

FRENCH PRESIDENT SENDS PERSONAL LETTER TO ALL HEADS OF STATE WHO WILL BE AT COP IN DECEMBER

PARIS: November 18, 2015 A dramatic appeal, sent this week personally by French President Francois Hollande to every Head of State attending the opening event on the 30th November of the Paris Climate Change COP asks each of them to answer a simple question “Why Do I Care” about the climate.

In this Appeal, the participants to the Summit of Conscience held in Paris in July asked world leaders to address this question “from our own individual personal consciences”.

President Hollande signals this Appeal to the attention of the Heads of States and Governments coming to Paris on November 30th, including US President Barack Obama, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

“In our contemporary world it is very rare that we are asked to talk about what lies at the heart of our actions. Instead we hide behind statistics, data, policy statements etc, few of which actually touch other people’s hearts and minds,” the Appeal says.

This radical new approach of asking people to go beyond formal statements and discussions to examine their own motivations for taking action on the environment is a result of the initiative taken nearly two years ago when President Hollande appointed Nicolas Hulot, the famous French environmentalist and TV star, as his Special Envoy of the President of the Republic for the Protection of the Planet.

The idea was for Hulot to help create a much wider sense of involvement in the COP and to support and encourage civil society to become real partners for change.

Working with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), Arnold Schwarzenegger’s R20 and the French publisher Bayard, a Summit of Conscience was held in July in Paris, co-hosted by President Hollande.

This brought together key religious leaders including: the Vatican’s Cardinal Turkson who is the Pope’s lead advisor on environmental issues; “The Green Patriarch”, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,”; Master Zhang Gaocheng, Vice President of the China Daoist Association; Dr Rajwant Singh, President of EcoSikh and Sheikh Khaled Bentounes, Sufi (Muslim) leader from Algeria.

They were joined by artistic and political figures including renowned Brazilian photographer and founder of The Earth Initiative, Sebastiao Salgado; environmental activist Vandana Shiva from India; Senator Loren Legarda of the Philippines (who herself was so inspired that she organised a summit of conscience in Manila) and Jean-Paul Delevoye, President of the Conseil Economique, Social et Environmental of the French Republic.

Each of them contributed their own response to the question “Why Do I Care?” and along with hundreds of other such leaders, their personal statements can be seen on the Why Do I Care website (<http://www.whydoicare.org>)

The idea of asking such a personal question arose from the experience of ARC, in particular the Valuesquest joint project developed with the Club of Rome which sought to go beyond conventional economic or political stances and delve into the core values which actually motivate people. It also built upon the experience of R20 and the role that Schwarzenegger’s own personal profile and commitment has made in drawing cities and provinces worldwide into real action on climate change.

“We hope that, as people, they will reflect on their own personal reasons for caring and that this will help them as leaders of nations to go beyond narrow national interests,” says ARC Secretary General and co-host of the Summit Martin Palmer.

“As it says, in the letter we all signed and which President Hollande has taken the extraordinary step of sending personally, ‘we hope that in answering this question, you will come to the COP primarily as a conscious human being not just as a representative of a Government or agency.’ Something more is needed if we are to move forward and protect our planet. We hope and pray this might help that to happen.”

“Why we should care?” asks Nicolas Hulot. “We are often so overwhelmed by our own duties and commitments that we neglect to reflect on essential issues. We fail to define what is ultimately at stake, or to share a fundamental vision.

“While they are in Paris for the COP in December, I hope every stakeholder will at some point go beyond his or her script, beyond his or her assigned duty, and will apply to the mission of climate change as a simple human being.”

“Indeed, what will be at stake in Paris? The very accomplishment of humankind,” he adds.

The tragedy that struck France on November 13 when so many people died in terrorist attacks makes this appeal all the more relevant. As Nicolas Hulot writes, reality will slam us in the face if we continue to sacrifice the essential for the sake of the futile.

May the women, men and children who died in the streets and halls of Paris compel us once and for all to rethink this world as a place where we care.

CONTACT

For more details contact Stephanie Lux at stephanie.lux@elysee.fr

In the UK contact Victoria Finlay at ARC, victoriaf@arcworld.org