

These are the notes used by Martin Palmer, ARC Secretary General for his presentation to Faith in the Future, the Bristol UN Faiths Meeting, September 8-9, 2015. Accompanied by PowerPoint images.

The Faiths: a snap shot of how they are already ensuring sustainable development – and why love, compassion and celebration are central to this

Perhaps one of the best kept secrets in the world is the degree to which the faiths around the world actually keep the planet going, by feeding millions upon millions of people if not billions, caring for them through schools, managing the land, the assets, seeking, in other words, to be a compassionate presence in a world which for many is extraordinarily tough.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a wonderful charter, a vision of what a sustainable planet, where we all work collectively together, could look like. For all the faiths there are elements within the SDGs which have been at the very heart of not just their teachings, but their practices, for hundreds and in some cases thousands of years.

These include:

- care for the stranger;
- compassion;
- hospitals;
- healing;
- education;
- wisdom;
- management of assets;
- and, in many cases, a search for justice;

And, of course, like all human institutions however divinely inspired, they have fallen short, as indeed will all of us with these wonderful goals of the SDGs.

And perhaps part of what the faiths also bring to the exploration of the sustainable development goals is what do you do when things don't work? When things you do for the very best of reasons have unexpected consequences that are not what you hoped for?

And how do you deal with whatever you call it – sin, distress, arrogance, foolishness, wickedness – how do you deal with corruption? These are all issues which will, in one way or another, affect our ability to deliver on the SDGs.

For the faiths it is very important that our role, our contribution, has been recognised again. That we are being invited to the table, that we are being asked to be partners and to help, to assist.

And it is very important for the UN and national governments to know that they have critical but warm and friendly allies who will work with them to deliver these goals.

We have chosen to clump together the 17 goals into 6 key themes and then alongside those, what one might call two key themes, that run beneath them. We have chosen to look at:

- Lifestyle
- Education
- Water
- Energy
- Creation (which encompasses oceans, water, forests and so on)
- Justice and Equality.

Two sub-themes, essential to this meeting, are

- Partnerships and Leadership
- Celebration.

In fact, we would even like to suggest that there be an 18th SDG which is Celebration because the 17 are wonderful visions of what could happen, but if we don't actually say *'thank you'* to people for doing it, *'isn't that amazing that you have achieved that'*; if we don't go *'Wow! That's even bigger and better than we expected'*; if we don't party as well as ask people to fast, then we won't carry many people for long. That's the experience of religion. The goal is you get to a point at which what you've done is worth celebrating.

These 17 goals have targets, but what do you do when you reach them, what do you do when you've halved infant mortality? Yes, you can publish the figures, but what about actually saying, *'we did it! Wasn't that amazing?'*

Why don't we look at when faith-based schools have their opening celebrations and say *'isn't it wonderful that we've got 10 percent more students and we've managed to reach 50/50 girls and boys?'* That's worth celebrating.

In other words, your goal should be that you reach a point at which it's worth celebrating, and saying *'thank you'*:

- not just to God,
- but to the local communities,
- to the people who supported this,
- to the partners,
- to the people who've given their time voluntarily,

because the SDGs will not be delivered by funds, they'll be delivered by people giving their time and energy supported by funds. So we need to celebrate the gifts in kind, and the energy, commitment and passion.

Lifestyle

The faiths have always focused on the living consequences of being a believer. For example, if you take Hinduism, or the Jains, or indeed many strands within Daoism and Buddhism, vegetarianism is a core feature of lifestyle.

And as vegetarians, they are not responsible for the billions of animals that are killed for food, every year. They are not responsible, therefore, for the abuse of the environment that comes through massive herds or through feeding most of the fish catch to animals, or the use of grain that could be feeding people, to fatten cattle that can then be served as burgers for the wealthy world.

So just simply that fact that probably a billion people are vegetarian is itself a lifestyle choice that helps make a more sustainable planet.

We add to that the fact that the Daoist of China are reintroducing the two days per month vegetarian days which is part of the ancient tradition of China and is beginning to be a whole lifestyle movement about saying *'if we don't eat so much meat, we can actually cut back on carbon emissions.'*

If we then look at the growth and the spread of faith consistent farming – whether that's Farming God's way or Islamic farming, which are two programmes that have been developed in partnership with Muslim and Christian organisations in East Africa in particular. I'm thinking here particularly of the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims or the Anglican Church of Uganda, or the Catholic and Anglican Churches in Kenya, plus the Ugandan Muslim networks.

Their contribution in saying *'how can we make our farming more respectful of what God has given us? How can we make the point that God was the first farmer? And therefore give status back to farmers who are often the most despised because they haven't made it into the city and they haven't got a clerical job. They don't sit behind a desk.*

And yet without them, and without them feeling valued as members of society, we are not going to be able to produce the food we need to feed people. And, therefore, we could be looking at the collapse that comes when hunger, when devastation of crops,, comes about.

And, of course, the farmers are the first to detect climate change, are the first to detect desertification, are the first to detect what happens when you cut down all the trees. And therefore they become these vital warning signs as well as the advance guard of protecting nature.

And if we look here at the work that the Shinto have done. Their idea of planting trees as a means of protecting the people, the land, the industry and, not to mention, of course, nuclear power stations... rather than building vast concrete dams and dykes

off the coast of Japan, which will ruin the oceans, destroy the fishing, destroy habitats, destroy livelihoods – there you have a vision from Shinto who have always respected and venerated the trees that give them life. That if we could rebuild or build the great tree wall of Japan, we wouldn't have to be quarrying the material that's needed to make a thousand miles of concrete barrier. We wouldn't be destroying the ocean. So a different vision emerges from that.

Lifestyle is also in terms of, for example, Eco-Sikh in their festival each year – Eco-Sikh Environment day giving a vision of what it is to live organically, to manage your water and energy thoughtfully, all of which ties in very nicely with some of the other big movements such as Earth Hour, the turn the lights off for an hour movement that WWF launched around the world.

The way that Hindus, for example, are looking at food labelling and saying '*well how can we make it clear to people what exactly is in their food so that they can make an educated choice?*'

The Armenian Orthodox Church have developed their Green Hospitality and Green Waste programme, seeing that the two are linked: how do you provide hospitality for the thousands, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who come to Etchamazin or example? How do you give them food that is organic, that is sustainable? That is good for their health but is good for the health of the planet? What do you do with the waste? How do you ecologically and spiritually manage waste, whether that is papers or plastic or bottles? How do you have a programme that respects what we have been given and how we make best use of it?

If you then look at lifestyles from the Muslim perspective, in terms of the Hajj – there is this huge movement worldwide which is now sweeping through the Muslim communities of saying '*we are going on pilgrimage, this is one of the five pillars of Islam, therefore we should not be damaging the planet. We should not be damaging other people's livelihoods, that we could make them into something that works for the good of the people.*'

So the idea is that you have a training programme for those going on pilgrimage so that they travel as gently as possible in terms of the planet – in terms of energy use for flights, of energy while there, the re-invention, re-introduction of traditional pilgrim flasks so you're not taking plastic bottles and dumping them at the end of the pilgrimage.

A hundred million plastic bottles were dumped at the end of the Hajj pilgrimage in 2010. But now, you instead have a flask that you treasure, that you carry with you. The idea that you do not have plastic bags on the Hajj, that you therefore set up the production in Bangladesh by women of hemp bags.

This creates jobs, this creates employment, this creates sustainable use of resources. This means that people have something they take home as a pride saying '*look what I*

carried all the way round the Hajj! So linking in with what we do and making it as ecological, as faith consistent, as faithful as possible is a fundamental element of that approach.

EDUCATION

The faiths contribute to or manage 50% of all schools. In some areas such as sub-Saharan Africa that figure is probably nearer to 65-70% of all schools. And therefore not to work with the faith-based schools is ridiculous.

What has happened in the last few years – particularly with the assistance of the New Psalmist Baptist Church – is that the involvement of UNICEF with faith based schools has begun to be both acknowledged and to grow. And in fact has now become a major element of what UNICEF is trying to do to implement the WASH – water sanitation and hygiene – programme.

Not only is there formal education and the fact that many, many faiths such as the Church of England, the Catholic Church in East Africa, the Islamic Pesantran schools in Indonesia and many, many other schools around the world are now implementing environmental programmes in their schools or creating eco schools.

Not only is there that but we have also been able to see the growth of a faith-based Education for Sustainable Development toolkit. First pioneered in Kenya, now an officially recognised text by the Kenyan Government's education department, and being developed in Tanzania and Uganda and as a result of the big UNESCO meeting on the Education for Sustainable Development Movement in Nagoya, Japan, last year being recommended as a model to be taken up in every country around the world.

To have a faith-based education for sustainable development programme that rolls out internationally will be fundamental to making young people feel that their faith and their faith leaders and faith communities have a central role in the SDG is probably one of the most important collaborative efforts of Muslims, Christians and Hindus who created the first model and now being adopted around the world.

If we look at the Hindu Green Temple education toolkit that's been rolled out across India we see this whole dimension of the voluntary sector of education. There are six major youth organisations in the world which between them have some 400 million young people involved. Of these, four of them – that is the YMCA, YWCA, the Guides and the Scouts – have powerful and strong religious connections. Not all of them but most of them will have a major involvement with religious places of worship and religious communities.

The other two, the Red Cross and the Duke of Edinburgh Award, often are working with or through faith schools, faith-based youth organisations to recruit members and involve them. Here is a huge network and increasingly the faiths are using those networks to get across their sustainable development education message.

Then we look at something like the Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa, founded on Jesuit principles, which is rolling out through Catholic networks across sub-Saharan Africa. Involving young people not just in reading about something but being engaged.

Then we look at the Daoists planning to set up summer camps for young people to take them into the countryside from the overcrowded mega cities of China so that they actually understand something about the world in which they live:

- how food is produced,
- how the forest gives us clean air,
- how the rivers need to be kept clean so we have drinking water.

The involvement of the faiths in education is largely hidden but is beginning to emerge as perhaps one of the most powerful areas where, as a section of two of the most important parts of civil society – *education* and *faith* – they come together *and* can be real power brokers.

WATER

I've already mentioned the fact that the New Psalmist Baptists are working with UNICEF have helped to introduce wash programmes into faith-based schools around the world and next month we will see the launch of the first ever faith-based WASH toolkit which again symbolises what happens when you get a partnership between faith and secular organisations.

Take something like the Indonesian women for water, sanitation and health initiative, set up as part of the Muslim programme. This involves over 28 different women's organisations in Indonesia, Muslim women's organisations, empowering them, giving them a voice, giving them a very clear role and giving lots of practical experience that can be fed back into communities in order to protect water and to provide good sanitation and health in the schools – and not just in the schools but in the mosques and in the communities.

If we look at GreenFaith again, in the USA they've launched the Water Shield, an award given to faith communities of all sorts of backgrounds, not just Christian but Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, for the ways they have managed grey water issues.

Again coming to Islam we have the Hajjar Guide - how to help young people, children in particular,

- understand the preciousness of water,
- the protection of it,
- the good and proper use of it.

The Hindus are involved with the Modi government's new programme on Clean India which picks up on many of the themes that Hindu organisations – for example, in Vrindavan – have been doing for decades on: *How do you protect India? How do you replant the forest? How do you keep the streets clean? How do you deal with waste?*

And on top of that of course the *Clean Ganga* project, something that the Hindu communities have been involved with for many, many years of cleaning the river Ganges. If we then look at again in India, the CPR Environmental Educational Centre and their work with 140 schools, taking them into sacred forests in order for them to understand why these need protection because of the water sources that they provide.

Again we go back to Islam, we go to Indonesia, we go to the island of Ache, where, when the Muslim schools began to work out where their water came from for ritual washing (as well as drinking and sanitation) and why it was diminishing, they noticed this was due to illegal logging about 70 miles further up the water course.

Through their lobbying and activity, the area was made into a national park and protected. So the range of faith based programmes on waters is enormous. If we look, for example, at the Savodiya Buddhist development agency in Sri Lanka, this has been a major focus for them, the provision of clean drinking water, the protection of water sources.

ENERGY

We come to the Hindu Green Temple guide and to the many, many guides that have been produced for churches, for synagogues, for temples, for gurudwaras, for shrines all around the world looking at:

- *How can we best cut back on energy?*
- *How can beautiful and historic places of worship be models for good use of energy, alternative energy.*

Look at:

- The increasing number of places that are developing solar and wind power.
- The role of the Church of England in its *Shrinking the Footprint* programme, trying to reduce the impact of the Church of England's buildings; not just churches but halls, community centres, retreat centres, schools – how can their footprint be cut so as to set a model on how the voluntary and civil society can exceed the goals of energy reductions that are set by governments.
- All the roles of the CoE and many other faiths now in the dis-invest / re-invest movement taking their investments which are massive (the faiths are the third or fourth largest investing group in the world) and moving their funds out of carbon fuels and into alternative fuels – solar, wind and the such like.

If we then look at the *Our Voices Project*, coming out of Green Faith again but the *Our Voices Project* being a major international interfaith movement to get people to speak out, to *pray* out, to hold vigils in preparation for the Paris COP, focusing on climate change as a moral and spiritual issue.

We then look at *Climate Smart Agriculture* as part of the *Faithful Farming project*. The idea that by farming properly you can cut down on the amount of CO₂ produced and in fact be helping the soil to absorb CO₂.

Climate Smart Agriculture is now a major dimension of the whole Faithful Farming movement by Muslim, Christian and Hindu communities, and now increasingly by other faith communities around the world, looking at how can we farm in a way that is faithful to what our faith teaches us about protecting the planet, about caring for the needs of other people, about providing food in a way that is generous to the planet and generous to people's needs and ends hunger.

That's a huge area which is not just:

- about food,
- not just about lifestyle,
- not just about water use,
- not just about energy,
- not just about protecting the rest of creation

but pulls it all together.

CREATION

Creation is the phrase that we use to describe what others would call *eco-systems*.

We look at, for example,

- The Armenian Orthodox Church and the way that they have addressed the issues of their responsibility to the rest of the planet, particularly in terms of tree-planting, of the right use of resources.
- If we then look at the fact that the CoE is now one of the largest forest investors in the UK and they do so on an ecological basis;
- Look at EcoSikh and their programme through their *Sikh Environment Day* which focuses very much on the forests, rivers, water supply systems, on the integrity of the whole of the ecological systems.
- The Islamic fatwa issued initially in Indonesia and now spreading worldwide on the ban on illegal wildlife trade and illegal logging. Both of them are fundamental shifts because never before has there been an Islamic fatwa, an Islamic edict, binding on people literally not just in this world, but for their fate in the next world, that has said that the illegal wildlife trade is against the core tenants of Islam. And that the illegal forestry trade is against the core tenants of Islam and rolling out a five-year education programme for Imams

and Sheiks and school children, for those who manage the Islamic properties, the Islamic funds – a huge programme.

And built into that is also the fact that many of the new Islamic banking programmes, both within multinational banks but particularly within the Islamic banking community, that have turned away from usury - the charging of interest - have done so in order they can then invest into programmes that make sustainable use of the planet. And this programme is now thought to be worth somewhere in the region of \$400 billion dollars of investment. **That whole idea that our use of what God has given us should be for the benefit of all of God's creation is central.**

The whole programme on sacred groves:

- the Shinto programme on sacred groves,
- the Daoist programme on protecting sacred mountains,
- the Hindu sacred groves,
- Buddhist shrines and temples

All around the world the 15% or so of the planet that is considered sacred is now increasingly being protected.

- **In the past, this 15% of sacred forests, mountains, rivers, sacred cities were simply there. Because it was there and because it was respected those sites are better preserved than almost any other.**
- **70% of all national parks around the world have emerged because they were originally sacred and therefore worth turning into a national park as they were in a better state than elsewhere.**

Look at the work that has been done, particularly in India with the tiger reserves and pilgrimage and Hindu temples, where previously groups that were at daggers drawn with each other are now working together to make the life of the pilgrim easier but also to protect the habitat and bio-diversity. These are amazingly exciting things that are going on.

Justice and Equality

In Armenia you have the Armenian Orthodox Church taking up a very active role of advocacy to the Armenian Government and then internationally on issues of environmental justice and justice of the poorest of the poor.

In Tanzania, the Evangelical Lutheran Church is particularly working on programmes for women to give them economic independence to give them education and structures that will enable them to take control of their own lives.

Again I would say that many, many faiths are involved in on climate justice - whether that is:

- the CoE on its dis-invest/re-invest programme;
- the Muslim and Hindu programmes looking at greening pilgrimage;
- Jewish programmes looking at how they can be involved in community supported agriculture so that farmers are not left at the whim of the multinationals but are actually able to have a guaranteed income because Jewish families and communities agreed to buy x amount of food per year and invest in them.
- Or again the post conflict work that's been done in Sri Lanka by the Savodiya Buddhist development agency.

The work that the faiths are doing all around the world to address issues of inequality, not least addressing issues of inequality within themselves. The issue of gender in particular is one that has caused and does cause many faiths to stop and re-assess their own position. And this is something that has a long way to go but is being addressed and explored.

But in terms of investing in advocacy and in having access to highest levels of power, the faiths are probably the most significant group that have a right to speak about justice; even if they are then persecuted, they have a right and an expectation that they will speak about justice.

Goal 17 is about the whole notion of **partnership: how can the faiths work as partners with different organisations around the world in order that the goals of the SDGs can be furthered.** Well, every single one of the faiths that is here today has been able to develop their programmes, their long-term plans, because they've been in partnership. Initially because they were actually asked by the UN to take part in this and to develop programmes.

We have been able, through ARC, to bring in groups like the World Bank, WWF, The Nature Conservancy, to bring in national governments, for example, the Summit of Conscience event held in Paris with the President of France in July this year. We have developed new partnerships with, for example, R2O and Sustania, to launch Faithful Cities – pilgrims for a living planet later this year.

But equally importantly there is the notion of leadership:

- *How can the faiths provide a leadership role in partnership?*
- *How can they be encouraged to be more articulate, to have a sense that they have a right to speak on these issues?*
- *How can they find within the UN the right partners?*
- *Woman religious speaking?*

We've spoken about how The New Psalmist Baptist Church has brokered on behalf of many faiths around the world the partnership with UNICEF on the wash programme.

- *How can that be replicated in other areas?*

- *How can other programmes that are working with the faiths such as Religions for Peace or programmes with the World Council of Churches, or other projects within the UN and World Bank, how can these be brought together?*
- *How can we maximise on the leadership impact? How can we maximise on the partnership?*

The partnership needs not to be: *'we will fund you to do what we say'*. It needs to be: *'This is what we are going to do as a faith. This is what you want to do as a UN. How can we work together and what kind of assistance can we get to enhance the faculties that we have?'*

The fact is that:

- The faiths own 8% of the habitable service of the planet outright.
- That they run over 50% of all schools.
- That they are the 3rd or 4th largest investing group.
- That they are trusted in countries where the government and NGOs and even international governing bodies are not trusted or believed or followed or listened.

How can they play a major role, being your partner on the ground but doing so because it's being faith consistent, not because you're going to tell them what deliverables they have to deliver. **A partnership is not about being told what to do, it's about learning how we can do things better side by side.**

But the leadership training is enormously important. People seem to assume that the faiths are some sort of monolithic block and if one person says *'we will do this'* then everyone else follows suit. Not even the Pope can manage that.

Therefore, how can we help partners to understand the local, the national and international leadership structures? Who actually makes decisions? How are those decisions made? How can those decisions be brought into decision making structure of, for example, World Bank plans, for national reconstruction, UN programmes that are both national or regional.

Cities

The whole greening of pilgrimage movement is trying to help faith cities, cities that have a strong faith dimension such as Echemazin, Armenia, Medina, Makkah, Lourdes, Amritsar, Louguan in China – how can we help these great cities to work with their faiths in order to provide:

- safe drinking water,
- good sanitation,
- food that is sustainable,

- land use that does not abuse the natural resources?
- How can we provide enough accommodation?
- How can we provide energy that is sustainable for these enormous events? **350 million people go on pilgrimage every year – that is almost half of all the travel for events and tourism in the entire world.** This is a massive market to address and the involvement of key cities in working with the faiths on these issues is a major unexpected outcome from the original meeting in Windsor in 2009. And it is one that we are going to continue through Faithful Cities.

The 18th goal: Celebration

And finally we would like to suggest an 18th goal. The 18th goal we would call celebration.

The SDGs is a fabulous list of hoped for transformations and developments. And some of this calls for a certain sense of self-restraint of abnegation, of cutting back, and making do of not spending more or doing more. And human beings are quite good at that – in religions for millennia have been telling people to live more simply.

But you can't just ask people to live more simply without also then saying congratulations! Thank you! Well done!

So our 18th goal would be that at certain points in this process, we should celebrate when things that we didn't think were possible became possible. We should celebrate when we exceed the targets that we set. We should celebrate when we *don't* exceed the targets that were set because actually the difficulties were greater than we thought. We should celebrate on an annual basis.

We all have our festivals. All the major faiths now have a day of the year that is the focal point for celebration. We should be saying thank you to the people who give their time without payment. Who give their resources without remuneration. Who make available spaces and places for events to happen.

The SDGs will not be undertaken primarily by funding. They will be undertaken primarily because people believe they are important. That should be celebrated. We should say thank you. And that is the world of faiths in relationship to the SDGs.