

Greetings from the Alliance of Religions and Conservation – July 2009

Hello

So much has been happening this month that it's hard to know where to start. First, some of the amazing long-term plans that different faiths are beginning to create. A [Muslim Seven Year Plan](#) to Protect the Environment was approved in Istanbul in early July, an [EcoSikh Five Year Plan](#) was drafted in Delhi the same time, the Hindus in the UK agreed to create a 9 Year Plan. And then of course there was the groundbreaking [Papal Encyclical](#) this month, which for the first time puts the environment firmly in the mainstream of Catholic thinking. Amongst many other things, I could also tell you about how ARC co-hosted (with our longterm partner EMF and a new partner IRC) the first international [Faith and Water conference](#) in Salisbury... concentrating on how Faith Schools (ie about half of all schools) can be part of the solution to the world water crisis: it was one of those rare events that fills you with energy and ideas for days. Links to all are also below, as well as to an interesting Faith and Forests conference in Germany, but what I wanted to write about today was something that has transformed my thinking both about how to explain the work we do at ARC and about the Copenhagen climate change talks themselves.

At the [EcoSikh launch](#) in Delhi, [Olav Kjorven, Assistant Secretary General of UNDP](#) said that what has characterized the history of the climate change negotiations over the past 20 years has been "everyone generally wanting to do as little as possible, while pushing for others to do as much as possible". This comes from a scarcity mentality, "to make sure that someone else pays the bill."

However, what we see in many meetings of faiths on the environment is quite the opposite. We see people are saying: "this is what we can offer: this is what we are going to do." They don't say: "we'll only do this if another faith does this, or if the government does this," they simply say: "*this* is what we can give and *this* is what we can do."

This comes from an abundance mentality... And if some of that mentality rubs off on those attending the Copenhagen talks in December, then the world just might be a clearer place. And even if it doesn't, then all these actions that religions are announcing in the next few years, are going to happen anyway. "Religions hold a key - an important key - to the task that humanity has been given."

Next time I hope to tell you more about the major event at Windsor in November where the plans will be announced, and which - it is becoming clearer - will be a significant contribution to how ordinary people, as well as governments, can address this giant task of protecting the environment, not because we are afraid, but because we are empowered.

But meanwhile, the promised links:

1. **[Historical Istanbul Declaration of the Muslim Seven Year Action Plan on Climate Change](#)**
2. **[ARC's response to the Papal Encyclical](#)**
3. **[Eco-Sikh: Greener Habits for up to 24 million Sikhs](#)**
4. **[UK Hindus plan for environmental action including a Hindu eco-label](#)**
5. **[First ever Faith in Water workshop leads to new collaborations and stories](#)**
6. **[Invitation to a rather special Faith and Forest meeting near Ratzeburg, Germany](#)**

Best wishes, Victoria Finlay

Alliance of Religions and Conservation [www.arcworld.org](http://www.arcworld.org)

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/arcworld>

1. **[Historical Istanbul Declaration of the Muslim 7 Year Action Plan on Climate Change](#)**

It was an astonishing moment in Istanbul on July 6, when 50 key Muslim scholars, as well as leaders, civil society members and representatives of all major Islamic governments

made the unprecedented step of joining together to endorse a long term Muslim plan for action on climate change. The plan proposes investigating every level of Muslim activity from daily life to annual pilgrimages, from holy cities to the future training of Imams. Specific proposals include: developing the major Muslim cities as green city models for other Islamic urban areas, developing an Islamic label for environmentally friendly goods and services and creating a best practice environmental guide for Islamic businesses. Such a thing has never happened before, and ARC's major partner in this was the fabulously well-connected UK-based NGO Earthmates.  
<http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=334> and link  
<http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=337> to find the Economist article about it.

## 2. ARC's response to the Papal Encyclical

In his encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, released on July 6<sup>th</sup>, Pope Benedict recognises the interconnectedness of our actions - if we mistreat the natural world we mistreat ourselves, because everything is bound to everything else. He links nature not only to the environment but to "human ecology"; all of our relationships speak of the moral tenor of society, we cannot distinguish one from the other. He urges the Church to assert her responsibility in the public sphere and defend the natural world, linking environmental stewardship to protecting mankind from self-destruction. No longer is concern for the earth something that is only of interest to "greenies", if you are a Catholic then you care about the world around you because it is fundamentally related to justice, peace and human development. This is an encyclical that firmly places care for the natural world at the heart of Catholic teaching and action. <http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=338>

## 3. Eco-Sikh: Greener Habits for up to 24 million Sikhs



"Eco Babu" Balbir Singh Seechewal holds the Guide to creating your EcoSikh Five Year Plan, New Delhi July 4, 2009.

The symbol of Sikhism is a sword, which stands for the Sikh commitment to defend the weak, particularly widows and orphans. In 1999 the Sikhs came to the end of their 300 year Cycle of the Sword, and among many other initiatives they had in place a system of providing food to 30 million people a day through free kitchens in their gurdwaras, or temples. The current 300 year cycle is committed to protecting Nature, and its impact on the vulnerable environment over the next generations may be equally impressive. Link to the story on <http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=336>, and also to ARC's first ever field video, taken with a hand camera, to tell, in about 2 minutes about how the evening prayer in Sikhism is a prayer dedicated to nature. And how nature is continually giving thanks to God.

## 4. UK Hindus plan for environmental action including a Hindu eco-label

"Food has always been at the heart of the Hindu way of life. Now with food, and especially the environmental cost of meat, right at the top of the global climate change agenda, Hindus feel they have something to say." Link to <http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=340> to learn more about the first Hindu Nine Year Plan to protect the environment, which includes the idea of starting up a Hindu eco-label. There are over 300 Hindu temples and organisations in the UK," said Shaunaka

Rishi Das, Director of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies which is coordinating this movement. "If they can work together to inspire their congregations to make changes, we can make a real contribution to the environmental goals of this country. This meeting was historical because the larger Hindu temples in the UK have agreed to work together as never before, which is very encouraging and a very good example."

#### **5. First ever Faith in Water workshop leads to new collaborations and stories**

ARC, and our partners EMF and IRC, held a unique meeting in Salisbury, UK in early July, to discuss the very specific issue of how faith schools (about half of all schools in the world are founded by, managed by or connected to faiths) can contribute to helping the water and sanitation crisis. We brought together groups that rarely meet – viz representatives of the major religions' schools programmes, representatives of major agencies working on water and sanitation issues, and inventors dedicated to finding practical solutions to water and sanitation issues. I'll write about this issue again later, when some of the papers and stories are available, but meanwhile here are some details, <http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=335> and here's a moving article written by our project manager Elizabeth Idienumah, after visiting the Nairobi slums to find out how one church is helping the inhabitants to improve their water and sanitation.

<http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=331>

#### **6. Invitation to a special Faith & Forest meeting near Ratzeburg, Germany**

The Ecumenical Foundation for the Integrity of Creation and Sustainability, is holding a major meeting in Germany to discuss the relationship between religions and forests – historically, culturally, spiritually, economically and environmentally. Participants are coming from across Germany and the Baltic as well as ARC, the Church of Sweden and a delegation of Shinto priests engaged with forests. There are still a few places left for what will be a fascinating meeting in a beautiful location. If you are interested in the relationship between faith and forests this will be a great event to attend. It takes place at the lakeside village of Bak near Ratzeburg and costs 350 euros for food, fees and accommodation. Contact Dr. Arnd Heling at [Stiftung@schoepfungsbewahrung.org](mailto:Stiftung@schoepfungsbewahrung.org) or +49 4541 805877. Our support for this is part of ARC's programme with the Shinto and the Church of Sweden to develop a Religious Forestry Standard. A brochure can be downloaded from <http://tinyurl.com/17snz4>

*Latest news about the Faith Plans for the Environment can be found at <http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=270>. We know that it is now quite hard to find your way round our site, but we beg patience, as a new site, [www.religionsandconservation.org](http://www.religionsandconservation.org) is now being planned and built, to be launched in October.*