



ALLIANCE OF RELIGIONS AND CONSERVATION

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

PRESS RELEASE

Celebration of Faiths and the Environment

*Many Heavens, One Earth:
Faith Commitments for a Living Planet*

Windsor
November 2-4, 2009

Attended by His Royal Highness, The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh
and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr Ban Ki-moon

October, 2009

It has been called “the biggest civil society movement on climate change in history”... Leaders from nine of the world’s major faiths – Baha’ism, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism and Sikhism – will gather in Windsor next month to commit to long-term practical action to save the environment.

They will announce a huge range of practical initiatives, from new faith-based eco-labelling standards for Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism to the planting of 8.5 million trees in Tanzania; from sourcing sustainable fuel for India’s Sikh gurdwaras (which feed 30 million people every day) to the greening of religious buildings and introducing eco tourism policies for pilgrimages – still the world’s biggest travel events.

So significant is this move that UN Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr Ban Ki-moon will make a keynote address at the Celebration, which will be hosted by HRH The Prince Philip, founder of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation. This gathering of nearly 200 faith and secular leaders on November 2-4 comes a month before the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit in December and is:

- The first major, internationally-coordinated commitment by the religions to the environment and aims to shape the behaviour and attitudes of the faithful for generations to come;
- Supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and major secular bodies, including the World Bank, Conservation International, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Fairtrade, WWF, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and the Soil Association. They will be at the Celebration to commit to working with the faiths on the environment;
- Called a Celebration because despite the gloom surrounding the environmental challenge ahead, these initiatives show that there is much to hope for and be positive about.

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THE WINDSOR CELEBRATION

The Celebration has been organised by the UK-based international body, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) in conjunction with the UNDP. UN Assistant Secretary-General Olav Kjørven has described it as: “the biggest civil society movement on climate change in history”, and: “the biggest mobilisation of people and communities that we have ever seen on this issue”.

The religious leaders coming to the Celebration are the decision-makers and implementers in the faiths, rather than simply the speech makers and figureheads; this is about practical action to be implemented now.

They include: leading Saudi Arabian scholar **Dr Solman Al-Ouda**; **Rev Canon Sally Bingham**, president of Interfaith Power and Light Campaign in the US; **Rt Rev and Rt Hon Dr Richard Chartres**, Bishop of London; **Rev Fletcher Harper**, Executive Director of the US’s Green Faith; **Archbishop Hilarion** of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate; **Master Huang Xinyang**, Vice President of the China Daoist Association; **Rev Dr Samuel Kobia**, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches; His Eminence **Seraphim Kykkotis**, Archbishop of Johannesburg and Pretoria of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa; **Rabbi Michael Melchior**, leader of the new Green Movement-Meimad party in the Israeli Knesset; **Archbishop Valentine Mokiwa**, President of the All Africa Conference of Churches; **Rt Rev Nyansako-ni-Nku**, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon; **Shaunika Risi Das**, Director of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies; **Rt Rev Thomas Samuel**, Bishop of Madhya Kerala, Church of South India; **Rabbi Zalman Schachter Shalomi**; **Rabbi Yedidya Sinclair**, co-founder of the Jewish Climate Change Initiative in Israel; **Dr Rajwant Singh**, Chairman of the Inter Sikh Council on Religion and Education; **Venerable Hiek Sopheap**, Executive Director of the Cambodia-based Association of Buddhists for the Environment; **Bishop Walter Thomas** of the US-based New Psalmist Baptist Church; and **Abbot Yang Shihua** of Maoshan Daoist Temple, China.

BACKGROUND

ARC is a secular body that helps the major religions of the world to develop their own environmental programmes, based on their own core teachings, beliefs and practices. UNDP, in partnership with ARC, launched its programme to work with the world’s major faiths to tackle climate change and environmental issues in December 2007. The faiths were asked to consider how they could develop Long Term Commitments for a Living Planet which would shape the behaviour and outlook of the faithful for generations to come. They’ve come up with a huge number of initiatives, based on their own beliefs and practice, which will be rolled out in the shape of Five, Seven, Eight and Nine Year plans.

WHY THE FAITHS?

Most people around the world adhere to a religion – the faiths reach out to 85 per cent of the world’s 6.79 billion people. There are 2.1 billion Christians worldwide; 1.34 billion Muslims; more than 950 million Hindus; 50-70 million Daoists; 24 million Sikhs and 13 million Jews (*source: Atlas of Religion, published by Earthscan, 2007*). So what the faiths do or don’t do with their assets and their influence matters a great deal. The faiths:

- are major land owners – they own 7-8 per cent of the habitable land surface of the planet;
- have vast media networks;
- major providers of health and education – they are involved in more than half of all schools worldwide;
- control more than 7 per cent of international financial investments;
- are often trusted where government and military leaders are not.

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Perhaps most important of all, the faiths can also be tremendous sources of inspiration and hope at a time when many people can feel despair at the scale of the environmental challenge facing the world, says ARC Secretary General Martin Palmer: "Religions for centuries have helped energise people and communities for action. They offer stability and resilience in a world where too many initiatives fail through lack of deep roots, and can bring a long-term perspective which will be based more on optimism than fear."

NEW INITIATIVES

Among the many initiatives to be announced at the Celebration will be:

- new faith-based eco-labelling systems in Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism;
- 8.5 million trees to be planted in Tanzania;
- all Daoist temples in China to be solar powered;
- 10 Muslim cities to be chosen to lead implementation of the Muslim Seven Year Action Plan;
- moves to source ecologically sustainable fuel sources for Sikh gurdwaras in India, which feed 30 million poor people every day;
- greening of all types of religious buildings;
- protecting sacred forests (the faiths own or manage 5 per cent of the world's forests);
- printing sacred books on environmentally-friendly paper (15 million Qur'ans are printed each year and around 75 million Bibles);
- extensive environmental education programmes through the faiths' formal and informal role in schools;
- plus more exciting initiatives to be announced at Windsor.

MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES

The three-day programme is extremely tight but there will be some opportunities to interview key delegates. A pool photographer/cameraman will be on hand to photograph/film the part of the event at Windsor Castle, on Tuesday. NB: Due to security considerations, media access to Windsor Castle itself is extremely limited. However, pool media will be available on the Palace rota. There will be opportunities to interview key delegates: please talk directly to ARC.

There is a public event at the Friends Meeting House in Euston, where Gandhi once spoke, on the evening of November 4: <http://www.quaker.org.uk/manyheavens> It includes several key speakers from the Windsor conference, including Olav Kjørven of UNDP, Nigel Savage of Hazon, Sally Bingham of Interfaith Power and Light, a leading Muslim proponent of environmental action (TBC), Rob Soutter of WWF-International, Martin Palmer of ARC, and others. It will be complemented by performances by leading Indian dancer Anusha Subramanyam, director for Dance India 2009, Narguess Farzad, a specialist in Persian language and poetry from SOAS, and the New Baptist Psalmist Choir, which has created a special gospel version of the Anglo-Saxon poem *Dream of the Rood*, called *That's What the Cross Would Say* each of them about a moment in their faith tradition when nature is imagined to have spoken aloud.

www.windsor2009.org/page10.htm

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