper concludes by and providing key recommendations. All sections of the paper suggest questions for discussion.



# AN INTEGRATED APPROACH



The continuing pace of natural resource degradation, more frequent and intense natural disasters, pollution, global health threats, and the prospect of irreversible climate change have convinced many that the survival of societies, cultures and of the planet itself is at risk. Billions of people continue to live in poverty and are denied a life of dignity. Inequalities in and among countries are rising, prompting significant political dialogue in both developed and developing countries. Unemployment, particularly for the youth, remains a major concern across many parts of the world. Other challenges, which include spiraling conflict, violent extremism, terrorism, humanitarian crises and forced displacement of people, threaten to reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades. Such social, economic and

political upheavals have also accelerated the trend of environmental degradation.

In September 2015, world leaders adopted the declaration on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets – a global action plan whose objective is to transform our world over the next 15 years. It builds on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aims to end extreme poverty, protect the planet and ensure peace and prosperity. It provides a universal, transformative, ambitious, shared and common vision for all humankind, all religions and cultures, and all creatures on earth. It is also intended to stimulate action in five areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet (Box 2).

## **BOX 2: Five critical areas of importance for humanity and the planet**

**People:** *We want to ensure that all human beings can fulfill their potential.*

**Planet:** *We must respect and safeguard our common home.*

**Prosperity:** *We want all human beings to enjoy the fruits of economic, social and technological progress and live productive and fulfilling lives.*

**Peace:** *All people yearn to live in peaceful and harmonious societies, free from fear and violence.*

**Partnership:** *We want to create an effective Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, which will embrace all countries and stakeholders.*

*If we realize our ambitions in these areas and across the full extent of the new Agenda, the lives of millions of human beings will be profoundly altered and our world will be transformed for the better.*

(Source: Preamble of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.)

**“Ours can be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty; just as we are the last to have a chance of saving the planet. ... The future of humanity and of our planet lies in our hands. ... We have mapped the road to sustainable development; it will be for all of us to ensure that the journey is irreversible.”**

— Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (paragraphs 45 and 48).

With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, world leaders envisage a world in which:

- every country enjoys sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all;
- consumption and production patterns and use of all natural resources – from air to land, from rivers, lakes and aquifers to oceans and seas – are sustainable;
- equity, democracy, good governance and the rule of law are exercised at national and international levels;
- extreme poverty and hunger are eradicated once and for all, and social development is fostered;
- development and the application of technology are climate-sensitive, respect biodiversity and are resilient;
- inter-cultural understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and an ethic of global citizenship and shared responsibility are fostered; and
- humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected.

The new agenda recognizes that the global action needed to go beyond social development priorities, such as education, health and food security. Only by integrating the social, economic, environmental and governance solutions could we hope to achieve a sustainable world in 15 years. Such an integrated approach can address not only the planetary issues, but also achieve all other goals of the 2030 Agenda. Environmental sustainability can reduce inequalities and promote prosperity for all while respecting the limits of our planetary resources. It can help to achieve these irreversibly by protecting and restoring ecosystem and their resources for present and future generations.<sup>1</sup>

Cultural and religious diversity can help society find long lasting solutions for today's challenges. Diversity is a force to be cherished in and of itself. Cultural diversity, religious diversity, and environmental diversity are all important parts of humanity's collective journey and the development of civilizations. A policy of cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life (UNESCO 2001, Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity).

Today's ethical journey has been shaped by a post-Enlightenment line of thinking that ignores in large measure any responsibility towards future generations. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs reflects a widening of the definition of prosperity and wellbeing. Although hotly debated on the floor of the UN General Assembly, notions such as "Mother Earth" proposed by Bolivia, or "eco-civilization" proposed by China, and the "Happiness Index" of Bhutan, are all signs of a global search for

new welfare paradigms for present and future generations. Despite such diversity of opinion, consensus was achieved on the need for humanity to live "in harmony with nature."

Today, nature is often reduced to an objectively perceived mechanism, to mere use, commoditized into marketable entities. But there is a growing academic and popular sense that such a mechanistic and singular approach to reality divests the

### **BOX 3: Points of religious agreement in environmental ethics**

- ✓ The natural world has value in itself and does not exist solely to serve human needs
- ✓ There is a significant continuity of being between human and non-human living beings, even though humans do have a distinctive role. This continuity can be felt and experienced.
- ✓ Non-human living beings are morally significant, in the eyes of God and/or in the cosmic order. They have their own unique relations to God, and their own places in the cosmic order.
- ✓ The dependence of human life on the natural world can and should be acknowledged in ritual and other expressions of appreciation and gratitude.
- ✓ Moral norms such as justice, compassion and reciprocity apply (in appropriate ways) both to human beings and to non-human beings. The wellbeing of humans and the wellbeing of non-human beings are inseparably connected.
- ✓ There are legitimate and illegitimate uses of nature.
- ✓ Greed and destructiveness are condemned. Restraint and protection are commended.
- ✓ Human beings are obliged to be aware and responsible in living in harmony with the natural world, and should follow the specific practices for this prescribed by their traditions.

(Source: Pedersen, K.P. 1998. "Environmental ethics in interreligious perspectives", in Twiss, B.S. and Grelle, B. eds. Explorations in Global Ethics: Comparative religious ethics and interreligious dialogue. Westview Press. Boulder CO, USA. And Oxford, UK.)

natural world of its fundamental sense of integrity. Religions and traditional cultures tell us another narrative. For example, to receive a seed and watch its germination is to enter into the universal order of things present in the manifestation of florescence without which we would not be here. To seek water is to be conscious of the intimate exchange of ocean and cloud. Thus the question today is how to achieve the convergence of science and religion wherein “objective analysis” and “subjective communion” are distinct yet complementary aspects of our experience and perception of the natural world.

**“We are here to counsel with each other. We must build spiritual and scientific bridges linking the nations of the world.”**

– Albert Einstein, 1947.

Over 80 per cent of people worldwide identify as members of a religious or spiritual community. Religious values and practices are deeply entwined in the fabric of daily lives, and the leaders of churches, mosques, Knesset, temples, and other religious communities play an important role in shaping attitudes, opinions, behaviors, and addressing societal challenges.

Today’s crises are occurring on many different fronts. The urgency to address these crises has led world leaders along a wide spectrum of belief systems, to an unprecedented agreement to achieve a shared vision for humanity by 2030, and a deep conviction that dialogue and cooperation among civilizations can lead to actions that generate long lasting solutions, and bring peoples and the



planet to a safe, equitable and sustainable place. The 2030 Agenda is a call to action that religious and cultural leaders at all levels (local, regional, national and global) need to embrace and act upon, both within their own communities by walking-the-talk, as well as in cooperation with each other. Religious leaders, representing 24 belief traditions from around the world and multi-faith organizations, declared in Bristol in September 2015, that they would do all they could to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>2</sup> In addition, religion scholars, social and physical scientists, laity, and the general public interested in nature, religion, or both, gathered in Florida in the United States in January 2016 to debate the “Gaia hypothesis” and the “greening of religion.”<sup>3</sup>

Religious traditions agree, to a greater or lesser extent, on the many important points of environmental ethics (Box 3). The universal understanding of a shared destiny and cooperative action as provided through the SDGs, and the emerging understanding of the points of religious agreement in environmental ethics, can be the corner stones for a common vision that draws religion, culture and environment together. Such a convergence is essential to address the urgent environmental, social and economic problems of today, and for fostering the notion of “duty of care” in all humankind.

Today’s environmental challenges, such as climate change, desertification, deforestation and pollution will not be solved only through a reliance on technology and science, even if they were equitably available to all communities. Culture and religion are important determinants of human behavior,

behavioral change and moral responsibility. To address today’s challenges in a holistic manner a new spirit of dialogue and understanding among scientists and religious scholars should be encouraged. A better understanding of the role of religion and science should not only be an academic discussion within ivory towers, because it has spiraling implications for the wider society.

Connection with intangible cultural heritage (ICH) can also facilitate not only in achieving sustainable development goals, but in involving the communities’ participation, through safeguarding their ICH, in the process and thus providing a multiplier effect and higher level of sustainable efforts.

**“I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address those problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy... and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation – and we scientists don’t know how to do that.”**

– Gus Speth, former UNDP Administrator, 2014.



**Suggested questions for discussion:**

1. How can religious and community leaders and FBOs be assisted to better understand the interconnectedness of the world, the relevance of their traditions and world views, and the concrete actions they can take to address the issues at hand?
2. How can religious community leaders and FBOs help redefine the relationship and place of Human kind with nature to help Man live in Harmony with nature?
3. Which areas of environmental sustainability need to be better known, developed, researched and integrated, that would enhance the ability of faith and cultural leaders to convince their communities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals?
4. How can religion and culture help humanity to understand and protect and secure all human rights, including the rights of future generations?



## PEOPLE:

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND AND ATTAIN  
SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS AND LIFESTYLES

Religion and culture, through the environment can significantly contribute to ending extreme poverty and leaving no one behind, and related challenges such as the rights of women, youth and minorities, and access to basic services (education, health, sanitation and hygiene, energy, water, and habitat). Such a convergence can also help all people achieve sustainable livelihoods and lifestyles, promote respect for traditional knowledge and cultural diversity, and exercise environmental stewardship and duty of care.

**“We envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity.”**

– Rio +20 outcome document – The Future We Want, 2012.

Updated estimates from the World Bank indicate that by the end of 2015 there were 702 million people living below the new inflation adjusted extreme poverty line of USD 1.90/day, down from 903 million in 2012.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the proportion of the population vulnerable to poverty and living on USD 1.25 to 4 per day had also risen sharply in many low- and middle-income economies by 2013.<sup>5</sup> It appears that economic globalization and liberalization have had very limited success in promoting equitable and sustainable development in many regions of the world.

Standard poverty measures concentrate on one variable – income. Although it has advantage of simplicity, it lacks reflection of different aspects of deprivation,<sup>6</sup> such as lack of food security and safety, education, health, sanitation, water, shelter, and security.<sup>7</sup> For instance, about 39 per cent of the population of a least developing country was living on USD 1.25 or less a day in 2005. However, the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative’s Multidimensional Poverty Index that adds social factors measured that almost 90 per cent of the population live in poverty.<sup>8</sup>

Environmental degradation impacts poor and marginalized people differently. Areas of poverty in rich countries, and in general in low-income nations, are more vulnerable to the impacts of extreme weather, natural disasters, pollution and climate change.

Technological advancements in the past century have significantly increased world food production, primarily through increased irrigation, fertilizer use and cropland expansion. Unfortunately, such gains have also resulted in environmental degradation and marginalization of smallholders.

In 2008, 24 per cent of the global land area was estimated as degraded,<sup>9</sup> and 40 per cent of the world’s agricultural land<sup>10</sup> was undergoing serious degradation and loss of biodiversity. For example, pollinator services although estimated to provide a value of USD 353.6 billion to agriculture annually, are severely threatened due to habitat loss and pesticide use.<sup>11</sup> Pesticide toxicity has contributed to poisoning up to five million agricultural workers per year,<sup>12</sup> and there is emerging evidence linking it to child stunting.<sup>13</sup>

Smallholder food producers, including women, have unequal access and rights to natural resources and land, lack credit

and safe technologies, do not benefit from inefficient agricultural subsidies, and have lost access to land as a result of large scale purchases.<sup>14</sup> Since 2001, a total of 227 million hectares of land in the world (an area the size of Western Europe) has been sold or leased mainly to international investors, the trend intensifying after the 2008 food crisis. Much of it is being left unused.<sup>15</sup>

Today, the world produces enough food to feed all of its population. Yet around 840 million people go hungry and two billion are considered malnourished.<sup>16</sup> About one third of all food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted around 1.3 billion tonnes every year.<sup>17</sup> Even if just one-fourth of this could be saved, it would be enough to feed the hungry in the world.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, some 34 per cent of the global adult population is estimated to be overweight or obese with associated obesity-related health conditions rising rapidly.<sup>19</sup> The number of overweight or obese adults living in the developing countries tripled from 250 million in 1980 to 904 million in 2008.<sup>20</sup> Between now and 2050, an increase in global population, from 7.2 billion to over 9 billion<sup>21</sup> means that global food production will need to increase by 60 per cent,<sup>22</sup> which would place considerable stress on the environment. This growth therefore must be accompanied by changes in the values and preferences of consumers towards sustainable consumption.

Investing in environmentally and culturally sound technologies and practices can lift the poor out of poverty and hunger, and ensure healthy ecosystems for agricultural production. Decentralized sources of electricity based on locally available resources can produce affordable renewable energy that is within the direct control of local communities, allows culturally sensitive

availability of energy for running basic services (water, sanitation, health, education), and provides many different types of employment (blue collar and white) that help to build viable local economies and societies. Phasing out distorting subsidies and a rebalancing of policies towards nature-based and labor-intensive jobs help to enhance opportunities for more diverse and decent employment for the poor.

Women are a fundamental force for poverty alleviation, environmental restoration, and the promotion of a caring society. Protection of the rights of women, girls, minorities and youths can be achieved through promoting environmentally sustainable practices such as clean and renewable energy for cooking and sanitation, management and restoration of watersheds and other natural resources; protection and investment in traditional knowledge, skills and innovations, securing land tenure and other rights, and ensuring equitable governance systems that promote diversity and gender sensitivity.

**“Support should be provided to mitigation and adaptation projects proposed and implemented by Indigenous Peoples, based on our traditional knowledge and cosmovisions that look beyond carbon benefits and market-based approaches.”**

– Statement of International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change, to UNFCCC COP 21 2015.

Indigenous and traditional leaders have been vocal in defending their rights and

pointing out the injustice of climate change and other environmental disasters impact on the poor. Noting that not all Indigenous Peoples are poor, they have called for protection of indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation in their territories from extractive industries, dams, extensive biofuel crops, new coal-mines, geothermal geothermal and fracking that harm Indigenous Peoples. They have called against violence, murder, criminalization and repression of indigenous peoples' leaders.<sup>23</sup>

Some government policies aim to sedentarize, relocate or urbanize remote and marginal communities as a response to a perception that they are more vulnerable. However, these policies have brought about greater levels of poverty, disruption to social cohesion as well as disruption to peoples' food and nutrition systems, due to lack of access to forests, lands and to traditional income-generating activities. Many call upon development planners and policymakers to take into account multiculturalism, to capture the heterogeneous realities of indigenous and local peoples, in order to aim at national integration, instead of assimilation.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, with today's technologies in communications, infrastructure and transport, there is no reason why indigenous and local communities should be considered "marginalized" just because of the location they inhabit or the mobility they exercise that sustains their livelihoods in an environmentally sound manner.

**“Faith leaders are well placed to build bridges of understanding and cooperation. They provide vital relief, health and education to**

**their communities, and ensure the inclusion of otherwise excluded and neglected groups and communities”**

– Ban Ki Moon, 2015.

All religions recognize in one way or the other that poverty, exclusion and discrimination are social, humanitarian, and security issues. The primary message of religions, especially Abrahamic religions, is a call for improvement and integration of the poor into society and elimination of all obstacles and inequalities for full individual development. This includes the right to education and participation in society. Religious communities, therefore, should remember their responsibilities to respond to the challenges of inequality in all its manifestation and poverty of any kind for secure and sustainable societies.

Religious principles also encourage caregiving and donation to the poor and the needy as an essential obligation of those who possess a minimum level of wealth. Buddhism teaches one to be selfless, by avoiding greed, anger and selfishness. It encourages Buddhists to not only donate for religious support maintenance but also sacrifice necessary things to needy people. The Islamic Zakat enjoins people to give some of their money or asset to other needy people. Hinduism teaches that all creatures are equal, whether they be human, insect or animal. Hindus believe that all people share a link and it is wrong to be prejudiced against someone's background. The Jesuits provide education to 175 million refugees and internally displaced people, as well as to millions of poor people worldwide.

Many FBOs that partner with the UN and others, aim to provide religiously and

culturally sensitive food to those in need. The Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims and the Church of Uganda are training people in faith-based forms of climate-smart, sustainable agriculture such as Farming God's Way (Christian) and Islamic Farming (Muslim). Some FBOs have emphasized the strategic nature of gender equality for social development and environmental sustainability. Major international FBOs such as the Islamic Relief Worldwide for instance, have reported focusing 80-90 per cent of their microfinance work on women's rights and economic empowerment projects.<sup>25</sup>

The Grameen Foundation is enhancing access to financing for agriculture and environmental activities through mobile phone technologies that can reach the most marginalized populations.<sup>26</sup> The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement of Sri Lanka provides comprehensive development and conflict resolution programs based on Buddhist and Gandhian principles. It is the largest indigenous organization working in reconstruction from the tsunami caused by the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake, and is launching initiatives to help poor people, through micro-finance, micro-credit and livelihoods support programs.

FBOs also play a significant role in the health sector of developing countries, often bridging service delivery in partnership with government health structures and influencing positive behaviours within communities, in particular in protecting the dignity of the needy. As such therefore, they are well placed to also address health issues emanating from environmental factors, such as chemical pollution, overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and management of waste. Many FBOs are also active in promoting gender equality, including violence against women and girls, unpaid work (including care), the gender wage gap, inequity in access to and control

over all kinds of resources, and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

The debates leading to the SDGs focused on promoting both quantity and quality education. It was recognized that curricula need to be adapted towards greater understanding of sustainability, and the impacts that one's individual behaviour has on the rest of humanity. By the same token, it is also important to adapt curricula to a greater awareness of religious and cultural diversity, of traditional and indigenous knowledge, and of the value of inter-cultural dialogue. Religious and local community leaders have a significant role in developing new curricula that is relevant for environmental sustainability, and promoting sustainable consumption and lifestyles everywhere. For example, they can educate rural youth about the values of environmental sustainability and taking pride in being stewards of the land; ensure great equitable access to quality education for girls, women, and minorities; and educate city dwellers about access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons, disabled, and for protection of culture and heritage.

### **Suggested questions for discussion:**

- How can religious, cultural leaders and FBOs contribute to reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized to resolve some key environmental concerns for sustainable development?
- How can religious and cultural leaders enhance the voice of women in support of sustainable development and similar social issues?
- What can be the possible role of indigenous knowledge in improving micro-finance and local economies?



# PLANET:

RESPECT AND SAFEGUARD  
OUR COMMON HOME

Religion and culture through environmental sustainability can significantly address climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, desertification and unsustainable land and water use, by fostering a fundamental change in attitude of the majority of people, not just a minority. They can do so through their own institutions and communities, and through cooperation with other cultures.

**“We need to see, with the eyes of faith ... the link between the natural environment and the dignity of the human person.”**

– Pope Francis, 2015.

Critical action is needed by the international community to address urgent problems such as climate change and other signs of natural degradation. The full extent of humanity's over-use of its planetary resources goes well beyond those in the popular press. For example, UNEP has estimated that the world is using more sand and gravel, than nature is producing.<sup>27</sup> Global consumption of cement is anticipated to increase by 4 per cent a year (3.5 bn tonnes in 2013) – and along with it comes contamination from heavy metals associated with its production. Consumption of meat and eggs has risen exponentially in the past three decades, concurrently with the rising wealth of the middle class, according to FAO statistics.<sup>28</sup> This has fueled greater intensification of the livestock industry, resulting in many negative costs, such as nutrient and pesticide accumulation, antibiotic resistance, and zoonosis such

as mad cow disease. It has also driven traditional pastoralists, ranchers and others who can produce more sustainable but more costly livestock out of business. UNEP estimates that rare earth minerals (at least those that can be extracted at relatively economical costs) are being used at very high rates. Already the renewable energy industry is feeling the pinch of supply. At least 40 per cent of all violent conflicts in the last 60 years have been linked to natural resources.<sup>29</sup>

According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, one third of the world's ecosystems had already seen some form of degradation in 2000. A globally dwindling supply of resources cannot be expected to meet the growing demand of consumption by a rising population. The way forward is well known:

- achieve reasonable consumption patterns (neither famine, malnutrition nor obesity),
- achieve culturally sensitive family planning, and
- invest in repairing and restoring degraded resources.

All of these however are challenging since they entail behavioural change by consumers, revitalized action by community leaders for the good of all not just their own communities, and redirecting of production practices and economic capital by businesses towards global sustainability. Religious and cultural leaders have an important role to play in fostering a new ethic of stewardship and duty of care that can overcome the inertia that we face in stimulating this behavioural change.



A clean and sustainable future for everyone ultimately rests on a fundamental shift in the understanding of how we value the environment and each other. One of the points of agreement of major religions and majority of indigenous communities is that the natural world has value in itself and does not exist solely to serve human needs. The right to a healthy environment is now recognized in over 90 national constitutions and regional instruments. Many subnational governments also recognize such rights in the absence of their lack of recognition through a national constitution. About two thirds of the constitutional rights refer to healthy clean, safe, and wholesome environments. Some States have included more detailed rights, such as rights to receive information and to participate in decision-making about environmental matters.<sup>30</sup>

**“We join together from many faiths and walks of life, reflecting humanity’s shared yearning for peace, happiness, prosperity, justice, and environmental sustainability. We have considered the overwhelming scientific evidence regarding human-induced climate change, the loss of biodiversity, and the vulnerabilities of the poor to economic, social, and environmental shocks.”**

– Pontifical Academies of Sciences and Social Sciences Declaration, April 2015.

The value of indigenous knowledge and practices for environmental sustainability has been known and catalogued now for at least one century. Through the Convention of Biological Diversity it has been provided the beginnings of modern legal protection. The intellectual property right of indigenous peoples is now protected, and has practical implications for growth in local nature-based industries. Tapping into creative cultural assets, traditional know-how, and well-honed skills, through respectful relationships built with indigenous peoples and local communities can effectively contribute to finding imaginative and more effective development outcomes and addressing global challenges, such as the adverse impacts of climate change and unsustainable tourism.<sup>31</sup> When cultural heritage becomes part of overall growth and development strategies, it has proven to contribute to the revitalization of national economies, generate green employment, stimulate local development and foster creativity in nature-based solutions.

The tradition of seeking forgiveness before a hunt by some Native American groups, and the protection of sacred ecological sites from degradation and destruction, are a manifestation of locally adapted interlinkage between religion, culture and environment. Indeed, today the notion of “nature as sacred” (see Box 4) seems to be an insight shared by most organized religions, many indigenous peoples, and many natural scientists, all of whom speak of “awe and reverence before the universe”, and that what is considered sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respected.<sup>32</sup>

The SDGs recognize the importance of citizen science – the role of communities and cultures in enhancing knowledge for sustainability.

#### **BOX 4. Role of sacred spaces, and traditional knowledge**

In East Africa, the Gabra, Turkana and Boran pastoralists ritually protect trees in sacred groves and shrines, and prohibit cutting of valuable mature species such as *Acacia tortilis*. In most cases, such trees are protected from being harvested, although the Kikuyu of southern Mount Kenya will allow cuttings to be taken from sacred trees to propagate other sacred trees. (Source: Niamir, M. 1990. Herders' decision-making in natural resource management in arid and semi-arid Africa. Community Forestry Note 4, FAO, Rome).

The Durban Parks Department's Silverglen Nature Reserve is home to Umlaas Nursery, South Africa's first and largest medicinal plant nursery, which grows thousands of specimens of 350 plant species commonly used for traditional medicine. The nursery's success depends on the knowledge of Zulu herbalists—heirs to a mystic oral tradition—who identified the important plants disappearing from the wild and explained their uses. Today, one of these traditional herbalists has developed his own nursery with the help of a grateful Silverglen team. One of his children is learning nursery management and ethnobotany. (Source: Mbanefo 1992: 11, 12. , quoted in Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*, Routledge, 2008, 243.)

Today's data revolution that allows crowd sourcing, big data, and open/transparent access to information through the internet is proving to be an important asset for an inclusive and equitable development.

Many of the insights from the different religions has been captured in UNEP's publication *The Earth and Faith*. The Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam look upon the natural world as a creation in which the universe is a manifestation of God's self-expression, a revelation to be engaged. In the Hymn of Praise of Saint Francis, the natural world is a community of beings to be entered. It has been proposed that for St. Francis the natural world was a gospel, i.e., the proclamation of essential truth and a guidance as to how to live the finite faithfully. Islam's teachings emphasize the duty of humans as stewards of the Earth that God created in perfect balance and with a role for every living creature. Several Hadiths (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) refer directly to

nature, including: "If you have a sapling, if you have the time, be certain to plant it, even if Doomsday starts to break forth". (Musnad, 183-184, 191, III).

The Hindu Hymn to the Earth, "The Prithvi Sukta, the 12th chapter of the Artharva Veda, recognizes the intimacy of earth nurturance and human cultivation. Hindus are enjoined to protect animals and to respect nature and the river by not contaminating it with sewage or domestic wash water. Buddhism sees in the composite nature of phenomena, the insight of transience and the instance of enlightened awareness – an awareness of the value of life by not destroying human, animals and plants. Confucian thought engages the realities of the natural world in a manner to cultivate the inner spontaneities of the human mind and heart, the Sage Personality, and the ability of those who possess absolute sincerity.<sup>33</sup> Taoism apprehends the actualities of nature as experienced emergence whose origin is beyond articulation; it holds that "Man [The

human] follows the ways of the Earth. The Earth follows the ways of Heaven. Heaven follow the ways of Tao. Tao follow its own ways [suchness-Spontaneity].<sup>34</sup>

**“One of the worse forms of inequity in development has been the impact of climate change on coastal and small island states. Prosperity for some has and will translate into death and destruction for others. Climate change presents a spiritual challenge and raises profound ethical and moral questions.”**

Philippines CVF Chair Closing 2 Statement at the UN FCCC COP 21, 2015.

Faith-based ecumenical platforms, notably the World Council of Churches, have hosted consultations since the 1970s linking climate change to global justice. More recently, many faiths and denominations have called on governments to take action at the Paris climate meeting, along with pledging climate action themselves (Annex 2). Indigenous peoples stated at UNFCCC COP 21 that to truly heal Mother Earth and ensure our survival, we must recognize that the entire natural system is one life system rather than fragmented parts.<sup>35</sup> Muslim leaders furthermore called on the people of all nations and their leaders to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, and to commit themselves to 100 per cent renewable energy and/or a zero emissions strategy as early as possible. They specifically called on richer nations

and oil-producing states to lead the way in phasing out their greenhouse gas emissions as early as possible and no later than the middle of the century.

Although coming from different perspectives, these statements have resulted in a confluence of guidance to address the planetary crisis. “Going green” is increasingly associated with spiritual connectivity between creatures and humans. This in turn has resulted in a new understanding that religious communities must work together, and an affirmation of the role of religion in sustainable development and the need for preserving cultural diversity.

**“The people of the world cannot continue to ignore Aboriginal Indigenous Peoples, the natural system of life, the natural law and our connection with All Life.”**

– Statement of Indigenous Elders And Medicine Peoples Council Statement United Nations Convention on Climate Change COP21 Paris, France 2015.

According to many religious and cultural perspectives, human beings must use resources wisely, no matter how rich and immense these resources may seem. Resources must be preserved and protected from pollution, waste, and over-exploitation in order to pass it on in good shape to the next generation. The proper management of these resources entails: maintaining an overall balance with the surrounding environment; ensuring the survival of all species; and using only the amount needed, avoiding waste and the depletion of resources. For example, an important Islamic principle is the prohibition concerning

thoughtless consumption, wastefulness, and extravagance. Wastefulness is not only the thoughtless consumption of natural resources, it is at the same time disrespectful towards God, the Creator and Owner of all the bounties. The Qur'an, therefore, commands Muslims to eat and drink, but waste not by excess, for God loves not the wasters (The Qur'an, 7:31) so that we become accustomed to avoiding wastefulness and extravagance in our daily consumption of food and drink, or even the use of too much water for ablutions.<sup>36</sup>

Religious leaders are among the early community organizers who initiated collective efforts on forest conservation, long before the role of forests in climate change mitigation was acknowledged. The principles of forest conservation are supported in religious beliefs, leading to some of today's notable community forestry practices. In Indonesia, the Darul Ulum Muslim boarding school mobilized its students to practice the *hingga*, the Islamic system of natural resource conservation that has been practiced for over 1400 years; teachers, students, and even neighboring community members stepped up to plant trees, stop pollution, and designate protected areas of rivers.<sup>37</sup>

**“Ecological awareness will arise only when we combine our rational knowledge with an intuition for the nonlinear nature of our environment. Such intuitive wisdom is characteristic of traditional, non-literate cultures, especially of American Indian cultures,**

**in which life was organized around a highly refined awareness of the environment”**

— Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point*, 1989.

Christian conservation FBOs active in the USA, show a remarkable unanimity in how they approach the issue. Many believe that environmental problems are a result of alienation of human beings from God and creation. Their solutions may address pure preservation work (for example, protection of Appalachian Mountains from strip mining), but in most cases, conservation actions are also linked to the preservation of local communities and cultures.<sup>38</sup> The historical background of some environmental movements has also been in the spiritual. Greenpeace, according to its website, was founded in a church basement inspired by the Quaker tradition of “bearing witness”.

Many FBOs and NGOs have been engaged in ecological restoration, afforestation and combating land and water degradation, while tying these actions to local livelihoods and equity issues. Many FBOs have pledged to consult and cooperate in good faith with indigenous peoples and local communities in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources. Buddhist monks actively patrol their neighboring areas to prevent the killing of snow leopards; the monks also teach the local people that killing the majestic creatures is wrong.<sup>39</sup> The Catholic Church in Kenya and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania are planting trees to restore lost forest cover.<sup>40</sup>

In recent years many FBOs are turning towards greening their own operations and footprint. For example, Muslims in Indonesia are raising awareness among the annual 280,000 Indonesian pilgrims to Mecca to transform the Hajj into a green pilgrimage.<sup>41</sup> In 2009, in a meeting at Windsor Castle, the 'Green Pilgrimage Network' was created where religious actors committed themselves to working collaboratively to realize the 'greening' of pilgrimage experiences. Cities such as Jerusalem and Mecca are already involved.

The "All Dulles Area Muslim Society Center" (ADAMS) serves more than 5,000 families in Washington, DC., and has made a goal of reducing its carbon footprint, created special parking spaces to encourage carpooling, and installed energy-efficient and solar-powered lights.<sup>42</sup> The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, is an internationally recognized body articulating the Islamic position on environmental protection. Plum village is a Buddhism community of practice that was established by the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Among its many activities, the way Plum village practices promotes a Car Free Day to reduce energy consumption and emission of carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide.<sup>43</sup>

### **Suggested questions for discussion:**

- How can FBOs and NGOs support the halt to environmental degradation, protect Mother Earth, and restore its value both physically and spiritually in the eyes of all peoples, without falling into a "green-wash" trap?
- How much has the consideration that nature is sacred and has a right of its own influenced the actions of business community (through bioethics), FBOs and local communities? How can a legal or constitutional recognition of this right help promote environmental sustainability?
- What evidence is there to show that cultural creativity, when supported and nourished, can find long-lasting solutions to our planetary crises?
- Some environmental challenges are unique to our times resulting from consumption patterns of our times and/or the wrong interaction of the modern human with the nature e.g. black zones in oceans. How can FBOs or religious leaders mobilize people and industries to take responsible action?



## **PROSPERITY:**

RESPECT TRANSFORM SOCIETIES TO HAVE SUSTAINED,  
INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH,  
AND SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES



**“Earth provides enough to satisfy everyone’s need, but not everyone’s greed.”**

– Mahatma Gandhi.

Religion and culture, through environmental sustainability, can promote strong, inclusive and transformative economies where all people have access to decent employment, social and legal protection, financial services, and sustainably produced consumables. They can be instrumental in promoting more sustainable lifestyles and behaviours and in considering the impact of their actions on others.

The human community has alienated itself from the earth community. In the last 200 years economy’s and technology’s aim has been to subjugate nature, rather than draw from it. We have reached the extreme of our arrogance where we believe that our innovative technologies can solve any problem, and that nature has a limitless capacity to supply materials and withstand abuse. Rather than internalizing the true environmental impact of the race for growth, we have passed this difficult choice on to future generations. We have forgotten the “common-sense” and compassion for Creation that drove humanity in the past. A major consequence of this moral shift in attitude has been the many negative environmental externalities we see today – unintended but also un-mitigated consequences. The planetary crisis impels us now to shift from subjugation of nature towards a cultivation of nature - a new human adaptation to the natural world.

The economic model has also had negative social externalities, of which the most striking is that wealth inequality within and between countries continues to escalate, despite the overall increase in world GDP and other

measures of national prosperity. In 2014, OXFAM estimated that 8 per cent of the world’s population earned half the world’s income,<sup>44</sup> but recently in January 2016, it quoted Credit Suisse that the richest 1 per cent have accumulated more wealth than the rest of the world put together.<sup>45</sup> More than two thirds of the world’s people live in countries where income disparities have risen since 1980.<sup>46</sup>

The environmental facets to inequality include: differential access to and stewardship of natural resources, access and affordability of basic services such as clean water, differential exposure to hazards and vulnerability to climate change, and lack of adequate and timely access to information related to the environment. Over 1.3 billion people worldwide are energy-poor – that is, they do not have access to electricity. The WWF Living Planet Index also tells us that ecosystem degradation is affecting the tropics more than the temperate zones – highlighting the global impact of unsustainable consumption and production patterns.

**“High inequalities have impeded sustainable development and have no place in a world where a decent and secure wellbeing should be a prerogative of all citizens.”**

– UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, 2015.

Evidence suggests that inequality impedes long-term growth; is associated with poorer health outcomes; generates political instability; contributes to higher rates of violence; erodes social cohesion; and undermines the capacity for the collective decision-making necessary for effective reform.<sup>47</sup>

About 600 million new jobs need to be generated globally over the next 10 years (ILO 2012). A failure to create jobs that are green, meaningful, decent, culturally appropriate, and respect a person's self-worth, could harm the ever-more fragile economic, ecological and social stability of many countries. Climate change may also force people to compete for limited jobs or re-skill. For example, more than half of the world's population resides in low-lying coastal zones under threat from sea level rise, which could lead to more migration and the need to develop new livelihoods.

The "take-make-dispose" paradigm is the dominant economic model today predicated on the false notion of limitless resources. Increasing availability of sustainable technology provides the beginnings of a paradigm shift. The science of industrial ecology shows that improvements in resource efficiency of up to 80 per cent are possible in many sectors of the economy.<sup>48</sup> Ecological restoration makes sense not just for preserving the environment but also for saving money. Notions of an economy of permanence, or a circular economy are now widely being discussed.<sup>49</sup> An Inclusive Green Economy is based on sharing, circularity, collaboration, solidarity, resilience, opportunity, and interdependence.

**“Today, 65 countries have embarked on green economy and related strategies.”**

– UNEP's Summary Narrative for Leaders, Pathways to Inclusive Green Economies, 2016.

Countries at all levels of development are moving towards greener economies. For example employment in environmental goods and services in the United States

in 2010 was 3.1 million (2.4 per cent) and growing. In Brazil, 2.9 million green jobs (6.6 per cent of formal employment) were recorded in 2010 in sectors aimed at reducing environmental harm. Over a million new jobs have been created through China's forestry programmes that guarantee paid work for the restoration of nature.<sup>50</sup> Thailand's Sufficiency Economy inspired by Buddhism which stresses the middle path way of living; 'sufficiency' means moderation, reasonableness, and the need for self-immunity to protect from impacts arising from internal and external change.

The SDGs recognize that securing tenure and ownership of land, property and resources is a major step towards empowering local communities. It is also a fundamental ingredient for promoting an ethic of stewardship and duty of care of natural resources. There are many forms of tenure – from private/individual, to common property, and those held in trust by public entities. Pastoralists and forest dwellers for example, have perfected centuries-old common property tenure systems adapted to their natural world based on the universal value of reciprocity rather than monetary exchange. In today's models of economic development based on either private or public property, such collectivism has little room. Consequently, societies are dismantled, cultures are lost, and ecosystems deteriorate. Recognizing and promoting secure tenure of land and natural resources by indigenous peoples and local communities can help reverse these trends.

The global fiscal crisis of 2008 has led many to understand that the global economy should be considered as another global public good, and that a new economic paradigm will be needed to



achieve the SDGs. Already work is underway to achieve one of its targets – that of finding new and alternative measures of prosperity that go beyond the GDP. For example, since 1971, Bhutan has rejected GDP as the only way to measure progress. In its place, it has championed a new approach to development, which measures prosperity through formal principles of gross national happiness (GNH) and the spiritual, physical, social and environmental health of its citizens and natural environment. More examples can be found in the Inclusive Wealth Index developed by UNEP.<sup>51</sup>

The need for a shift in the dominant economic model is recognized by some religions. Pope Francis called for a more balanced levels of production, a better distribution of wealth, concern for the environment and for future generations (Box 5). Buddhism teaches people to appreciate what they have, to value everyone's skills, and to ensure that all

people can access to decent employment. Buddhism promotes the principles of self-reliance, of moderation and of the middle path.

Several religious scholars and philosophers are actively engaged in pondering the role of the ethical, the moral and the sacred, in such an economic model. In early Greek philosophy, ethics was the rational search for absolute and immutable principles to inform human social action and personal behaviour. However, today, it is recognized that ethics are socially and culturally informed and influenced, open to revision and reevaluation and change. Morality primarily describes behaviour. The moral man or woman is perceived as one engaged in actions guided by principles, a moral code. Beyond the imperatives of the ethical [in engaged stewardship] and of the moral [in the strivings for social justice], there is the sacred, the impulse toward the transcendent. The sacred is

### **BOX 5. Finance overwhelms the real economy**

The lessons of the global financial crisis have not been assimilated, and we are learning all too slowly the lessons of environmental degradation. Some circles maintain that current economics and technology will solve all environmental problems, and argue, in popular and non-technical terms, that the problems of global hunger and poverty will be resolved simply by market growth. They are less concerned with certain economic theories, which today scarcely anybody cares to defend, than with their actual operation in the functioning of the economy. They may not affirm such theories with words, but nonetheless support them with their deeds by showing no interest in more balanced levels of production, a better distribution of wealth, concern for the environment and for future generations. Their behaviour shows that for them, maximizing profits is enough.

(Source: The human roots of the ecological crisis. Laudat'o Si. Section 109.)



an ultimate term of reference for human comprehension and the ground of meaning and purpose for human endeavor. These three modes of human response are as relevant to changing paradigms, as they are to bridging religion and science. Religious and cultural leaders have an important role to play in bringing these three responses to converge on practical behavioural change towards sustainability, such as an ethic of sufficiency and moderation, of resource efficiency, and a commitment to producing and using long-lasting or biodegradable consumables.

**“The deep psychic change needed to withdraw us from the fascination of the industrial world, and the deceptive gifts that it gives us, is too difficult for simply the avoidance of its difficulties or the attractions of its benefits. Eventually only our sense of the sacred will save us.”**

– Thomas Berry, 2003.

Almost all religions contain values and ethical considerations, like the need for equity and justice and for empathy toward those who suffer today and are impacted tomorrow. There is a rich theme in Christian and Jewish writing using equity as a quality of divine governance. For example, Leviticus 19:15 (New International Version) says: "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly".

Socioeconomic equity and justice enjoy paramount importance in Islam. There are frequent references in the Qur'an to justice, fairness, truth, piety, as well as economic and social equality. The Prophet Muhammad repeatedly empathized the importance of justice and frequently stated that all are equal before Allah and His divine laws on earth, whatever their race, color, sex, creed, and social, economic, or political status. In Islam, all are equal in the eyes of God. Furthermore, Islam provides for specific measures in which socioeconomic equity and justice are to be ensured and safeguarded.<sup>52</sup>

At the UN Faiths Meeting in Bristol in September 2015, religious leaders pledged far reaching practical action over the next 10 years. This includes, to develop micro credit schemes for the poor, increase access to education, plant trees, invest in clean energy and promote a green pilgrimage. Many FBOs are already heeding such advice or already taking action. For example, the World Hindu Economic Forum (WHEF) is a nonprofit and independent international organization that seeks to bring together financially successful elements within the Hindu Society such as traders, entrepreneurs, bankers, technocrats,

investors, industrialists, businessmen, professionals, along with economists and thinkers, so that each group can share their business knowledge, experience, expertise and resources with their fellow brethren.

The financial crisis of 2008 has reopened fervent debates about the financial sector and banking system, which deeply criticize speculative and unethical practices. Ethical banking or socially responsible investment guided by ethical, social and environmental criteria, have been developing for some years, but are recently becoming more and more mainstream. New forms of finance, such as microcredit schemes and insurance schemes are increasingly incorporating environmental concerns. The financial crisis also boosted Muslim confidence in propagating the benefits of Islamic systems, as these appeared to have remained immune to this crisis. The two root causes of this crisis have been identified as excessive credit and excessive speculation, both of which prohibited by Islam.<sup>53</sup>

Enlightened CEOs are finding ways to meet their profit goals through long term investing, cooperative risk sharing, and public-private enterprises. The multiform crisis our planet is experiencing has created an opportunity for business schools to rethink their role in society and their responsibility toward future generations, by challenging their dominant teaching paradigm, by redefining the models they transfer and by redesigning their curriculum, and developing the corps of responsible leaders who are required for the society of tomorrow. For example, the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility targets the practices of FBOs and teaches/helps them to become more socially and environmentally responsible.<sup>54</sup>

### **Suggested questions for discussion**

- How can FBOs and NGOs contribute to a sustainable economy, prosperity for all, and long-lasting sustainable solutions?
- How can religious and cultural leaders work towards an inclusive green economy, and sustainable consumption and production patterns? What changes in ethical, moral and sacred values need to accompany such a shift?
- How can religion and cultural leaders raise awareness on rising inequality, and offer solutions towards more equitable access to sustainable development?



## PEACE:

LIVE IN PEACEFUL, DIVERSE, HARMONIOUS SOCIETIES, FREE FROM FEAR AND VIOLENCE



**“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”**

The founding statement of UNESCO Charter, 1945.

Faith and culture through environmental sustainability can directly promote good governance, reconciliation, peace building, safe, inclusive and peaceful societies, and strong institutions.

Despite the advances in technology and mass communication, mass travel, the intermingling of races, the ever-growing reduction of the mysteries of our world, a depressing fact of our time is that misunderstandings, prejudices, and stereotypes among members of different faiths, religions, and cultures still endure. Moreover, this causes regional and globalized tensions that trigger war, extremism, fundamentalism, and terrorism,

all of which have consequences for environmental degradation and slow down or even reverse the pace of sustainable development.

Today, UNESCO’s message has never been more important. We must create holistic policies that are capable of addressing the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development. This new thinking on sustainable development reaffirms the founding principles of the Organization and enhances its role. In a globalized world with interconnected societies, intercultural dialogue is vital if we are to live together while acknowledging our diversity. In an uncertain world, the future of nations depends not only on their economic capital or natural resources, but on their collective ability to understand and anticipate changes in the environment - through education, scientific research and the sharing of knowledge. In a connected world - with the emergence of the creative economy and knowledge societies,

along with the dominance of the Internet, the full participation of everyone in the new global public space is a prerequisite for peace and development.

**“There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.”**

— Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2015.

According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) there were 19.5 million refugees worldwide at the end of 2014. The number of people assisted or protected by UNHCR had reached a record high of 46.7 million people in 2015. Refugees are a diaspora of peoples outside of society, disconnected from the rest of the world and victimized by human traffickers. The root causes of such dislocation are diverse – sea level rise, drought, and other extreme events that uproot people from their social, environmental and economic fabric of life; policies that favor urban

and industrial growth rather than rural development that inadvertently create a “pull” for rural migrants to cities; increasing poverty and inequality within and between nations; wars, terrorism and other forms of conflict; and the ambiguity of the role of religion during times of conflict and therefore its potential as a destabilizing force.

Dislocation tears the fabric of family and society. Many countries and peoples struggle to receive the massive influx of refugees. Creating open, inclusive, and willing integration into the new society that helps rebuild the fabric of family and community is essential and urgent. Investing in environmental sustainability can help, for example, by providing energy and water efficient housing, by providing sustainable education curricula and services that integrate children into the society rather than keep them in isolation. Religious and cultural leaders have a significant role to play in accelerating this integration, recognizing that human nature is intrinsically benevolent (Box 6).

**BOX 6. Human nature is intrinsically benevolent**

Mencius, a disciple of Confucius, is best known for his view that human nature is intrinsically benevolent. Its ingredients are ‘benevolent knowledge’ and ‘benevolent ability’ in Mencius’ terms. They are imbedded in us the time when we were born. Mencius used the example of witnessing a child falling down a well. He said, “If people witness a child about to fall down a well, they would experience a feeling of fear and sorrow instantaneously without an exception. This feeling is generated not because they want to gain friendship with the child’s parents, nor because they look for the praise of their neighbors and friends, nor because they don’t like to hear the child’s scream of seeking help.” Mencius asserted that it’s because all people have a mind that cannot stand to see others suffer.

(Source: Mencius’ Teachings, 2010.)

**“Government must not only treat people with concern and respect, but with equal concern and respect. It must not distribute goods or opportunities unequally on the ground that some citizens are entitled to more because they are worthy of more concern. It must not constrain liberty on the ground that one citizen’s conception of the good life of one group is nobler or superior to another’s.”**

– Ronald Dworkin, 1977.

Acceptance and integration of refugees and migrants is a core duty of our modern world. In addition, though, we have a responsibility to address the root causes of human dislocation. Urgent and significant action to combat climate change, desertification, pollution and loss of ecological health can address many of the environmental root causes of migration today. Investing in environmental sustainability can also create new and additional rural and urban employment in developing and developed countries to help stem the tide of migration. Nature-based jobs such as ecological restoration, investments in biogas and other forms of small-scale renewable energy, and certified wild foods, are just some examples of successful rural employment that harness new forms of technology or adapt the

diversity of cultural and traditional knowledge and practical know-how.

Resilient governance is central to balancing the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and to transforming national assets into sustainable development outcomes.<sup>55</sup> Capable and effective public institutions, that respect local cultures and traditions, can provide predictable ways to deal with shocks, stresses and tensions in a fair and transparent manner, thereby preventing escalation. The environment and natural resources can be also a good platform for building confidence and tangible basis for cooperation between social groups and between countries and regions in times of conflict. FBOs and NGOs are well placed to focus on environmental justice as a practical cornerstone for activism and engagement of all peoples.

In a globalized world with interconnected societies, intercultural dialogue is vital if we are to live together. In an uncertain world, the future of nations depends not only on their economic capital and natural resources, but on their collective ability to understand and anticipate changes in the environment - through education, scientific research and the sharing of knowledge. In a connected world - with the emergence of the creative economy and knowledge societies, our ability to manage big data, and along with the dominance of the Internet, the full participation of everyone in the new global public space is a prerequisite for peace and development.

Cultural diversity – its identity and values – needs both preservation and development. This diversity is not in contradiction with the notion of “universal” values and principles. On the contrary, it is diversity that is the





source of universality. One of the dangers facing humanity is the absence of true communication and mutual understanding of cultural diversity. It is critical to recognize the diversity within religious organizations and actors and not seek to over-simplify or categorize. Cultural pluralism at the local, regional, and national level as well as regional and sub-regional initiatives highlight the importance of transfers and exchanges between cultures. Such a spirit of understanding may likely be the best way to counter extremist thought and the power of extremist groups.

Today we are witnessing extremism, intolerance, violence, and promulgation of directives that counter the aims of sustainable development in the name of almost all religions. However, the mainstream of all religions teaches their followers to practice tolerance, peace and respect for other faiths. All Holy Books of Abrahamic tradition underline diversity as an essential element of Creation. The Qur'an teaches biological and cultural/religious diversity as a value in itself and also as the will of God from the very beginning. The Qur'anic spirit reflected in Islamic tradition, especially in Muslim Sufism, sees "unity in diversity".

Achieving unity in diversity means to respect the other in spite of all the differences; to seek solidarity with others in the satisfaction of basic needs for survival and for transcendence; and to cooperate with the other in the preservation of the common natural and cultural patrimony (UNESCO, Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity 2001). Today, this simple message can be the essence of preservation of life and of the Earth.

**The Sufi Master Rumi recommended us if we want to “make peace with the universe” we should “take joy in it”. Then “it will turn to gold. Resurrection will be now. Every moment, a new beauty.”**

Jalaluddin Rumi, *The Book of Love: Poems of Ecstasy and Longing*, 2005.

The Qur'an criticizes those who exert pressure on others to become believers (Box 7). On 27th January 2016, the world's eminent Muslim leaders and 50 leaders of

other religions endorsed the Marrakesh Agreement, which sends a message of tolerance among religions, and the protection of the rights of minority religions in majority Muslim countries. It calls upon the representatives of all religions, sects and denominations to confront all forms of religious bigotry, vilification and denigration of what people hold sacred, or promote hatred and racism.

### **BOX 7. The Muslim Qur’anic teachings on tolerance**

“And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the Earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are Signs for those who know.” (the Qur’an 30:22)

“... To each among you Have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If God had so willed, He would have made you single people, but (His Plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive As in a race in all virtues.” ((the Qur’an 5:48)

And if your Lord had pleased, surely all those who are in the earth would have believed, all of them; will you then force men till they become believers? (the Qur’an 10:99)

Today the world is increasingly recognizing the values of biological diversity, and so too must it value and respect cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. These endowments must be

a fundamental part of the education system. Peace education and dialogue for a common future is an imperative for all concerned and sensible souls, and a corner stone of a culture of peace.<sup>56</sup> Teacher education and further professional development of teachers in the areas of intercultural and inter-faith education is crucial in fostering the notion of learning to live together - one of the pillars of education as described by the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, “We cannot create a better and brighter future with traditional and out modeled education systems which was enough to master the 'reading, writing, and arithmetic' skills”. Critical thinking must be adopted as a tool and skill to unearth the potentialities of our children and youth and encourage them to be actors of change in a positive and creative way.<sup>58</sup>

A respect for cultural and religious diversity, including different forms of secularism, and a shared vision for humanity, and commitment to promote the common good, are at the heart of building an ethic of global and local citizenship. Religious traditions point—each in its own way—to a vision of a “shared wellbeing” anchored in each religion’s respective experience of the Sacred and based on the profound reciprocity between human dignity and social wellbeing. Human beings find meaning in being and becoming, rather than simply having and accumulating. Shared wellbeing includes the conviction that the call to personal development is directly related to the obligation to build up the common good, which includes the natural world. This notion of shared wellbeing was unanimously affirmed by over 700 diverse senior religious leaders – including men, women and youth – during the Religions for Peace World Assembly in 2013.

### **Suggested questions for discussion**

- How can FBOs and NGOs contribute to achieving a safe and peaceful world?
- How can FBOs and NGOs be equipped to integrate environmental sustainability into their actions in support of disaster relief and rehabilitation, and peace building?
- What steps need to be taken to foster greater inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue so as to combine all wisdoms for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals?
- How can religious leaders better incorporate peace education, tolerance, inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue in their teachings?



# **PARTNERSHIPS:**

STRENGTHEN GLOBAL SOLIDARITY  
TO ACHIEVE THE SDGS

With the advent of the SDGs, religious and cultural leaders have a historic opportunity to create new and transformative partnerships that place people, planet, and mutual accountability at the center in order to catalyze global solidarity for sustainable development.

Governments and non-governmental organizations around the world are already mobilizing to implement the SDGs. The “means of implementation” as described in SDG 17, are a vital sign of commitment by countries to make it happen – this time. The means of implementation cover: finance, technology, capacity building, trade, policy, and institutional coherence, data, monitoring, and accountability, and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

A global compact by religious and cultural leaders to embrace and promote the vision and aims of the SDGs within their communities will have a significant impact on achieving a paradigm shift by all stakeholders. Each religion and traditional culture has many conceptual and practical entry points to promote such a shift, as explained in previous chapters.

In addition to taking action within their own communities, religious and cultural leaders and networks can create opportunities for multi-stakeholder dialogue by reaching out to other communities across countries and religions (Box 8). For example, dialogue encouraged by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (1991) was an attempt to see how the Islamic tradition of the Beautiful Names of God can provide inspiration for Christians.<sup>59</sup> Some religious leaders are very active in mobilizing resources and networking with others including religious organizations, NGOs and

governments. They also actively participated in climate change workshops during the run-up to COP 21, where they met other stakeholders from inside and outside of the country. These inter-faith partnerships reflect the value of dialogue between science and religion, as well as cooperation for greater mutual advancement.

### **BOX 8. Inter-faith dialogues in Norway**

Like interfaith dialogue in general, Christian-Muslim dialogue of an organised kind is a very recent phenomenon in Norway. The first partners to set up a regular structure for interreligious dialogue in Norway were, perhaps not surprisingly, Christians and Muslims. Against the background of growing grassroots contact a national Contact Group between the Church of Norway and the Islamic Council of Norway was established in 1993. The Lutheran Church of Norway is a state church, comprising 86 per cent of the population. The Islamic Council of Norway is an umbrella organization for most of the organised Muslims in Norway. These inter-faith dialogues gained considerable momentum and even aspired to deal with global challenges.

(Source: Leirvik, 2001.)

The lessons learned from inter-faith dialogues, summarized in practical maxims by Dr. Hans Köchler,<sup>60</sup> is still relevant and meaningful for any initiative of dialogue:



commitment to authenticity, intellectual maturity and independence, intellectual curiosity and compassion, hermeneutical versus apologetic approach, going beyond stating the obvious, avoiding political instrumentalization, commitment to sustainability, and networking.

Interfaith dialogue was given a boost through the publication of the *Laudat'o Si* of Pope Francis. In Rome people of different faiths came to call for climate action; many religious leaders welcomed it, including the Dalai Lama on Twitter, stating: "Since climate change and the global economy now affect us all, we have to develop a sense of the oneness of humanity."

A deeper understanding and acceptance of universal shared values such as human rights and stewardship of the environment are needed so as to tackle ignorance, intolerance and prejudice. Religious and cultural leaders can play a more constructive role if they try to understand their respective traditions and history with a fresh sense of global responsibility not only for their followers and communities, but the whole humanity and creation. Traditions sometimes need to evolve in order to address current problems, and the combined wisdom of all religions and cultures, obtained through greater dialogue and sharing of insights, can lead to harmony among civilizations as well as finding long lasting solutions for sustainability.

It is important to complement dialogue with action. FBOs and NGOs should leverage additional resources to support the implementation of the SDGs, through their considerable contributions from charities and foundations, and to create transparent ways of monitoring the flow and impact of such resources.

According to a 2013 report of Charity Aid Foundation's World Giving Index, which tracks charitable activity globally, private faith-based investment are growing, particularly in developing nations. The size and scope of these organizations are very diverse. From small community-based FBOs for whom USD 100 is substantial, to large organizations. For example, Lutheran World Relief's total support and revenue was USD 38.5 million; Islamic Relief Fund was USD 130 million; and World Vision International was USD 2.67 billion. Far above these are the Catholic Church's diverse assets.

Muslim FBOs are relatively newer entrants into the scene of international development. Many Muslim FBOs have benefited from a coordinated use of the Zakat; for example, in Mali the Zakat is regularly channeled towards development projects in the villages. The Kuwaiti International Islamic Charitable Organization has recently raised almost 40 million USD from Zakat for Syrian refugees. Driven by ideas of pan-Islamic solidarity, many

organizations focus exclusively on Muslim countries and populations. But their religious identity arguably also gives them greater access to areas that are difficult for secular organizations to enter or influence. For example, fishermen in Zanzibar only stopped using dynamite when Islamic Relief spent time teaching about the Qur'anic precepts about stewardship of the Earth.

Securing a sustainable, climate-resilient future will require significant investment. For example, research shows that by 2020, the world will need to invest USD 5.7 trillion annually in green infrastructure like clean water, sustainable transport, and renewable energy in order to prevent climate change's worst effects.<sup>61</sup> It is not clear how much of the charitable funds from religious organizations in circulation today address environmental sustainability, or could be considered to be implementing the SDGs.

In addition to supporting communities to move towards sustainable development, FBOs and NGOs need to also "walk the talk". As previous chapters have shown, many are already doing so, and there are important resource hubs and support centers that can provide adaptable solutions. UNEP's work on moving the entire UN towards sustainability for example, has generated many new ideas and technologies that could be adopted.

### **Suggested questions for discussion:**

1. What would it take to mobilize religions, cultures and secular communities to understand the urgency and need to achieve the shared vision?
2. How do religious and cultural groups interpret the “means of implementation” of the SDGs? How can they mobilize more resources, commitment, and raise awareness to make it all happen?
3. What steps need to be taken to increase the transparency and effectiveness of support from FBOs and NGOs for sustainable development?
4. What are the technological, legal and financial challenges faced by FBOs in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals?





## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



We, the international community in its entirety, have delayed beyond the point of avoiding severe and most deleterious effects of climate change on major ecosystems that support all life on earth. Our task presently is to bring a halt to the continued anthropogenic interference with the primary processes of the Earth that would inexorably lead to irreparable damage and global systems change. Albert Einstein observed that problems cannot be solved at the same level at which they are created. Humans need to gain a whole-systems perspective if we are to respond effectively to massive ecological problems.

A recent report by an international group of business scholars, leaders and policy makers produced for the 50 + 20 Agenda is very explicit, both in blowing the whistle and in recommending action. They state that “We need a new kind of society including a revised economic framework to reassign economics to its appropriate status as a subject of a larger system, not its center. To achieve this we need responsible leadership for a sustainable world” (The 50 + 20 Agenda).<sup>62</sup>

Fortunately, there has been a tremendous positive momentum in the past decade towards a shared vision and shared action. It seems the time is ripe for a new paradigm shift in which universal human values and rights will unite and orient the endeavors of humankind towards a shared destiny. The more than 7 million people who actively engaged over 2 years in developing the SDGs can rest assured that achieving them can guide this transformation. But the help of religious and cultural leaders is needed to pass on this message to the remaining 6.3 billion people on earth.

Religion is an important part of the fabric of many people’s daily lives on the planet,

regardless of the primary faith belief system, ideological histories and legacies, the stage of economic development and political systems.<sup>63</sup> It is a moral obligation for major religions and all peoples to foster and inspire dialogue that respects the diversity of thought, culture and knowledge, so as to make the 21st Century an age of understanding, tolerance, peace, prosperity, equity and love. Celebrating our differences and taking strength from our spiritual and cultural traditions, can guide us to finding lasting solutions to mankind’s common and shared problems, and create or strengthen strong fabrics of society that empower all, including the most vulnerable and marginalized.

**“We do not have the luxury of time. Action is urgently needed, and to make it possible will require: a strong ethical framework; political courage on the part of world leaders; reform of the current systems of global governance and financial regulation; increased and better targeted official development assistance; and heightened individual awareness and commitment worldwide.”**

– Earth Dialogue Forum, in Lyon, 2002.

The history of modern inter-faith dialogue is already 40 years old. Protection of cultural diversity and dialogue among civilizations dates back to the founding of the United Nations 70 years ago. Today, continuing such dialogue is even more critical in fostering a

a shared vision towards environmental sustainability and duty of care of our planet.

Humanity can take the best fork at the cross roads, especially if the global civil society, including the religious community, engage in the global partnership for sustainable development, implement mitigation measures commensurate with the urgency of scientific projections. The discourse of the 2016 Seminar could arrive at a more sophisticated understanding of how religious and cultural diversity can contribute to the protection, preservation and improvement of the natural environment and cultural heritage. Such a global partnership will enhance the prospect that the shared vision and goals will be achieved in the next phase of world economic, environmental and social development.

**It is recommended that:**

- Religious and cultural leaders and organizations actively engage in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs, in their communities, in their own organizations, and in cooperation with each other. No one should be left behind, therefore, global compacts for action by religious and cultural leaders to reach the 7 billion people on the planet are needed to galvanize action.
- Religious scholars continue to engage in dialogue amongst themselves and with the scientific community, to continue to support the progressive evolution of religious thinking and scientific discovery, by building guidance for sustainable development that addresses the moral, ethical, spiritual, and practical responses needed to transform the paradigm for a shared destiny.

- Governments fully embrace the notion of unity in diversity, by adopting conducive outlooks and approaches, putting into place policies, incentives, and practices that respect cultural and religious diversity and the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities. Monitoring human rights, including land rights and the right to sustainable livelihoods and lifestyles, should be ingrained in the implementation, follow-up and review of the SDGs.
- Stronger multi-stakeholder partnerships should be built that offer the opportunity to bind the religious, cultural and scientific, and secular communities together, for more effective implementation of the SDGs. Through such dialogue and cooperation, creativity, innovation and financing should be unleashed to find long-lasting solutions to today's dilemmas and challenges.
- UNEP and its partners should update the Earth and Faith publication, including an analysis of trends and advances in the connectivity between science and religion, trends in the greening of FBO initiatives and activities, and reporting on trends in financing from FBOs and NGOs on environmental sustainability.
- UNESCO should continue to review the ways in which cultures relate to one another, raise awareness of cultural commonalities and shared goals, and identify the challenges to be met in reconciling cultural differences.



# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



# Summary of Findings, Second International Seminar on Environment, Culture and Religion-Promoting Intercultural Dialogue for Sustainable Development [Tehran Summary]

23-24 April 2016, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran.

We, coming together from different faith groups and intellectuals dealing with culture and religion in the context of the environmental dimensions of sustainable development gathered in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, at the Second International Seminar on Environment, Culture and Religion – promoting intercultural dialogue for sustainable development;

**Expressing** our sincere gratitude to the people and Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the Seminar in Tehran in collaboration with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and for the hospitality extended to the participants;

**Expressing** concern over the continuing pace of natural resource depletion and degradation, the growing negative impact of climate change on humanity, hundreds of millions of people still living in poverty and extreme hunger, and in areas affected by conflict or natural disasters which all impair the access to natural resources for future generation;

**Recalling** the conclusion of the first Seminar held in Tehran in 2001 emphasizing the need for a new shared vision of a common destiny

to create a culture of universal peace and solidarity and therefore an environment free from poverty, fear, insecurity, violence and war;

**Noting** that interreligious and intercultural dialogue has made significant contributions to mutual understanding, tolerance and respect, as well as to the promotion of a culture of peace and an improvement of overall relations among people from different cultural and religious backgrounds and among nations [GA Resolution 70/19];

**Noting** that the second Seminar was held less than a year after the adoption in September 2015 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the UN Summit aiming at ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring peace and prosperity; and seeking to identify ways in which culture and religion can contribute to a balanced and integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda;

**Welcoming** with deep appreciation the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which emphasizes the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development;

**Reiterating the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which**



envisages, inter alia, a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; equal opportunity contributing to the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity; and further envisages a world in which humanity lives in harmony with nature;

**Reaffirming** that culture should be regarded as a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, value systems and beliefs, traditions, lifestyles, and ways of living together;

**Further reaffirming** that respect for the diversity of cultures, religions, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation, in a climate of mutual trust and understanding, are central to enhancing and fostering of international peace and security;

**Recognizing** that culture, in its multifaceted manifestations and expressions, is both an enabler and a driver of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development;

**Underlining** that in today's world it has become more crucial than ever to promote and disseminate values, attitudes and behaviors conducive to dialogue, non-violence and the rapprochement of cultures and religions in line, among others, with the principles of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity;

**Further Underlining** the importance of the insights from different faiths which emphasize the need for harmony and balance between human beings and nature, creating a common ground for understanding among many peoples, as highlighted in UNEP's 2001 publication 'Earth and Faith';

Acknowledging that faith and cultural understanding can promote positive social dialogue across boundaries and sharing of communal knowledge even in diverse societies and diaspora communities, enhancing homogeneity and pluralism, strengthening unity in diversity and tolerance among peoples;

**Understanding** that culture and faith are important determinants of social behavior having an important educational role in inspiring and conducting people to promote ethical value for environmental sustainable practices and that addressing today's environmental challenges will require a new ethical approach and changes in the way we produce and consume;

1. **Welcome** the inclusion of the promotion of a culture of peace in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [GA Resolution 70/1];
2. **Reaffirm** the recognition by the UN General Assembly of the importance of interreligious dialogue and its valuable contribution to promoting social cohesion, peace and development, and welcome the call upon Member States to consider, as appropriate and where applicable, interreligious and intercultural dialogue as an important tool in efforts aimed at achieving peace and social stability and the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other internationally agreed development goals [GA Resolution 70/19];
3. **Urge** religious leaders and faith-based organizations to actively promote a

culture of peace as a prerequisite for any action towards the effective and integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals;

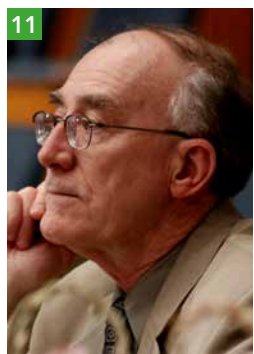
4. **Encourage** cooperation and partnerships between religious leaders, cultural and indigenous leaders, scientific communities, faith-based organizations, United Nations Member States and organizations for the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
5. **Call upon** Member States to put culture at the heart of their efforts to find durable solutions for environmental challenges in a spirit of dialogue, understanding and respect for diversity;
6. **Call upon** world leaders and member states of UNESCO and UNEP to establish international partnerships to develop new mechanisms for inclusion of the 2030 Agenda in their national development priorities with particular focus on faith based initiatives/ interventions;
7. **Call upon** religious scholars to continue to engage in dialogue among themselves and with the scientific community to continue to support the progressive evolution of religious thinking and scientific discovery, by developing a more comprehensive sustainable development discourse that addresses the moral, ethical, spiritual, and practical responses needed to transform the paradigm for a shared destiny;



- 8. **Underlines the need** for the continued dialogue on environment, culture and religion to address the implementation of the 2030 sustainable development agenda;
  
- 9. **Urge** member states of UNEP and UNESCO to fully embrace the notion of unity in diversity by adopting conducive

outlooks and approaches, and putting into place policies, incentives and practices that respect cultural and religious diversity and the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.







1. Group Photo of participants at the Seminar.
2. H.E. Dr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran
3. DR. Masoumeh Ebtekar, Vice-President of the I.R. of Iran and Head of the Department of Environment
4. MR. Achim Steiner, UN Under Secretary-General and Executive Director of UNEP.
5. Ms. Esther Kuisch Laroche, Director and Representative Tehran Cluster Office, UNESCO
6. Dr. Mahnaz Mazaheri.
7. Dr. Kalus Toepfer and Father John Brinkman.
8. Dr. Klaus Toepfer.
9. Dr. Abbas Sadri.
10. Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker.
11. Dr. John Grim.
12. Mr. Martin Kopp and Dr. Nigel Crawhall.



13. Mr. Pekka Haavisto.
14. Ambassador Juan Mayr Maldonado.
15. Ms. Edna Kaptoyo, Dr. Ibrahim Ozdemir, Dr. Nigel Crawhall, Ms. Esther Kuisch-Laroche
16. Participants at the Seminar
17. Mr. Amirfateh Vahdati.
18. Mr. Pekka Haavisto and Ms. Ella Antonio
19. Mr. Madhava Turumella and Dr. John Grim





# ANNEXES

# Annex 1: Notes on the First International Seminar on Environment, Culture, and Religion. Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 18-20 June 2001

The First International Seminar on Environment, Culture, and Religion was held in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 18-20 June 2001, hosted by Department of Environment (DOE), President Mohammad Khatami and with the support of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Receiving 169 attendees—representatives of various religions, and environmental experts from Iran and other countries—the Seminar marked the importance of the role religions can play in the field of environment in protecting and preserving nature and earth.

Representatives of Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrian, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Taoism attended the Seminar, which focused on the connection between various religions and environment, and further discussed the matter of getting religions more involved in the field of environment. This International Seminar provided an opportunity for the representatives to express their view and find shared concerns and common fields on environment.

The representatives also met the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, who put emphasis on the

importance of environment and called its protection sacred duty humans must fulfill. The Seminar continued with workshops and speeches on water, biodiversity, and desertification, focusing on important matter such as human corruption and pride, and covered the environmental challenges in cities. It expressed:

Concern over the continuing pace of natural resource depletion and degradation, the growing negative impact of climate change on humanity, hundreds of millions of people still living in poverty and extreme hunger, and in areas affected by conflict or natural disasters which all impair the access to natural resources for future generations;

New-shared vision of a common destiny to create a culture of universal peace and solidarity and therefore an environment free from poverty, fear, insecurity, violence and war;

Interreligious and intercultural dialogue has made significant contributions to mutual understanding, tolerance and respect, as well as to the promotion of a culture of peace and improvement in overall relation;

That culture should be regarded as a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, value systems and beliefs, traditions, lifestyles, and ways of living together;

Recognition that culture, in its multifaceted manifestations and expressions, is both an enabler and a driver of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development;

And further underlined the importance of the insights from different faiths which emphasize the need for harmony and balance between human beings and nature, creating a common ground for understanding among many peoples, as highlighted in UNEP's 2001 publication 'Earth and Faith';

That culture and faith are important determinants of social behavior having an important educational role in inspiring and conducting people to promote ethical value for environmental sustainable practices and that addressing today's environmental challenges will require a new ethical approach and changes in the way we produce and consume. The Seminar recommended:

- ▶ Cooperation and partnerships between religious leaders, cultural and indigenous leaders, scientific communities, faith-based organizations, United Nations Member States and organizations for the promotion of sustainable development; peace and culture;
- ▶ Member States to put culture at the heart of their efforts to find durable solutions for environmental challenges in a spirit of dialogue, understanding and respect for diversity;
- ▶ Religious scholars to continue to engage in dialogue among themselves and with the scientific community to continue to support the progressive evolution of religious thinking and scientific discovery, by developing a more comprehensive sustainable development discourse that addresses the moral, ethical, spiritual, and practical responses needed to transform the existing paradigm for a shared destiny.
- ▶ The remarks and conclusions of the seminar were presented at the closing session on 20 June 2001, making the base needed for the second seminar years ahead.

## Annex 2: Declarations and statements from major religions and cultural leaders in relation to the SDGs, COP 21, and other environmental events.

In September 1986, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) brought together five major world religions to declare how their faith leads each of them to care for nature. What resulted were the Assisi Declarations: calls from Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, and Islamic leaders to their own faithful. Afterwards, several more faiths produced similar declarations. In 2000, UNEP's publication "The Earth and Faith" gathered together many declarations from the different faiths.

The International Conference on "Environment, Peace, and the Dialogue among Civilizations and Cultures (Tehran Communiqué, May 2005) stated among other things<sup>64</sup>:

- ▶ the environment provides an important aspect of holistic dialogue that can contribute to understanding by, among other things, supporting a revitalized framework for effective multilateralism, confidence building and strategies for conflict avoidance, and effective decision-making.
- ▶ an inclusive approach based on dialogue can be a catalyst for cooperation to ensure that problems of shared resources can produce effective shared solutions.
- ▶ there is a need for the reconstitution of ethical and spiritual messages that are common to all faiths concerning the protection of the environment and the central message of peace, tolerance and harmony.

Almost 30 years after the Assisi Declaration, the Pope's Encyclical of June 18, 2015 called for global action to slow climate change and deal with its impacts. The recently published declarations and pronouncements of note focused on the adoption of the SDGs and UNFCCC COP 21 in Paris. In chronological order, extracts of the latter statements are presented below.

### **The Islamic Leaders Climate Change Declaration (18 August 2015)**

"We face the distinct possibility that our species, chosen to be God's caretaker (Khalifa) of the Earth, could be responsible for ending life as we know it on our planet. This current rate of climate change cannot be sustained, and the earth's fine balance (mizān) may soon be lost.

We call on other faith groups to join us in collaboration, co-operation and friendly competition in this endeavor, as we can all be winners in this race."

[Source: <http://islamicclimatedeclaration.org/>]

### **Statement of the Indigenous Peoples Major Groups to the United Nations Summit for the Adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (25-27 September 2015)**

We are around 5'000 distinct indigenous peoples from all regions of the world. We nourish the forests, deserts, rivers and fields that form part of our culture. Our traditional knowledge is built through centuries of symbiotic interaction and

codependence with our natural environment. We are governed by our customary institutions that provide for social cohesion, cooperation and collective resilience; access to justice; sustainable resource management systems for the common good, and; solidarity relations with other peoples. We are self-governing peoples and rights holders, and our institutions uphold sustainable development.

We are not against development. We are in fact the embodiment of sustainable development, but we are threatened by development targets – such as those on energy and climate change solutions – if our human rights are not protected.

Inclusive institutions for achieving the SDGs for us mean the recognition and respect for our customary institutions and our sustainable resource management systems. It means mechanisms that require our free prior and informed consent to development projects and programmes that affect us.

It means inclusive partnership based on the respect for our self-determined development. Universal access to justice means ensuring the effective protection of our collective rights against land grabbing, displacements and destruction of our cultural heritage by states, corporations, investors and business enterprises. It means going beyond social or environmental safeguards to fully ensure respect for human rights, equitable benefit sharing and accountability.

[Source: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19411indigenous-peoples-art.pdf>]

### **Conference “Appeal of Cardinals, Patriarchs and Bishops from around the world to COP 21” took place at the Vatican on 26 October, 2015.**

This gathering of Presidents of Catholic

Bishops’ Conferences representing regional and national episcopal conferences from all five continents issued an urgent appeal for the delegates at the November 30-December 11 meeting of COP 21 Paris to achieve a “fair, legally binding and truly transformational climate agreement.”

“Archbishop John Ribat of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea who is the president of the Federation of Episcopal Conferences of Oceania, said that islands had been especially hard hit by climate induced rising sea levels. ‘Our life in Oceania is at stake’.

Jean-Pascal van Ypersele of the Georges Lemaitre Centre for Earth and Climate Research and Life Institute, Université Catholique de Louvain pointed to the moral imperative in advocating a 1.5 oC ceiling in climate change temperature:

“One should note that it would make a difference for the most vulnerable to keep the warming under 1.5 oC or under 2 oC in the long term. This is particularly true for sea level. The latest IPCC report mentioned for example that the Greenland ice sheet, which contains enough frozen water to increase average sea levels up to seven meters, would probably melt completely in the coming millennium for a warming above a threshold comprised between 1 or 4 oC above preindustrial temperature. ... Everyone can understand that the probability to be above that threshold is significantly higher if the warming reaches 2 degrees than if it stays below 1.5 ... The choice between the 1.5 oC and 2 oC long term objective therefore requires value judgments: for example are the lives of those who would drown under such a long term sea level increase worth saving or not?

Both the encyclical and this appeal rely on values and ethical considerations like the need for equity and justice and for empathy toward those who suffer today from the first

consequences of climate change. The IPCC has shown that these would suffer much more tomorrow, if more action does not take place.”

[Source: [http://www.elic.ucl.ac.be/users/vanyp/Conference2015/talk-JPvanYpersele\\_Bishops\\_appeal.pdf](http://www.elic.ucl.ac.be/users/vanyp/Conference2015/talk-JPvanYpersele_Bishops_appeal.pdf)]

### **Conference of Buddhist leaders (29 October 2015)**

“We strongly support ‘The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change,’ which is endorsed by a diverse and global representation of Buddhist leaders and Buddhist sanghas. We also welcome and support the climate change statements of other religious traditions. These include Pope Francis’s encyclical earlier this year, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, the Islamic Declaration on Climate Change, as well as the upcoming Hindu Declaration on Climate Change. We are united by our concern to phase out fossil fuels, to reduce our consumption patterns, and the ethical imperative to act against both the causes and the impacts of climate change, especially on the world’s poorest.

To this end, we urge world leaders to generate the political will to close the emissions gap left by country climate pledges and ensure that the global temperature increase remains below 1.5 degrees Celsius, relative to pre-industrial levels. We also ask for a common commitment to scale up climate finance, so as to help developing countries prepare for climate impacts and to help us all transition to a safe, low carbon future.”

[Source: <http://gbccc.org/>]

### **G20 Interfaith Summit in Istanbul (18 November 2015)**

The Istanbul gathering sought and received expressions of solidarity from other faith traditions in the initiation of its climate change declaration. One such message of solidarity

from His Excellency Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace expressed the kinship of the Catholic tradition and the Muslim tradition.

“A great motivation which unites Christians, Muslims and many others is the firm belief in God. This faith compels us to care for the magnificent gift God has bestowed upon us – and, God-willing, upon those, who will follow us. Our urgent action will surely be more effective if we believers of different religious communities find ways to work together.

So, it is with great joy and in a spirit of solidarity that I express to you the promise of the Catholic Church to pray for the success of your initiative and her desire to work with you in the future to care for our common home and thus to glorify the God who created us.”

[Source: [http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/08/17/cardinal\\_turkson\\_all\\_faiths\\_must\\_work\\_together\\_on\\_ecology/1165624](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/08/17/cardinal_turkson_all_faiths_must_work_together_on_ecology/1165624)]

### **Hindu Declaration on Climate Change (23 November 2015)**

The Hindu document reached into its own unique references to Nature and its sense of life-style guidance gleaned from living in harmony with the ordained natural course of things. The Declaration quotes the *Mahābhārata* (109.10) which states: “Dharma exists for the welfare of all beings. Hence, that by which the welfare of all living beings is sustained, that for sure is dharma” and calls on all Hindus to expand their conception of dharma so as to consider impacts of personal actions on all other beings. National and international responses to climate change must be based on central Hindu principle that the Divine is all and all life is to be treated with reverence and respect. Three Sanskrit words from the *Īsopaniṣad*, characterize the Hindu outlook: “*Īśāvāsyam idam sarvam*. This entire universe is to be looked upon as the energy of the Lord.” The Declaration asks the world’s 900 million



Hindus to transition to using clean energy, adopt a plant-based diet, and lead lives in harmony with the natural world. International and national action must be scientifically credible and historically fair, based on deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions through a rapid transition away from polluting technologies, especially away from fossil fuels. Renewable energies are also the best hope for the billions of people without electricity or clean cooking facilities to live better lives and reduce poverty.

[Source: <http://www.hinduclimatedeclaration2015.org/english>]

### **International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change: Our proposals to COP 21 and beyond (29 November 2015)**

Our call comes from our lands, mountains, forests, rangelands and seas that suffer droughts, floods, melting of glaciers and thawing of permafrost and loss of sea ice. It is the call of our peoples that are on the frontline and pay the highest price of climate change. Climatic aggression threatens Indigenous Peoples' individual and collective human rights and life ways, including the right to life, the right to food, the right to health, and the right to lands, territories and resources. It is unacceptable that without being at all responsible, Indigenous Peoples remain major victims of climate change, and climate change continues to cause further imbalance and degradation to Indigenous Peoples' multiple land use systems. This is further aggravated by the pressure of commercial and extractive interests on our lands, territories and resources such as agribusiness operations, oil palm biofuel, carbon offsetting and market credit mechanisms, intensive livestock, hydroelectric, mining, oil, fracking and geothermal projects. This injustice calls for a commitment by the international community to compensate for the historical, social and ecological debt we are suffering.

We Indigenous Peoples therefore urge governments and the international community

to recognize our rights of self-determination, and to respect our right to freedom of expression and association.

[Source: [http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/news/2015/12/IP%20Political\\_statement.pdf](http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/news/2015/12/IP%20Political_statement.pdf)]

### **Indigenous Elders and Medicine Peoples Council Statement United Nations Convention on Climate Change, COP21 Paris, France (30 November 2015)**

All Creation has a right to live and survive on this Sacred Earth and raise their Families where the Creator placed them to be.

We've entered the state of survival because of the magnitude of the desecration, damage, and destruction to the Creator's Sacred Creation.

The people of the world cannot continue to ignore Aboriginal Indigenous Peoples, the Natural System of Life, the Natural Law and our connection with All Life.

To survive climate change and see the future we must heal the sacred in ourselves and include the sacredness of all life in our discussions, decisions and actions.

World leaders in Paris must lead us away from the commodification of Mother Earth, which places our lives and our future on an unstable foundation based on money, greed and power.

Neither world leaders nor modern institutions have the tools to adequately address climate change. Indigenous peoples must be included.

We are the People of the Earth united under the Creator's Law, with a sacred covenant to follow and uphold and a sacred responsibility to extend Life for all future generations.

[Source: <http://nativenewsonline.net/currents/indigenous-peoples-release-joint-statement-to-un-talks-in-paris-on-climate-change/>]

# Annex 3: Climate change and humanity at a crossroads: the urgency of the agenda

The journey of humanity toward global sustainability and ecological resolution of climate change has encountered a historic crossroad. The Sustainable Development Goals and the IPCC 5 AR and UN FCCC COP 21 Paris Accord are but three records of endeavors that have led to this critical juncture in human history. They are now essential guidelines in place at this critical time for the near term efforts of the international community.

The long discourse engendered by the MDGs and the recent admission of climate change as a focused challenge to all genuine development in the Sustainable Development Goals; the long and comprehensive analyses of the IPCC that led to the Fifth Assessment Report; the annual UNEP reports to bridge the gap between the climate objective targets and emission reduction measures and the most recent Paris Accord and its mechanisms of critical review for the way forward; these evidence the most recent efforts of humanity to stand in critical regard of the relatively short but recent two hundred years of human development. It is important to note the profound change of awareness that must take place to ensure the type of economic reform, social equity and environmental protection necessary for sustainability to be the hallmark of the next phase of human development.

Presently we stand at cross-road which crossing is a "once and for all," unrepeatable moment of decision for environmental

integrity to be the priority to ensure not only sustainable human progress but to ensure the very continuance of the evolutionary process of life emergence which sustains us. The choice is to go forward into the future with a newly achieved sense of human integration with the natural world and innovative forms of production or to continue on the pathway of business-as-usual which in its effects will diminish the earth itself.

The cumulative carbon saturation in the atmosphere in 2016 is over 400 ppm. "If humanity wishes to preserve a planet similar to that on which civilization developed and to which life on Earth is adapted, paleoclimate evidence and on-going climate change suggest that CO<sup>2</sup> will need to be reduced from the current [2008] 385 ppm to at most 350 ppm..." *Target Atmospheric CO<sup>2</sup>: Where Should Humanity Aim?* James Hansen, Makiko Sato, Pushker Kharecha, et alia. Open Atmospheric Science Journal, vol. 2 (2008)

In its former UN FCCC negotiations, in its declarations and policies of intent, humanity has been able to adhere to tenuous resolves along the way. The non-binding Copenhagen Accord negotiators offered emission reductions pledges that were aspirational in their intent in a manner that would remind one of a group of travelers whose delay to engage and failure to traverse lies in the uncanny fact that they have for a moment forgotten their

commitment to a common destination. The Durban Platform for Enhanced Action significantly crossed a seemingly insurmountable divide between the developing countries and developed countries by its commitment for all nations to take on future legally binding emission reductions.

“The Durban Platform for Enhanced Action” which has emerged from the 2011 COP 17 presents a pathway for a future international agreement from within the context of the Kyoto Protocol process. For the first time in these negotiations, all nations in the world including China and the US have agreed to a fresh negotiating process whose aim would be to oblige every country to reduce Green House Gas emissions. This Durban outcome offers the way forward from a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol commencing on 1 January 2013 while seeking more comprehensive emissions reductions from all parties to the Convention. Hence, both industrialized and developing countries have committed to carbon cuts under a new deal that may well be in time binding with “legal force.” An opportunity has emerged to bridge a significant divide and to accommodate an aggregate emissions reduction that may keep global warming at +2 degrees Celsius.

The Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) of carbon emission reductions registered at production or managing COP 21 and cited as a central reference in the Paris Accord represents a temporary footing from which we might navigate the near term accommodations and long term transitional modification. It is sobering to note that the cumulative effect of the presently registered INDCs falls far short of securing carbon stabilization in the atmosphere to 350 ppm, the level of

sequestered carbon surmised to ensure avoidance of the most dangerous effects of climate change. In Paris, a mechanism has been put in place with five-year periodic reviews to offer the prospect of timely reform to adjust human efforts and to renovate registered “NDCs” to increase ambition to meet requisite levels to secure a ceiling of less than 2 °C and attain the optimum goal of 1.5 °C.

For the “developed” countries emission reductions were seen as production or managing sacrifices and actions that would yield off-setting credits were sought in lieu of cutting emissions at their source. For “developing” countries, mitigation efforts diminish economic growth and should rightly be proportioned in relations to their developmental needs. The impact of the Climate Vulnerable Forum’s intervention at the High-level COP 21 meeting to adopt the Manila-Paris Declaration was a remarkable step forward in world recognition of the 1.5 °C limit to global warming as an essential condition for the one billion people represent by the 43 Member States of Forum.

We have delayed beyond the point of avoiding severe and most deleterious effects of climate change on major ecosystems that support all life on earth. Our task presently would remain to bring a halt to the continued anthropogenic interference with the primary processes of the Earth that would inexorably lead to irreparable damage and global systems change.

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# Photography

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Copyright: REUTERS/Ajay Verma. A Hindu woman worships the Sun god Surya in the waters of a lake during the Hindu religious festival of Chatt Puja in Chandigarh, India, November 17, 2015. Hindu women fast for the whole day for the betterment of their family and the society during the festival.  
Copyright: REUTERS/Paulo Whitaker. Members of the Brazilian indigenous ethnic group Kuikuro dance before the opening ceremony of the XII Games of the Indigenous People in Cuiaba November 9, 2013. Forty eight Brazilian Indigenous tribes will present their cultural rituals and compete in their traditional sports such as archery, running with logs and canoeing during the XII Games of Indigenous People which takes place from November 8 to 16, 2013.
- p.vii Copyright: Reuters/Ilya Naymushin.  
p.1 Copyright: REUTERS/Ammar Awad. Ahmad Khalaf (4th R) looks on as a religious leader together with others release a dove outside the al-Aqsa mosque the day after he was released from an Israeli prison, in Jerusalem's old city December 31, 2013. Israel freed 26 Palestinian prisoners, on Tuesday, days before U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry was due back in the Middle East to press the two sides to agree a framework peace deal.
- p.4 Copyright: REUTERS/Jacky Naegelen. Late autumn colours in Vosges mountains mark a change in season in Rimbach in the Alsace region, Eastern France, November 3, 2015.
- p.8 Copyright: REUTERS/Pawel Kopczynski. Nepali porters take a break near the Himalayan village of Tengboche, May 13, 2003. Porters in the area are available to do everything from carrying goods up to remote villages, or even carrying wealthy clients up mountains on a chair. They also fix ropes and ladders across perilous crevasses, clear the route for climbers and carry their climbing paraphernalia.
- p.11 Copyright: Jaime Serpanchy. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. 2009
- p.16 Copyright: NASA. To mark Earth Day on April 22, 2000, NASA scientists released this new image of the Earth, updating the famous "Blue Marble" photograph taken by Apollo astronauts. The digital image uses data collected in 1997 from several satellites to approximate what a human could see from orbit, with the added artistic license of having the Moon in the background. The prominent storm raging off the west coast of North America is Hurricane Linda. The image of the Moon has been magnified to about twice its relative size, Washington, USA.
- p.23 Copyright: Gabriella C. Marino. Tehran City, Islamic Republic of Iran. April 2016
- p.27 Copyright: REUTERS/Mike Hutchings. Wild flowers bloom on Cape Town's Table Mountain heralding the coming southern hemisphere spring, August 19, 2015.
- p.30 Copyright: REUTERS/Khaled al Hariri. Syrian women light candles before attending mass in the Catholic Patriarchate in Damascus, September 7, 2013. Pope Francis has urged the international community to join in a special day of fasting and prayer for peace in Syria on Saturday.
- p.31 Copyright: REUTERS/Ashikur Rahman. Devotees crowd the streets after the final day of prayer during "Bishwa Ijtema", the world congregation of Muslims, on the banks of the Turag river in Tongi near Bangladesh's capital Dhaka January 10, 2016. Millions of Muslims attended the three-day religious event, Tongi, Bangladesh.
- p.34 Copyright: REUTERS/Kai Pfaffenbach. The island featured in Alexandre Dumas' novel "The count of Monte Christo" is covered in fog during sunset at the seafront in Marseille, France.
- p.37 Copyright: CC-BY Wonder woman0731
- p.39 Copyright: REUTERS/Andreea Campeanu. Families displaced from violence take shelter at the Don Bosco Catholic youth centre in Bangui December 25, 2013. The interim president of Central African Republic Michel Djotodia said peace is returning to most Bangui districts and asked displaced people to return to their homes.
- p.42 Copyright: REUTERS/Adnan Abidi. People sit atop an overcrowded passenger train as they travel home to celebrate Eid al-Fitr festival, which marks the end of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan, at a railway station in Dhaka, Bangladesh, July 5, 2016, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
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- p.52 Copyright: REUTERS/Evvard Ngendakumana. An artist jumps as traditional drummers perform the royal drum dance during the UNESCO organized drum festival in Gitega, near Burundian capital Bujumbura, April 22, 2016, Gitega, Burundi, p.60
- Back Cover** Copyright: REUTERS/Mike Hutchings. Polluted water emanating from mining operations fills a dam near Johannesburg, South Africa, September 24, 2015, Johannesburg, South Africa  
Copyright: REUTERS/Maxim Shemetov. A man herds sheep in the mountains outside the village of Qalaalti, Azerbaijan, June 20, 2016.  
Copyright: REUTERS/Arnd Wiegmann. Native Brazilians with faces painted in the colours of the German national flag stand in front the news conference room of Germany's national soccer team in the village of Santo Andre north of Porto Seguro July 11, 2014.

