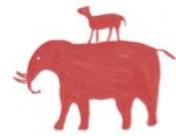




MANY HEAVENS ONE EARTH OUR CONTINENT



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

Christian, Muslim and Hindu faith groups in sub-Saharan Africa launch long-term action plans to protect the environment 18 September 2012, Nairobi, Kenya

For immediate release – September 5, 2012

Faith groups in sub-Saharan Africa are mobilising to protect the environment in what the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) believes is the biggest civil society movement on climate change the Continent has seen.

This month, 26 Christian, Muslim and Hindu groups, which between them have 183.86 million¹ followers, will launch long-term action plans on environmental care at a celebration organised by ARC. The *Many Heavens One Earth Our Continent* celebration will be held from 18-20 September, 2012 at the All Africa Conference of Churches' Desmond Tutu Conference Centre in Nairobi, Kenya. It will be attended by senior representatives of faith groups from Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

The plans, which have been developed over the past 18 months, outline the environmental actions the faith groups commit to taking over the next seven years and include each group's faith mandate to protect the environment. In particular, the plans focus on practical action to:

- Plant millions of trees across Africa;
- Launch major awareness campaigns on the environment and global warming;
- Engage in extensive environmental education (more than half the schools in these countries are run by the faiths; they also have huge influence in community groups, women's groups and youth networks);
- Train their people in sustainable farming.

"With 90 per cent of Africa's population being either Christian or Muslim, the way to the heart of Africa is through faith. And faith is at the heart of these plans," says ARC Secretary General Martin Palmer. "Faith groups all around Africa are rediscovering how the mandate to protect the richness of God's Creation is clearly set out in their holy texts and this is leading to profound practical action – everything from restoring habitats and planting trees to reducing energy use and training young people in environmental care and protection."

Mr Palmer added: "In 2009, when 31 faith groups from around the world launched long-term plans on the environment at ARC's Windsor Celebration, UN Assistant 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'.

"With these inspiring and carefully developed plans, African faith groups are also responding to the challenge facing our planet. We believe they constitute the biggest – and potentially the most important – civil society movement on climate change yet seen in Africa. Faith groups are the biggest element of civil society. They are trusted where politicians and governments are not and they are key to changing perceptions and behaviour to protect the planet."

For example, for the first time, Ethiopia's 40,000 mosques will each commit to planting 5,000 trees over the next three years. Some of them will become eco mosques, establishing woodlots in order to become self sufficient in their fuel supply. Each eco mosque will have its own tree-planting club running workshops and annual Tree Days as part of a wider effort to lead and educate the community in environmental action.

Other faith groups are also engaging in tree planting on a grand scale. For example:

- In Uganda, the Muslim Green Top Tree planting project aims to distribute, plant and grow 2.5 million seedlings for fruit and agroforestry as part of its plan;
- The Council of Protestant Churches in Rwanda has committed to planting one million trees a year for the next seven years;
- Christians from the Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania propose planting 8.5 million trees as community forests in the deforested Mount Kilimanjaro region;
- 5 million trees are to be planted at church and community levels in the Church of Uganda's Bunyoro Kitara Diocese;
- The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ghana, along with the interfaith body, RELBONET, is mobilising 10,000 Christian and Muslim congregations to plant 7 million trees in seven years.

Alison Hilliard, co-ordinator of ARC's Africa programme, says the launch of the long-term faith commitments marks an extraordinary moment for the environment in Africa. "These are exciting plans. Many are ambitious and will require outside funding and partnership to get them off the ground. Others will happen because the faith groups who have drawn them up are convinced that this is the right thing for them to do," she says.

"Catholic leaders have called this a 'moment of grace' – a chance to move towards a different future. The Orthodox Christian Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, put it another way, calling this our 'Kairos moment': a moment where extraordinary things can happen – where we can act and offer a new vision of a new way of living. These long-term plans are part of that vision."

The Nairobi celebration will also include the launch of faith pledges to protect wildlife in Africa, organised in partnership with WWF. In the past five years alone, rhino poaching has increased over 3,000 per cent while last year witnessed the highest recorded rates of elephant poaching in Africa. Illegal killing for trade is the biggest factor in the decline of these animals. While every faith has teachings about protecting creation, this will be the first time major faiths of Africa come together to pledge to protect wildlife species.

The *Many Heavens One Earth Our Continent* celebration is funded by the World Bank, with support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the USAID-supported Africa Biodiversity Collaborative Group. This programme has been supported by the World Bank as part of its TerrAfrica partnership, which involves 20 countries and focuses on land degradation in sub-Saharan Africa including sustainable land management such as agroforestry, water harvesting and erosion control.

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.**

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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 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

- ¹ 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.
- 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. Please be aware that it is a 6.5MB document.

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