

**‘Real partnership, not tokenism:’ ARC says faith groups need more than
‘just walk-on parts’ in the Sustainable Development Goal process**

September 24, 2015: The Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) calls on the United Nations and other development partners to engage in “real partnership, not tokenism” with faith groups, as the Pope makes an historic address to the UN General Assembly this week.

ARC Secretary General Martin Palmer said for too long the faiths have not only been ignored but often dismissed and patronised – even though more than 80% of the world’s population say they belong to a religion and faith groups are among the world’s biggest providers of education, health and aid.

They needed more than “just walk-on parts in the drama of the Sustainable Development Goal process”, he said: “Let’s be frank. The Pope’s visit to the UN could either be simply seen as a sort of good luck charm that the UN can waive around or it can be the real start of an engagement with civil society’s largest, best organised and most trusted sector – the faiths.”

Pope Francis will address the UN tomorrow ahead of a three-day summit involving more than 150 world leaders who will formally adopt 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will set the global development agenda for the next 15 years.

Martin Palmer said faith groups were already taking action on many of the areas addressed in the SDGs. For example, on September 8-9, 2015, 24 faith groups and faith-based organisations around the world launched far-reaching action plans to help the world’s poorest people.

Known as the Bristol Commitments, they include pledges to develop micro credit schemes for the poor, increase access to education, plant trees, invest in clean energy, green pilgrimage and train people sustainable agriculture. They were launched by traditions from Baha’ism, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism and Sikhism.

“The Bristol Commitments show that the faiths will be doing what the UN called SDGs, whether the UN manages to find the funding and support for them or not,” said Martin Palmer. “The door has been opened a crack. Will the UN, so often constrained by fearful officials and worried national governments, be able to take the bold step of real partnership with the world’s oldest caring organisations? Or will it go back to its usual position of distrust or even worse, patronising of the faiths?”

“The relevance of the UN will to some degree be determined by what happens next. It is fine to have general well-meaning statements of religions supporting good things but that is to give the faiths just walk-on parts in the drama of the SDGs. The Bristol Commitments are real, substantive offers of programmes which are already being rolled out, as being a serious contribution from civil society towards goals which, for a variety of different reasons, so many faiths share with the UN and the World Bank. That is what partnership looks like from the faith perspective.”

Notes for editor:

- For more information about the Bristol UN faiths meeting, or to speak to Martin Palmer, ARC Secretary General, call Susie Weldon on 01225 758 004 or 0797 0466 830, or visit www.arcworld.org.
- To download a copy of the Bristol Commitments, visit: <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=661>.
- To download specific faith commitments: visit: <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=671>
- For photographs of the Bristol UN Faiths Meeting, visit: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/53990852@N05/albums>.

The faith groups and faith-based organisations that have drawn up plans include: The Bahá’í International Community, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (Buddhism), the China Daoist Association, Bhumi Project (Hinduism), Hazon (Judaism),

Great Forest Wall Project (Shinto), Jinja Honcho (Shinto), EcoSikh (Sikhism), GreenFaith, USA (multi-faith), Kenya Organisation for Environmental Education (multi-faith) as well as the following groups from Christianity and Islam.

Christian groups: Armenia Inter-Church Charitable Round Table Foundation (ART); Church of Uganda, Bunyoro Kitara Diocese; Catholic Climate Covenant; Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa (CYNESA); Church of England; Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania; Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops; New Psalmist Baptist Church, Baltimore, USA; Quakers: American Friends Service Committee; Society of Jesus, Secretariat for Social Justice and Ecology

Muslim groups: Global One 2015; Muslims of Indonesia; Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM); Uganda Muslim Youth Assembly (UMYA)

Examples of the faith commitments

- 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 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.*
- Hindus are developing a global network of Hindu women to be role models for girls. 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.
SDG 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.*