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Faith leaders and senior UN officials meet in Bristol, UK, on Sept 8-9 to discuss working together to improve life for millions of people worldwide

1 September 2015: Faith leaders from around the world and senior United Nations officials will gather in Bristol, UK, next week to discuss how to work together to implement the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aimed at lifting people out of poverty and creating a more sustainable planet.

The UN Bristol meeting, entitled: *Faith in the Future*, takes place on **September 8-9, 2015, Marriott Royal Hotel** in Bristol – currently Green Capital of Europe – and is co-hosted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UK-based Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC).

The aim is to discuss how faith groups can work in partnership with the UN and other groups to support the SDGs, which will set the direction of development work worldwide for the next 15 years. The [17 goals](#) will be adopted by the UN Member States during the Sustainable Development Summit on September 25 in New York and replace the Millennium Development Goals which expire at the end of 2015.

The meeting will be attended by 24 faith traditions and faith-based organisations as well as by representatives from the United Nations, the World Bank, The Nature Conservancy, WWF and the Governments of France and Germany.

The faiths are the biggest organised element of civil society and major providers of health, education and relief services worldwide. During the UN Bristol Meeting, the faiths will announce their own 10-year commitments to sustainable development, the Bristol Commitments.

Martin Palmer, Secretary General of ARC, said: “The Bristol Commitments are specific, faith-related, detailed programmes of work by faith communities from around the world, each inspired by their own values and beliefs, and will make a significant contribution to improving life for millions of people around the world.

“The reason why they are for 10 years, not 15, is to enable the faiths to take stock of what they have or haven’t achieved, and adjust them for the final five years of the SDG process.”

Examples of the faith commitments include:

- Buddhist organisation, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement of Sri Lanka, is launching a range of initiatives to help poor people, including micro-finance, micro-credit and livelihoods support programmes. (*SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere.*)
- The Shinto of Japan are building the Great Forest Wall, a five-metre high embankment retained by sustainable forest as a buffer against future tsunamis. (*SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.*)
- The Church of England is disinvesting from specific segments of the fossil fuel industry and companies that derive more than 10% of their revenues from the extraction of oil sands or thermal coal. (*SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.*)
- Many faiths, including the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims and the Church of Uganda, are training people in faith-based forms of climate-smart, sustainable agriculture such as Farming

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God's Way (Christian) and Islamic Farming (Muslim). (SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, promote sustainable agriculture.)

- Many faiths, including Muslims in Uganda, the Catholic Church in Kenya and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, are planting trees to restore lost forest cover. (SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss.)
- Muslims in Indonesia are raising awareness among the annual 280,000 Indonesian pilgrims to Mecca to transform the Hajj into a green pilgrimage. (SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.)
- Led by the Bhumi Project (a worldwide Hindu response to climate change), Hindus are developing a global network of Hindu women, including businesswomen, politicians, scientists, and religious leaders, to be role models for young women and girls. (SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.)
- The Jesuits provide education to 175 million refugees and internally displaced people, as well as to millions of poor people. It is stepping up its work in this area. (SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.)
- American Quakers are working with marginalised constituencies, particularly where exclusion or oppression exist along dimensions such as ethnicity, race, gender, class, religion, sexual identity, age, physical disability, or ideology. (16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.)

Paul Ladd, UNDP Director Post-2015 Team, said: "During the post-2015 negotiations, governments and civil society worked together towards a common agenda, so that transformational change can take place. The world's faith communities will play an important role in the upcoming implementation of the new agenda, mobilising people around the world to support the achievement of the 17 SDGs by 2030."

Martin Palmer said: "For Britain to host this historic meeting between major sectors of the UN and the major faiths of the world is very significant. Increasingly, international organisations, such as the UN and the World Bank are exploring how to work in partnership with the faiths – the largest and most socially active sector of civil society in virtually every country in the world, with the exception of North Korea.

"This is why, in the new vision for development which forms the basis of the Sustainable Development Goals to be launched in late September at the UN, working with the world's major faiths is seen as a new priority.

"The historic meeting in Bristol marks the coming of age of faith and secular working side by side, each inspired by their own values and beliefs and finding common cause in working to make life better, not just for billions of people, but for all life on the planet."

The UN Bristol meeting will open on Tuesday, 8 September, with a Procession and Welcome Ceremony. Faith leaders and secular representatives will process from the Marriott Royal Hotel to the 800-year-old Lord Mayor's Chapel. They will be greeted by The Lord Mayor, Clare Champion-Smith, and her Sword Bearer on behalf of Bristol. George Ferguson, Bristol's first elected mayor, will host a dinner for the delegates at At-Bristol on Tuesday night.

Notes for editor:

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Details: Date: **Tues 8 and Wed 9 Sept**
Place: **Marriott Royal Hotel, College Green, Bristol BS1 5TA**
Time: **9am**

Media opps: **9am-10.15am, Tues 8:** Welcome Ceremony: Faith leaders will process from the Marriott Royal to the Lord Mayor's Chapel, and will be greeted by The Lord Mayor, Clare Campion-Smith, and her Sword Bearer on behalf of Bristol.
12.30pm: Formal presentation of the Bristol Commitments to Deputy Secretary-General Magdy Martinez-Soliman.

For interview requests, please contact Susie Weldon (ARC) or Antje Watermann (UNDP).
Event photographs will be available to download from Flickr: <http://tinyurl.com/p3ua5hn>
Event hashtags: #promise2015 and #action2015

About ARC: ARC works with the world's major faiths to help them develop environmental programmes based on their own beliefs, teachings and practices. It was founded by HRH The Prince Philip in 1995 and is based in Bath, UK. www.arcworld.org

About UNDP: UNDP partners with people at all levels of society to help build nations that can withstand ground in more than 170 countries and territories, we offer global perspective and local insight to help empower lives and build resilient nations. www.undp.org

SDGs: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Post-2015 Development Agenda will be formally adopted by the UN Sustainable Development Summit on September 25 in New York. There are 17 new goals. To find out more, visit: <http://undp.org/globalgoals>