

## FAITHS PROTECTING FORESTS

Evangelical Lutherans in Tanzania and Muslims in Uganda are among the many faith groups across Africa addressing environmental degradation by planting millions of trees.

Shinto shrines protect some of Japan's most ancient forests, dwelling place of the kami, the nation's deities. The most famous is the Ise Grand Shrine, one of Shinto's holiest sites, in Mie prefecture (below).



The Maronite Church in Lebanon has publicly pledged to protect the sacred Harissa Forest, recognised as one of the Mediterranean's biodiversity hotspots.

Some of Ethiopia's last and most biodiverse forests, which survive in around 35,000 fragments of woodland across the country, belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.



Buddhist monks 'ordain' trees in Cambodia. In 2010 the monks won the United Nations' Equator Prize for their efforts to protect the nation's biggest community forest.

## WHAT IS ARC?

The Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) is a secular organisation, founded by HRH Prince Philip in 1995. It works with the world's major faiths to help them develop environmental programmes based on their beliefs and practices. It also helps secular environment organisations to work with the faiths to protect the natural world.

# ARC

ALLIANCE OF RELIGIONS AND CONSERVATION

Launched in 1995 by HRH The Prince Philip,  
Duke of Edinburgh, KG KT

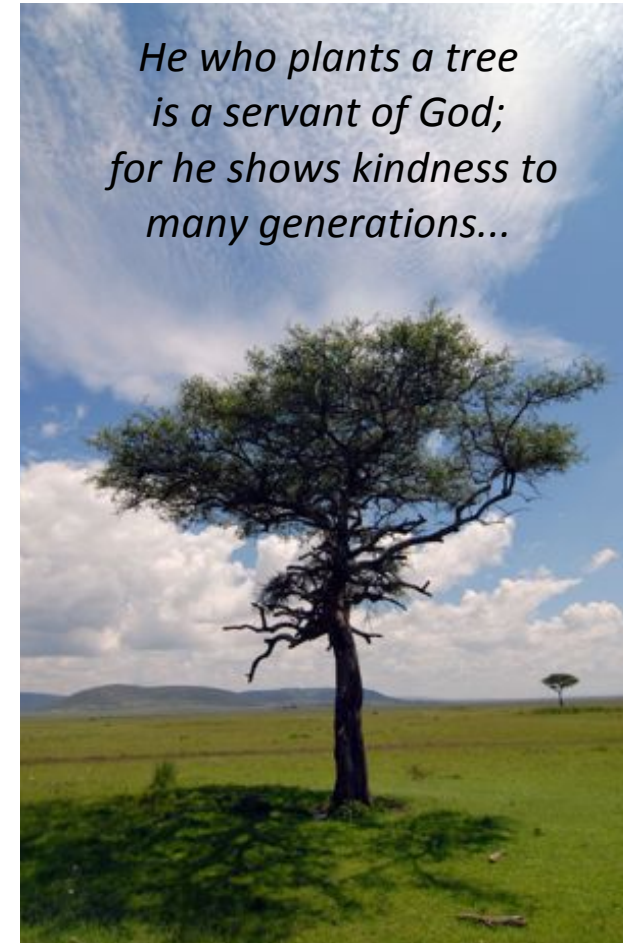
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Images: Martin Sharman (front); Patrick Coin (leaves).  
The paper used in this leaflet comes from FSC woodlands.

# RELIGIOUS FOREST SITES

*He who plants a tree  
is a servant of God;  
for he shows kindness to  
many generations...*



*...and he shall be blessed  
by them in all seasons*

- Henry Van Dyke

# ARC

## RELIGIOUS FOREST SITES PROGRAMME

ARC is working with faith groups around the world to help them manage forests in ways that are in line with their values and beliefs, and to ensure international recognition of the spiritual, cultural, economic and conservation value of religious forests.

Faiths own approximately 5% of the world's forests and influence even more in terms of use and management. In 2005, an ARC-WWF report, *Beyond Belief*, found sacred groves are some of the oldest forms of forest protection in the world, with high levels of biodiversity, yet the powerful role of faith beliefs and practices in maintaining forests is often overlooked.

### THE PROGRAMME AIMS TO:

- Increase international recognition of religious forest sites and their global value, and of religious groups as integral to the forest;
- Improve management and protection of religious forests and develop faith-consistent models of good forest management;
- Develop a broad coalition of religious groups, environmental experts and other partners to share best practice and provide other support such as training;
- Improve understanding, through theologies of land and forest, of traditional relationships with forests and the faith teachings underpinning conservation action;
- Give the faiths a voice in forest policy.



### WHAT IS A RELIGIOUS FOREST SITE?

Any forested area owned or influenced by faith groups – from a single rare tree maintained in a churchyard to a large commercial forestry holding – can be considered a Religious Forest Site. There are four main criteria for management of religious forest sites:

**Religiously compatible** – honouring the faith's values, beliefs and traditions;

**Environmentally appropriate** – care of the sacred site and harvesting of timber and other products should maintain the forest's biodiversity and ecological processes, while attention is paid to environmental concerns such as recycling;

**Socially beneficial** – local people and wider society should enjoy long-term benefits from these places;

**Economically viable** – the forest should be sufficiently profitable but not at unreasonable cost to the ecosystem or the community.

### KEY INITIATIVES

**Theologies of the forest** – written theologies of the land and forests are being developed to clarify faiths' role in managing, protecting and being protected by forests.



**Commercial forests and ethical purchasing** – helping faith groups manage commercial forestry ethically, according to religious, social and environmental values, and encouraging ethical purchasing policies for sustainable wood and paper products.



**Tree planting in Africa** – ARC is working with Christian and Islamic leaders across Africa to deliver one of the largest ever tree-planting efforts. This will provide income for poor communities, help conserve watersheds, restore degraded land and link with the carbon market to address climate change.

**Mapping religious forests** – Working with Oxford University's Biodiversity Institute, ARC is helping document religious forest sites, to map where they fall within areas of high biodiversity and to identify religious groups as key stakeholders in forest conservation.



**Documenting best practice** – Globally, faith groups are among the greatest stewards of forests and forest resources. ARC is helping to identify and share their best practice in sustainable forestry management and protection.

