



# MANY HEAVENS ONE EARTH OUR CONTINENT



AFRICAN FAITH COMMITMENTS FOR A LIVING PLANET: NAIROBI, KENYA, SEPTEMBER 2012

## **PRESS RELEASE ALLIANCE OF RELIGIONS AND CONSERVATION September 18, 2012, Nairobi KENYA**

Working with religions will go to the top of United Nations Environment Program agenda in Africa, UNEP Regional Representative for Africa said today.

"I really realised, just coming this morning that we could be *more* successful, we could be *more* relevant to the needs and aspirations of the continent, we could have more impact in all African countries if we can work with you [the faiths] hand in hand," said UNEP director and Regional Representative, Mounkaila Goumandakoye, speaking off the cuff at a gathering of more than 50 senior African faith leaders, launching 26 long-term environmental plans.

"And I think this is one area definitely that I will make sure we put it top of my priorities," Mr Goumandakoye added.

The Christian, Muslim and Hindu traditions launching these strategic action plans represented more than 184 million followers in some of the most environmentally threatened parts of the planet.

They come from Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe cover a wide range of ecological activities including planting millions of trees, setting up TV stations and programmes, holding Environment Days, making teaching of such subjects both widespread and interesting, and protecting local wildlife.

ARC has published all these plans together as a booklet - '*Many Heavens, One Earth, Our Continent*' – that can be downloaded as a free pdf file from:

[http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/African\\_Commitments\\_web-FINAL.pdf](http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/African_Commitments_web-FINAL.pdf)

Dr Ali Mohamed, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Mineral Resources endorsed his belief in the key role religions should and can play in protecting the planet:

"We in the Ministry of Environment are particularly encouraged that an Alliance between religions and conservation exists to assist in the response to challenges of global environment," he wrote in a statement read by his colleague Richard Mwendandu, Director of Multilateral Environmental Agreements, Ministry of Environment and Mineral Resources.

"The basic tenet for all faiths is generally deep respect for God's creations and the appreciation of the delicate balance and harmony that exist in the functioning of the universe as established by the Creator... To this end, Religious leaders and Environmental Ministries and Organisations are natural allies who should always work together," the permanent secretary added.

"Maybe it's a new awakening," Mr Mwendandu said in an interview.

The faith plans have taken around 18 months to put together with the assistance of the UK-based Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC). This NGO was started by HRH Prince Philip in 1995 with the specific hope that faiths might help protect animal species from extinction – because protecting Creation is part of the teachings of each faith.

Acting Ambassador for Norway, Elin Bergithe Rognlie attended the launch. “The Alliance of Religions and Conservation provides an example for others to follow in a world too often marked by religious tension and conflicts,” she said.

She drew attention to the women-led tree nurseries in Tanzania and Uganda, the training in sustainable agriculture in Ethiopia, Nigeria and Rwanda, the environmental education programs in Kenya and Ghana: Norway has been a major donor in the creation of these long-term plans and the ambassador said she could foresee that this could continue to be a major area in which Norway works with ARC and the faiths.

The Methodist Church in Kenya with three million members, a university, major hospital and 533 schools, has drawn up a long-term environmental plan. It has committed to set up an Intensive Agricultural Training Centre to train in environmentally friendly and sustainable farming techniques, and will also organize creation awareness courses in schools and on radio programmes.

“The initiative to draw an environmental policy for our church was born following a conference with ARC in 2011 in Nairobi,” said presiding bishop of the Methodist Church in Kenya Rev Fr Stephen Kanyaru M’Impwii.

“In response I felt convicted that God’s call is for us to be caring over all that he has given us according to his wisdom and that our failure (sin) has led to destruction, poverty and death of many. We therefore, as God’s children, must arise to our God-given responsibilities.”

Further north, the Ugandan Muslim Youth Assembly has concentrated on forest and tree planting, with 50,000 trees planted in the past two years, and more than 700,000 trees planned for the next two.

Imam Ibban Iddih Kasozi explained that people are cutting down trees for construction, furniture, and fuel: “Wood is the biggest fuel source in Uganda,” he said. “The only way of ensuring there is wood for the next generations is to do this programme.”

“Our community believes in community work. All is jama, all is congregation: we believe that everything that we do is a prayer: this is why we have undertaken this plan.”

Elimringi Abraham Maringo from the Northern Diocese of the Lutheran Church of Tanzania said a whole generation had grown up never planting a tree and they were the ones cutting the trees down. That is why all faith groups should engage young people in nurturing the care of trees so that this generation loves trees and sees them as their responsibility. The church plans to plant 8.5 million trees.

ARC’s head of Africa projects Alison Hilliard said it was inspiring to see all the extraordinary work being done by faiths in Africa. “I have been working on these programmes for many years, and I am constantly surprised and moved by the creative and energetic responses

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from faiths. Each plan is different, according to what the faith can do, and sees is important. I look forward, many years into the future, to seeing the fruits of these extraordinary initiatives being launched today."

The programme emphasised the centrality in all faiths of thanksgiving and celebration for creation; it included singing and a chanted poem from the choir of All Saints Cathedral Primary School and the girl's choir from the Muslim Academy, Nairobi.

[www.arcworld.org](http://www.arcworld.org) and <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=580>

#### **FURTHER QUOTES:**

##### **-- Mounkaila Goumandakoye (from written speech)**

"The commitments of the faith groups in environment conservation for human well-being are among the most important driving forces for positive change as humanity is grappling with challenges of colossal consequences.

"Self-interest of man, egoism of nations seems to shape the agenda. I am personally convinced that we have not succeeded in reversing some of the trends of environmental degradation because we fail to look at the issues through the lenses of spirituality, morality and faith. I am convinced that the responsibility taken by the faith groups, the long term commitments for a living planet of the faith groups will help shape the beliefs, behaviour and actions for a greener and better Africa."

##### **-- Statement by Dr Ali D Mohamed, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Mineral Resources (his statement was presented by Richard Mwendandu, director Multilateral Environmental Agreements, Ministry of Environment and Mineral Resources)**

Kenyans are religious people, and I have no doubt that messages from such a meeting will resonate well with most Kenyans. We in the Ministry of Environment are particularly encouraged that an Alliance between religions and conservation exists to assist in the response to challenges of global environment.

The basic tenet for all faiths is generally deep respect for God's creations and the appreciation of the delicate balance and harmony that exist in the functioning of the universe as established by the Creator... To this end, Religious leaders and Environmental Ministries and Organisations are natural allies who should always work together. Environmental conservation is usually about moral values.

Conservation of water catchment areas and wetlands remain a priority activity in the ministry. We therefore invite the Alliance to join us realising these endeavours.

##### **-- Acting Ambassador for Norway, Elin Bergithe Rognlie**

I am confident that your environmental projects will make a difference: in the long term of course by helping to protect the environment for future generations. But you are going to make a significant difference in the shorter term too. By launching these projects in a region where so many people depend directly on the natural resources for survival and

development you will help in securing the livelihood and food security of those who need it most.

#### **Notes to editors**

#### **CELEBRATION DETAILS**

**Date:** Tuesday 18 September 2012

**Venue:** Desmond Tutu Conference Centre, All Africa Conferences of Churches, Nairobi, Kenya

**Time:** 9am-12.30pm

The official launch ceremony will include:

- Opening prayer by Archbishop Eliud Wabukala, Primate of the Anglican Church of Kenya
- Welcoming addresses by Archbishop Valentine Mokiwa, President of the All Africa Conference of Churches and Primate of the Anglican Church of Tanzania, and ARC Secretary General Martin Palmer
- Speeches by:
  - Elin Bergithe Rognlie, Acting Ambassador of the Norwegian Embassy in Kenya
  - Mounkaila Goumandakoye, Regional Director, United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for Africa
  - Dr Ali Mohamed, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Mineral Resources, Government of Kenya
- Presentation of certificates by Sir Miles Hunt-Davis, International President of ARC
- Songs and prayers by children of the All Saints Cathedral Primary School and Nairobi Muslim Academy
- Blessing and presentation of tree seedlings to Kenyan faith leaders and to the school children

**Media interviews:** There will be an opportunity to interview faith leaders from **12.30-1pm, Sept 18.**

**Photographs:** The celebration will offer good picture opportunities – especially the blessing and presentation of seedlings to faith leaders and school children. In addition, a selection of images from faith groups engaged in environmental action may be downloaded from ARC's Flickr site. ARC will add images of the celebration during the Nairobi event. Visit: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/53990852@N05/sets/72157631303772102/>

**Rest of the Celebration:** The *Many Heavens One Earth Our Continent* celebration continues over the next two days, with a workshop in which faith groups will discuss how to mobilise their communities, sustainable agriculture, agroforestry, education and building partnerships. Media are welcome to attend.

#### **FAITH GROUPS LAUNCHING LONG-TERM PLANS**

*Cameroon* – Presbyterian Church in Cameroon

*Ethiopia* – Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus – Development and Social Services Commission; Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council; Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church – Development and Inter Church Aid Commission

*Ghana* – Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana

*Kenya* – Anglican Church of Kenya; Bhumi Africa; Catholic University of Eastern Africa – Centre for Social Justice and Ethics; Full Gospel Churches of Kenya; Kenya Episcopal Conference; Methodist Church in Kenya; Presbyterian Church of East Africa; Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM)

*Nigeria* – Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja; Qadiriyyah Movement in Nigeria

*Rwanda* – Council of Protestant Churches in Rwanda

*South Africa* – Anglican Church of Southern Africa

*Sudan* – Sammaniya Sufi Order

*Tanzania* – Bukoba Catholic Diocese; Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania; National Muslim Council of Tanzania (BAKWATA);

*Uganda* – Bunyoro Kitara Diocese, Church of Uganda; Greening Initiatives (Uganda Muslim Supreme Council and Uganda Muslim Women Association); Green Top – Tree Planting Project (Humanitarian Efforts and Relief Uganda and Uganda Muslim Youth Assembly)

*Zimbabwe* – Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa; United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

#### **BACKGROUND**

ARC is a secular, UK-based, international NGO that helps the major religions of the world to develop their own environmental programmes, based on their own core teachings, beliefs and practices. The African Faith Commitments grew out of an ARC/UNDP initiative to engage the world's major faiths in action to tackle climate change and environmental issues. In November 2009, 31 faith groups from around the world launched long-term plans aimed at shaping the behaviour and outlook of the faithful for generations to come. UN Assistant

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Secretary-General, Olav Kjørven, described it as “potentially 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.” Now African faith groups are joining this global movement by the religions and launching their own long-term plans to protect the planet. More than 90% of Africans describe themselves as either Christian or Muslim. Out of a population of 819 million people in sub-Saharan Africa, 470 million are Christian and 234 million are Muslim. Faith groups make up the largest sector of civil society.

#### **MORE INFORMATION**

- <sup>1</sup> Details of the membership numbers of each faith group are listed in each group’s long-term plan which are all available on the Africa pages on the ARC website, [www.arcworld.org](http://www.arcworld.org).
- For an overview of the African Faith Commitments, visit: <http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/African-Faith-Commitments-overview.pdf>.
- For details of all of the plans, download a PDF of ARC’s *Many Heavens, One Earth, Our Continent* book, from this link: [http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/African\\_Commitments\\_web-FINAL.pdf](http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/African_Commitments_web-FINAL.pdf). Please be aware that it is a 6.5MB document.

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