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Achievements and Actions – case studies

While it is important to be clear about the theological reasons directing religions to care for the environment, it is crucial that this leads to effective action to address the issues at every level, from the domestic to the international.

Since the beginning of the Religions and Conservation initiative in 1986, hundreds of thousands of environmental projects of all sizes have been carried out by individuals, communities and organisations in the name of their religion, with many still ongoing and new ones being launched every year. Below are a number of case studies of effective work carried out by different religious groups and organisations to address environmental issues.

1. BAHÁ'ÍSM, INDIA: Rural women trained in literacy, health and conservation

The Barli Development Institute for Rural Women, near Indore in Central India, gives indigenous women training in literacy, agriculture, health, income-generation, and environmental conservation. The group – which was inspired by Bahá'í social activism – was established as an independent entity in September 2001, and was offered as a Sacred Gift in 2002. Since 1985 the Institute and its forerunner have trained more than 1,300 women as “social change agents” since 1985.

The trainees learn conservation strategies through practical action. Rainwater is harvested and stored, washing water is reused for irrigation. Gardens tended by the trainees provide most of the Institute's food. Trainees prepare meals using state-of-the-art solar cookers; some become 'experts' able to support solar cookers in their own villages. When they return home after training, 99% of graduates are literate; 97% use safe drinking water; 96% use their income generation skills to provide for their families.

In 1998, a solar cooker was installed in Barli's kitchen using technology developed by German scientist Dr Dieter Seifert. This cooker allows 80% of daily food output to be resourcefully cooked for 250 days of the year: this saves three kilos of gas or 24 kilos of wood each day. In 2003, the success of this cooker inspired the Institution to train village craftsmen to replicate this technology. Now other NGOs

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and establishments in the area are benefitting from this ecological way of supporting the community.

As a result, 300 orphans in a Dhar orphanage have been supported by their new solar cooker and a further 500 tribal children have been catered for across the town of Jhabua in the Madhya Pradesh. Over 400 villagers have been given the opportunity to take this technology home with them by attending training sessions that teach them how to use the solar cookers to cook in a domestic environment. They can also dry vegetables, fruit, herbs and spices in preparation for times when supplies are short. Much of this produce can be taken from the Institute's three-acre organic garden. With their "zero-waste" policy, Barli Institute is making huge improvements in resource consumption both in the kitchen and the broader community.

2. BUDDHISM: Cambodia's Green Shade movement

Mlup Baitong means 'Green Shade'. It is a Cambodian NGO, which started by helping pagodas in Kampong Thom and Kampong Speu provinces to organise environmental projects and develop teaching materials and workshops. With their encouragement, pagodas are becoming centres for monitoring, such as with water surveys, and experimentation, such as with fuel-efficient cooking stoves.

They have many success stories: an environmental radio and advocacy programme, the first of its kind in Cambodia, broadcasts twice a week, with coverage to 70% of the country; their women and environment programme has formed 22 small-income groups for village women producing goods for home consumption and for sale at village level; their military environmental training programme trains personnel operating in and outside national park areas on topics such as forestry and wildlife laws.

3. BUDDHISM, MONGOLIA: Buddhists reintroduce traditional hunting and logging bans

The first Sacred Gift from the Buddhists of Mongolia was the reintroduction in 2000 of a centuries-old ban on hunting the snow leopard and the saiga antelope - both of which are endangered. The ban is an expression of the ancient Buddhist teaching of compassion

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towards all life, which in practice encourages Buddhists to engage in sustainable natural resource management.

In 2001, this Sacred Gift was expanded to include the recreation of traditional Buddhist Sacred Reserves. From the 12th century onwards Buddhists have declared certain sacred areas as protected by the deities in order to preserve the fragile ecology of Mongolia. Under Communism these were destroyed. With the help of ARC, WWF and the World Bank, seven such reserves have been rededicated and made sacred once again.

The Buddhists have also published a major study of the sacred sutra texts that outlines the sacred dimension of virtually every valley, plain and mountain of Mongolia. Both these actions are expected to create strong moral and religious support for the protection of wildlife and for existing governmental protection and enforcement measures. Another region that comes under the full protection of this ban is the Khan Kentii Strictly Protected Area. It encompasses 1.2 million hectares of land and is home to one tenth of Mongolia's forests and many rare and threatened species of plants and animals.

4. Christianity - LEBANON: Church protects the Harissa Forest, one of the Mediterranean's top 10 "Forest Hot Spots"

The forest of Harissa lies steeply above the busy town of Jounieh, just north of Beirut. For more than 1,000 years it has been virtually undisturbed, supporting a few orchard owners and plenty of wild animals and plants. But after the Lebanese war the developers started moving in with concrete and bulldozers, threatening this last green coastal space in the region, and one that WWF has named one of the top 10 "Forest Hot Spots" in the Mediterranean.

The Maronite Church – representing Lebanon's most popular Christian tradition – owns a large proportion of the Harissa forest and in 2000 the Church made the unprecedented move of issuing a public pledge to preserve its forest. This commitment will not only protect the Maronite Church in perpetuity: it has also encouraged other groups to make similar pledges. In June 2003, the Church established a full Management group to oversee the ecological protection of the Harisa Forest in association with the municipality of Jounieh. The city agreed to purchase a further 325,000 square metres of adjoining privately-

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owned forest land to keep in its natural state, and several private owner families are also discussing committing to protect further areas of adjacent forest land.

The Maronite church is Orthodox in practice, but formally linked to the Catholic Church. It owns considerable land holdings in Lebanon and in the spirit of its seventh century founder, St Maron, it is now exploring how to create other Maronite-Protected Environments, including the sacred Qadisha Valley in Northern Lebanon. The publicity surrounding this Sacred Gift inspired volunteers in the diocese of Antelias to create an eco-religious tourism project in its 77 villages (containing 95 churches). They went on to create a protected oak forest in the church-lands around the monastery of St George, Bherdok – and an ecology education centre in the monastery building itself.

5. CHRISTIANITY, SWEDEN: FSC Certification for Church Forests

The Church of Sweden is one of the country's largest forest owners. In an unprecedented move, it agreed in 2000 to move towards certifying 15 per cent of its forests – more than 100,000 hectares – as sustainably managed under the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) guidelines. It also permanently designated one 20th of forests in all 13 of its dioceses as protected areas. With this Sacred Gift, the Church became the first commercial forest owner in the country to join the FSC process. Its commitment to environmental sustainability at all levels of church life stems from its belief in social justice and the need to treat with respect the gift of creation.

By 2001, the forests of the Västerås, Strängnes, Uppsala, Stockholm and Visby dioceses were FSC-certified. By early 2003 the Church had exceeded its original target of 15% of the forests under FSC and had achieved 25%. As the second part of its Sacred Gift, the Church of Sweden also pledged to boost its Parish Environmental Diploma scheme. The scheme requires parishes to conduct a comprehensive audit of resource use – both at an institutional level and in the domestic and professional lives of individual church members.

6. CHRISTIANITY, UK: Christian Environmental Network promotes eco-awareness

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The Church of England and the Conservation Foundation have established a network of more than 5000 parishes throughout the UK, aiming to promote environmental awareness and action. The project has been dubbed "Parish Pumps" in memory of the times before telephones and faxes or even newspapers, when the daily visit to collect water from the village pump was also the main source of information. The project arose directly out of the Church of England's Millennium Yew Tree Project in which 7000 parishes around the UK were invited to plant yew saplings, propagated from trees that had been alive at the time of Christ's birth.

7. CHRISTIANITY, CANADA AND USA: Catholic Leaders speak out for Columbia River Conservation

In 1999 two archbishops and six bishops representing 1.5 million Catholics in Idaho, Oregon, Montana and Washington, and British Columbia, called for urgent action to stop the degradation of the 1,200-mile-long Columbia River. After extensive consultation with scientists, policy-makers, environmentalists, indigenous peoples, theologians and others, they developed a five-year strategy designed to bring together all the key stakeholders along the river to tackle major problems including pollution, spread of alien species and destruction of wildlife habitats.

8. CHRISTIANITY, INDONESIA: Indigenous Batak Christians fight back against lake pollution

The Batak Church of Sumatra is a fascinating blend of the Batak indigenous culture with a vibrant Christianity. As such, the theology and practice of the Church is dynamically grounded in a deep respect for the natural world. Building upon this, the Church has created a major new programme aimed at engaging Batak society in protecting the environment. The actions undertaken in this Sacred Gift range from: a campaign to tackle pollution caused by logging and factories on nearby Lake Toba; protection of their local national park; work on combating soil erosion caused by deforestation; and the creation of a new post of Environment Officer for the Church.

All these practical actions are backed by workshops, sermons, educational resources and specific Church-run projects, which build awareness of key environmental problems. The Church's actions are

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not only significant for the local area but are also a model for other Churches in Indonesia.

9. CHRISTIANITY, UK: Gorton Monastery in Manchester

In the 1970s the surrounding terraced housing was demolished and the community re-housed. The last mass was said in 1989. Since then it has become almost derelict. In 1996 the Monastery of St Francis and Gorton Trust was founded and a year later the site was included in the World Monuments Fund's list of 100 most Endangered Buildings. The Trust has been given £173,800 of Lottery money towards converting the building into an environmentally friendly hotel and conference venue, with an extra £2.8 million funding earmarked for capital costs of restoration. The first stage is to construct the Angels Healthy Living Centre project, named after the neo-gothic stone angels around the Monastery facade, and intended to meet the health needs of local Gorton people.

10. CHRISTIANITY, USA: Benedictines engage students in civic eco-action

In 2000 the Catholic Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Pennsylvania, offered the Sacred Gift of expanding their innovative environmental education programme to cover three states in Canada and the USA. In 1999 the Glinodo Earth Force Programme (GEFP) was based in just 30 schools in Western Pennsylvania. A year later, as a result of the Sacred Gift, the Benedictines more than doubled their existing programme in Pennsylvania and, subsequently extended it to New York State and Ontario, Canada.

It has had particular impact already on Lake Erie - one of the Great Lakes of North America which between them contain one fifth of the world's fresh water. Students carry out water monitoring as an important part of the Gift, and are encouraged to engage in civic action to change public policy and achieve more environmentally sustainable management of these important freshwater resources.

The GEFP is supported by local government departments, universities and environmental groups, and involves students identifying local problems related to the overall health of the Lake Erie area, and taking action to address them. Through this Gift 50 new educators will be

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trained to develop watershed projects in schools – reaching out to a student population of approximately 50,000.

11. CHRISTIANITY, USA: United Methodists commit \$40 billion to ethical investments

The United Methodist Pension Board in the US is spearheading a drive to convert all the denomination's funds to ethical investments, a move affecting up to US\$40 billion of church assets. Currently some 30 per cent of the Church's funds are invested in some form of ethical portfolio. As part of this Sacred Gift the Board is promoting a broad-based socially responsible investment scheme throughout the seven million members of the United Methodists' congregations. The scheme includes environmental stewardship considerations.

The Pension Board screens its investment portfolio, worth an estimated US \$13 billion, for a whole range of eco-justice considerations and uses its proxy votes to encourage corporations to adopt environmentally friendly codes and practices. Since 2000 the Pension Board has become one of the key groups developing 3iG and it plays an increasingly important role in helping other faiths move to socially responsible investing. The Board is encouraging Methodists worldwide to develop similar schemes.

12. CHRISTIANITY, USA: United Methodists say "no" to dioxins

As their Sacred Gift, the Women's Division of the US United Methodist Church launched an important initiative in 2000 to eliminate chlorine in paper products used by the church. The aim was to build consumer demand for chlorine-free paper throughout the country. Dioxins and other toxins interfere with the body's essential hormone functions and have been linked to cancers, infertility and abnormal development in both humans and wildlife. They are released into the environment during the production of paper that contains chlorine, as well as during its incineration.

As a result of the Gift, United Methodists throughout the USA launched a major campaign to persuade one of the largest nationwide printing and photocopying companies to provide the option of chlorine-free paper. By 2002 they had succeeded. The United Methodists have more than seven million members in 36,000 churches across the country with a further 6,300 churches and more than one million members

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outside the US. Between them, this Church and its members use more paper than the whole of Sweden.

13. CHRISTIANITY, USA: Interfaith Power and Light

This programme was designed to help the 8,000 Episcopal churches in the US to assess their energy consumption with the idea of switching to more renewable forms of energy and encouraging their parishioners to do the same. This initiative developed a previously unimaginable knock-on effect when the Episcopal Power and Light leadership joined with the California Council of Churches (which represents 3,400 congregations of different faiths) to set up California Interfaith Power and Light. Now the National Council of Churches of the US comprising 340,000 congregations, and the World Council of Churches are starting to develop similar programmes.

14. DAOISM, China - Chinese Daoists support alternatives to endangered species used in traditional Chinese medicine

Chinese traditional medicine has for centuries been using rare ingredients derived from species like seahorses, rhinoceroses and tigers. The result has been that hundreds of thousands of endangered animals have been killed, often by illegal poaching. By re-emphasising the principle of maintaining a balance in nature Daoist theologians are teaching that remedies which cause such negative effects on the environment are bad for the soul and thus cannot work as cures. Researchers from the Beijing School of Traditional Chinese Medicine are identifying alternative, non-endangered and sustainable ingredients to replace them while banning the use of endangered species. By 2012 ARC and WWF were beginning a major programme in partnership with Daoists to educate further about this issue.

15. Hindus - INDIA: Hindus restore sacred forests in Orissa

Hindu groups and the Orissa government agreed to re-establish the state's sacred forests to provide sustainably-managed wood for the annual festival of Lord Jagannath. The centrepiece of the ancient festival is the building and parading of three huge chariots – after which the English word “juggernaut” is named. These are made with timber from 20 local tree species and after the ceremony, the wood is distributed to local villages and used to fuel temple kitchens.

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Festival chariots require an estimated 400 cubic metres of wood, harvested annually by the State Forests Department specially for the purpose. But over the centuries inadequate forest management has gradually led to a significant loss of trees. The implication both for the festival and the natural environment is serious. The Sacred Gift builds on the people's devotion to Lord Jagannath – a devotion that has been a key element of Orissan culture for at least 2000 years – and aims to set up three forest conservation zones, each incorporating about ten villages sited in state-owned forest lands. Since 2000 each village has had a Forest Protection Committee to promote joint forest management based around practical incentives and employment schemes. By mid-2007 2369 hectares were earmarked for plantation under the Shri Jagannath Vana Prakalpa Forest Project.

16. HINDUS, NEPAL: Hindus pledge to clean up sacred Bagmati River

The sacred Bagmati River in Nepal is no longer the rapid flowing waterway it once was. The river runs (in theory) through the country's expanding capital, Kathmandu but in recent decades it has suffered from over-extraction, damming, and effluent disposal. The Friends of the Bagmati association was formed at the time of the celebration of Sacred Gifts in Kathmandu 2000. The group is now developing exciting new initiatives to turn the river's fortune around and restore its sacred dignity, as well as acting as a central focus for the individual and corporate schemes already underway to help the river.

As much of the pollution is caused through small-scale abuse by ordinary people, the group is seeking to promote the sacred traditions of the river through celebration and education. Recently it has begun a neighbourhood watch scheme with a view to empowering local citizens to care for their river and its environs. Through this initiative, the development of local participation in clean-up schemes and other good environmental practices will tie into and influence governmental management of the watercourse.

17. ISLAM, EGYPT: Cairo rubbish dump converted into public park

When the Al-Azhar park project was first conceived - following His Highness the Aga Khan's decision to donate a park to the citizens of

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Cairo in 1984 - the idea was to provide the metropolis with much-needed green space at the heart of its historic agglomeration. The motivation arose out of the Islamic belief that we are all trustees of God's creation and therefore must seek to leave the world a better place than it was when we came into it.

A 30-hectare site on al-Darassa was selected because of its enormous potential as a 'lung' at the very centre of the historic agglomeration. Before work started, al-Darassa was a municipal rubbish dump. The park has seen 89 varieties of trees, 51 types of shrubs, five species of grass, 50 groundcover plants, 14 climbers and 26 succulent plants propagated, along with herbs such as chamomile, mint, lemongrass, coriander and thyme. Nurseries have housed over two million plants and trees, of which 655,000 have been planted in al-Azhar. The remaining plants have been used in the courtyards and roof terraces of Cairo and to sell to garden contractors.

Other features include a museum, restaurant and café; a children's play area, amphitheatre and stage; a selection of gardens adorned with marble columns; an orchard; playing fields; a lake and three fresh water reservoirs that supply Cairo with clean water. Al-Azhar has inspired the launch of a much broader community rehabilitation programme, which encompasses a number of projects that are successfully developing the overpopulated and underfunded neighbourhood.

18. ISLAM, SAUDI ARABIA: Rare species protected in first national biosphere reserve

In 2000 Saudi Arabia pledged to establish its first biosphere reserve – in one of the few places in the world where the Nubian ibex still breeds in the wild. The 2,200 km² reserve, located west of the town of Ha'il in north central Saudi Arabia, will be known as the Jabal Aja' Biosphere Reserve, and includes the largest mountain massif in the interior of the Arabian Peninsula.

The area is considered a 'refugia', dating back to the times when the Arabian Peninsula had a cooler and wetter climate. It encompasses wetlands and many threatened wildlife species including the Arabian wolf and the striped hyena as well as the Nubian ibex. The area has a greater concentration of biological diversity than anywhere else in the

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interior of the entire peninsula - and is a national gene bank for plant and animal species.

Saudi Arabia is an Islamic state governed by shari'ah, the law of Islam. The reserve's creation and management embodies specific Islamic rulings relating to the sustainable management of natural resources especially through the concept of "hima", a traditional method of protecting rangeland and water resources. An environmental education centre and wildlife park is also to be established in collaboration with the NCWCD (Saudi Wildlife Commission) and local education authorities.

19. ISLAM, TANZANIA: Fishermen say no to dynamite - using Islamic environmental principles

In 2000 the Muslim fishing communities of Pemba and Misali islands in Tanzania pledged to conserve Misali Island, one of the most important turtle nesting sites in the Zanzibar archipelago and home to some of the most magnificent coral slopes in the western Indian Ocean. In the 1990s it was under severe threat from dynamite fishing. What the fishermen did not know (and did not think was their business) was the terrible destruction they were doing, not just to the fragile reef ecosystem but also to their own long-term survival.

Dynamite takes out young fish along with the mature ones, while traditional fishing leaves the young to slip through the nets and breed later. The explosion also destroys the very environment within which the fish live. In the long run, nobody benefits. A startlingly simple solution was developed because the fishing villages of the East African coast are mostly Muslim, organised under a religious leadership of sheiks who have enormous authority in the communities. The sheiks on Masali island came together to explore Islamic teachings about the appropriate use of God's creation. From these studies the sheiks drew the conclusion that dynamite fishing was illegal according to Islam. They used Qur'anic texts such as "O children of Adam! ... eat and drink: but waste not by excess for Allah loveth not the wasters" (Surah 7:31) to spread the message among the community.

20. ISLAM, UK: World's first Centre for Islam and Ecology announced for Welsh University

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In a major new development, ARC and the University of Wales, Lampeter hope to found a Centre for Islam and Ecology at the University to further theological and practical work by Muslim communities in the UK and worldwide. There is a pressing need for such a centre. Islam has profound insights into the nature of our relationship with Creation but many of these are not well known even to Muslims themselves. The joint project will produce theological and legal handbooks, educational resources, will train Muslim leaders in practical ecology, and seek to raise the profile of Islamic action on the environment worldwide. At present (May 2012) funding has not been identified to bring this about, however.

21. JAINISM - INDIA: Jains build a sustainable community in earthquake village

During the devastating earthquake in the Indian state of Gujarat in January 2001, the village of Ninama was utterly destroyed and its 1,500 inhabitants left destitute. The situation came to the attention of the Shree Raj Saubhag Satsang Mandal (RSSM), a Jain spiritual organisation whose ashram is in the nearby village of Sayla.

The head of the ashram resolved to build a new village for these dislocated people. Though there was no existing connection between the village and the ashram, and none of the inhabitants are Jain, the ashram could not allow any soul to suffer from such a calamity in its neighbourhood.

The new village was built to embody social and environmental ideals, building 335 houses in landscaped clusters to promote communal living, with individual electricity and sanitation facilities. The building materials and house design are drawn from local tradition and thus embody local ecological wisdom. Water is supplied from an overhead water tank with distribution points spread across the village, and drainage is planned so as to avoid pools of water, breeding grounds for mosquitoes, and other causes of disease.

22. JUDAISM, EUROPE: European Liberal Synagogues environmental audit

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The Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues (ULPS) based in CHECK has launched a wide-ranging environmental audit, focusing on climate change and forest conservation. The audit was designed to determine how to decrease the environmental impact of synagogues, other communal buildings and the domestic and business activities of individual members.

The results are helping the ULPS create targets for CO2 reduction within the community. The ULPS has joined buyers groups including WWF's Forest and Trade Network, and has committed the synagogues to buying only FSC products. A key part of the programme is promoting environmental education, awareness and advocacy through its network of auditors, synagogue magazines and religious schools.

23. JUDAISM, UK: Major Jewish groups unite to protect the environment

In 2002 the UK's largest Jewish organisation, the Board of Deputies, launched a joint programme with the main Jewish environmental organisation Noah. The programme is intended to integrate environmentally sustainable practices into all main levels of traditional Jewish life. Initiatives were designed around three main spheres of activity: communities; homes and families; educational establishments. They have produced: environmental audits, checklists for householders to monitor the environmental impact of their homes; educational materials for pupils and teachers. One of the most significant activities was the production in 2007 of The Big Green Jewish Website.

24. SHINTOISM, JAPAN: Shintos commit to sustainable management of sacred forests

In 2007 Jinja Honcho, the Association of Shinto shrines in Japan, agreed to work with other faiths to develop a set of Religious Management Standards for religious-owned forests. The initiative follows on from a pledge made in 2000, under the aegis of WWF and ARC's Sacred Gifts programme, when Japan's Shinto leaders pledged not only to manage all of their sacred forests in sustainable ways but also only to buy timber from sustainably managed forests on behalf of their 80,000 or more shrines.

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The Gift reflected the Shinto culture's reverence for nature, and particularly for trees and woodlands. Thousands of Shinto shrines in Japan are built largely of wood and these shrines form the heart of the villages and local communities of Japan. Often the only extensive areas where trees and greenery flourish in Japanese cities and towns are in holy shrines. Here the faith controls the land and is able to practice what it teaches about the sacred nature of all life.

According to custom, the Shinto shrines at Ise (Shinto's holiest and most important shrine complex) are ritually rebuilt every 20 years – with the wood coming either from local forests or bought from outside. As part of this Gift, the Association of Shinto Shrines, Jinja Honcho, has now requested that the wood for shrines conforms to sustainable forestry standards. Since most of this wood comes from countries outside Japan, this increase in consumer demand is likely to have a significant effect on Japanese companies buying wood from abroad.

25. SIKH, INDIA: Sustainable gurdwara project

If faiths are to make a difference they must start with themselves and their own communities. One possible example is the Sikh gurdwaras in India. Most of the 28,000 gurdwaras, or temples, run free kitchens or langars where anyone, regardless of need, creed or caste, can be fed. The Sikh community gives vegetarian food to anyone who comes – about 30 million people a day with, for example, the five great gurdwaras of Delhi feeding more than 10,000 hungry people daily.

The energy consumption for such an undertaking is vast. It is hoped that in the future the amount of fossil fuels used for heating, lighting and cooking at Delhi's eight largest gurdwaras will be reduced by the use of solar power and that, later, gurdwaras in rural areas will be fitted with fuel-efficient cooking equipment. These initiatives would reduce energy consumption in these gurdwaras by up to 15%.

In 2009 the EcoSikh movement was launched in Delhi and at Windsor Castle. EcoSikh is supported by ARC, the Norwegian Government, the Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE) and the Sikh Community. Its first initiatives are to establish March 14th as Sikh Environment Day, to help gurdwaras throughout India and the diaspora become (and think) greener, and for Amritsar, holy

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pilgrimage destination for Sikhs, to become one of the first Green Pilgrim Cities.

26. ZOROASTRIAN, INDIA: Parsis recycle tonnes of flower offerings from Fire Temples

The ten days prior to the Parsi (Indian Zoroastrian) New Year are called 'Muktad'. It is a period during which Zoroastrian families are engaged in intense prayer for the souls of their departed relatives. Special prayers are conducted in Fire Temples for individual souls for whom flowers are offered and displayed in vases.

Rather than wastefully disposing of these huge heaps of used flowers, the Zoroastrian Alliance for Religion and Conservation (ZARC) decided to make use of them by motivating the priests in charge of Fire Temples to run vermiculture projects. They will provide valuable vermicompost to be used as manure to enhance the greenery in the land attached to the Fire Temple. The Zoroastrians realised they could recycle flower offerings made throughout the year in the same way.

This project started in August 2002, during Muktad, at the Vatcha Gandhi Agiary, and a similar project began at the Wadia Atash Behram in October. ZARC aims to promote this recycling project in all 47 existing Fire Temples in Mumbai, which has the highest concentration of Zoroastrians.

The water table in central India had lowered rapidly over the previous few years, becoming a matter of serious concern, particularly as the 2002 Monsoon was far below average. ZARC made significant progress recharging ground water aquifers and storing rainwater collected from terraces of buildings and open lands. Valuable rainwater, which would otherwise drain into the sea, has thus been stored for later use.

27. ZOROASTRIAN, INDIA: Zoroastrians Establish Sacred Baval Tree Groves

The Zoroastrians celebrated joining ARC in 2000 by presenting a Sacred Gift that symbolises the very heart of this ancient religion. The sacred fire that burns perpetually in Zoroastrian fire temples is fuelled exclusively by the wood of the baval tree. Currently this wood is bought on the open market. With the Sacred Gift, the Zoroastrians of

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India (also called Parsis) committed to buying baval wood from sustainable sources established by the Zoroastrian community.

In 2000, setting themselves a 15-year target, they began by buying land and reforesting it, creating tree nurseries and assessing the amount of land needed to provide all their sacred fuel. In 2001 they also agreed to create nature reserves on the land in order to contribute to biodiversity. New initiatives launched in 2001 and 2002 included sponsoring the breeding of vultures (because there are no longer enough of these birds in India to dispose of human bodies in the traditional Zoroastrian style) and building sustainable traditional housing, focusing especially on the reduction in energy use.

28. INDIGENOUS RELIGION, MEXICO: Huichol people take responsibility to protect ancient pilgrimage route

Every year members of the indigenous Huichol people of San Luis Potosi state in Mexico make an annual pilgrimage of 400 miles to the Huiricuta (Wirikuta) sacred mountain or "field of flowers". In 2000 the Huichol pledged to join with the San Luis Potosi state government, ARC and the Mexican NGO Conservacion Humana to enlarge the Huiricuta Ecological and Cultural Protected Area by 50%.

The area is the most sacred site for the Huichol – they regard it as a huge natural temple - and includes key parts of the Chihuahuan Desert, identified by the WWF as one of the "most biologically diverse and important natural sites in the world". The Sacred Gift extends the protected area from 74,000 to 110,000 hectares; and to show its support the state government has pledged to produce and implement a new management plan for the enlarged area.