



ALLIANCE OF RELIGIONS AND CONSERVATION

launched in 1995 by HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh KG KT

PRESS RELEASE

Celebration of Faiths and the Environment

*Many Heavens, One Earth:
Faith Commitments for a Living Planet*

Windsor
November 2-4, 2009

Attended by His Royal Highness, The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh
and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr Ban Ki-moon

October 19, 2009

It has been called “the biggest civil society movement on climate change in history”... Leaders from nine of the world’s major faiths – Baha’ism, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism and Sikhism – will gather in Windsor next month to commit to long-term practical action to save the environment.

They will announce a huge range of practical initiatives, from new faith-based eco-labelling standards for Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism to the planting of 8.5 million trees in Tanzania; from sourcing sustainable fuel for India’s Sikh gurdwaras (which feed 30 million people every day) to the greening of religious buildings and introducing eco tourism policies for pilgrimages – still the world’s biggest travel events.

So significant is this move that UN Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr Ban Ki-moon will make a keynote address at the Celebration, which will be hosted by HRH The Prince Philip, founder of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation. This gathering of nearly 200 faith and secular leaders on November 2-4 comes a month before the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit in December and is:

- The first major, internationally-coordinated commitment by the religions to the environment and aims to shape the behaviour and attitudes of the faithful for generations to come;
- Supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and major secular bodies, including the World Bank, Conservation International, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Fairtrade, WWF, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and the Soil Association. They will be at the Celebration to commit to working with the faiths on the environment;
- Called a Celebration because despite the gloom surrounding the environmental challenge ahead, these initiatives show that there is much to hope for and be positive about.

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THE WINDSOR CELEBRATION

The Celebration has been organised by the UK-based international body, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) in conjunction with the UNDP. UN Assistant Secretary-General Olav Kjørven has described it as: “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”.

The religious leaders coming to the Celebration are the decision-makers and implementers in the faiths, rather than simply the speech makers and figureheads; this is about practical action to be implemented now.

They include: leading Saudi Arabian scholar **Dr Solman Al-Ouda**; **Rev Canon Sally Bingham**, president of Interfaith Power and Light Campaign in the US; **Rt Rev and Rt Hon Dr Richard Chartres**, Bishop of London; **Rev Fletcher Harper**, Executive Director of the US’s Green Faith; **Archbishop Hilarion** of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate; **Master Huang Xinyang**, Vice President of the China Daoist Association; **Rev Dr Samuel Kobia**, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches; His Eminence **Seraphim Kykkotis**, Archbishop of Johannesburg and Pretoria of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa; **Rabbi Michael Melchior**, leader of the new Green Movement-Meimad party in the Israeli Knesset; **Archbishop Valentine Mokiwa**, President of the All Africa Conference of Churches; **Rt Rev Nyansako-ni-Nku**, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon; **Shaunika Risi Das**, Director of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies; **Rabbi Zalman Schachter Shalomi**; **Rabbi Yedidya Sinclair**, co-founder of the Jewish Climate Change Initiative in Israel; **Dr Rajwant Singh**, Chairman of the Inter Sikh Council on Religion and Education; **Venerable Hiek Sopheap**, Executive Director of the Cambodia-based Association of Buddhists for the Environment; **Bishop Walter Thomas** of the US-based New Psalmist Baptist Church; and **Abbot Yang Shihua** of Maoshan Daoist Temple, China.

BACKGROUND

ARC is a secular body that helps the major religions of the world to develop their own environmental programmes, based on their own core teachings, beliefs and practices. UNDP, in partnership with ARC, launched its programme to work with the world’s major faiths to tackle climate change and environmental issues in December 2007. The faiths were asked to consider how they could develop Long Term Commitments for a Living Planet which would shape the behaviour and outlook of the faithful for generations to come. They’ve come up with a huge number of initiatives, based on their own beliefs and practice, which will be rolled out in the shape of Five, Seven, Eight and Nine Year plans.

WHY THE FAITHS?

Most people around the world adhere to a religion – the faiths reach out to 85 per cent of the world’s 6.79 billion people. There are 2.1 billion Christians worldwide; 1.34 billion Muslims; more than 950 million Hindus; 50-70 million Daoists; 24 million Sikhs and 13 million Jews (*source: Atlas of Religion, published by Earthscan, 2007*). So what the faiths do or don’t do with their assets and their influence matters a great deal. The faiths:

- are major land owners – they own 7-8 per cent of the habitable land surface of the planet;
- have vast media networks;
- major providers of health and education – they are involved in more than half of all schools worldwide;
- control more than 7 per cent of international financial investments;
- are often trusted where government and military leaders are not.

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Perhaps most important of all, the faiths can also be tremendous sources of inspiration and hope at a time when many people can feel despair at the scale of the environmental challenge facing the world, says ARC Secretary General Martin Palmer: "Religions for centuries have helped energise people and communities for action. They offer stability and resilience in a world where too many initiatives fail through lack of deep roots, and can bring a long-term perspective which will be based more on optimism than fear."

NEW INITIATIVES

Among the many initiatives to be announced at the Celebration will be:

- new faith-based eco-labelling systems in Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism;
- 8.5 million trees to be planted in Tanzania;
- all Daoist temples in China to be solar powered;
- 10 Muslim cities to be chosen to lead implementation of the Muslim Seven Year Action Plan;
- moves to source ecologically sustainable fuel sources for Sikh gurdwaras in India, which feed 30 million poor people every day;
- greening of all types of religious buildings;
- protecting sacred forests (the faiths own or manage 5 per cent of the world's forests);
- printing sacred books on environmentally-friendly paper (15 million Qur'ans are printed each year and around 75 million Bibles);
- extensive environmental education programmes through the faiths' formal and informal role in schools;
- plus more exciting initiatives to be announced at Windsor.

MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES

The three-day programme is extremely tight but there will be some opportunities to interview key delegates. A pool photographer/cameraman will be on hand to photograph/film the part of the event at Windsor Castle, on Tuesday. NB: Due to security considerations, media access to Windsor Castle itself is extremely limited. However, pool media will be available on the Palace rota. There will be opportunities to interview key delegates: please talk directly to ARC.

There is a public event at the Friends Meeting House in Euston, where Gandhi once spoke, on the evening of November 4: <http://www.quaker.org.uk/manyheavens> It includes several key speakers from the Windsor conference, including Olav Kjørven of UNDP, Nigel Savage of Hazon, Sally Bingham of Interfaith Power and Light, a leading Muslim proponent of environmental action (TBC), Rob Soutter of WWF-International, Martin Palmer of ARC, and others. It will be complemented by performances by leading Indian dancer Anusha Subramanyam, director for Dance India 2009, Narguess Farzad, a specialist in Persian language and poetry from SOAS, and the New Baptist Psalmist Choir, which has created a special gospel version of the Anglo-Saxon poem *Dream of the Rood*, called *That's What the Cross Would Say* each of them about a moment in their faith tradition when nature is imagined to have spoken aloud.

www.windsor2009.org/page10.htm

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LONG-TERM PLANS BY CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

The Church's mission to protect sacredness: The fragrance of sacredness protects the earth; without it the earth will be no more than a piece of raw material. If the earth and its life should be degraded to mere raw material, the earth would rise against humankind in the greatest slave revolt in history...

...Let the eyes of your grandchild be your confessional mirrors.

Martin Lönnebo, Swedish Bishop Emeritus at the General Synod 2007. (From the Church of Norway's 10 year plan)

Eighteen Christian faith traditions have created long-term plans for environmental action, each of which is special to their own strengths and outreach. Some are deeply ambitious – the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania's Northern Diocese, for example, intends to plant 8.5 million trees in the Kilimanjaro region of Tanzania to tackle serious deforestation – while others focus on encouraging their members to adopt lifestyle changes for lasting change and impact.

Climate change and the natural environment as a moral issue

What all have in common is the recognition that how we treat the earth is a moral issue – that caring for God's Creation is an imperative for the faithful. These long-term plans signify the growth of a movement that, in the words of the US interfaith ministry The Regeneration Project, "addresses ecological issues from theological roots". Many have widened this moral issue to include broader issues of justice and fairness:

- The Church of England recently set up the Climate Justice Fund to compensate communities overseas who are suffering most from the impacts of climate change;
- The Lutheran Church of Norway says that as a major oil producer, Norway has a special responsibility to mitigate the effects of petroleum extraction and protect vulnerable environments such as the Arctic; it intends to lobby the Norwegian Government to that effect;
- The Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, the Greek Orthodox Church, intends to work with secular and government groups to co-ordinate action on environmental refugees and will also lobby to end the dumping of industrial waste in Africa;
- The plan for American evangelicals – 28 per cent of the US population – includes finding ways of integrating concern for 'creation care' with other justice issues;
- The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon intends to mobilise faith-based and civil society organisations to lobby the government on climate change action.

Celebrating God's Creation

Many churches are incorporating an annual Creation Day or Creation Time festival into their calendar of worship and contemplation, both to celebrate the beauty of God's world but also to focus attention on conservation and environmental issues. These festivals are part of wider moves to encourage people to make protecting and cherishing God's creation part of living their faith. Some of the plans are deeply challenging to those of us in the richer, developed world.

- The Church of South India, for example, is urging its members to adopt environmental tithing: participants would "reduce their burden on the earth's bounty" by producing 10 per cent less in waste and consuming 10 per cent less in non-renewable resources. The resulting financial savings would then be contributed to earth care efforts.

For their part, churches from the developed world are bringing their greater wealth and resources to collaborate with churches in the developing world. American evangelicals are linking up with African churches in eco-twinning projects, helping them to implement eco-friendly initiatives.

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Forestry

The faiths are major landowners – they own 7-8 per cent of habitable land surface of the planet and five per cent of forestry. Forestry plays a big role in many plans, particularly from countries already experiencing the devastating effects of climate change.

- The Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania is to implement an intensive tree planting campaign, with 8.5 million trees to create community forests at a cost of USD2.5 million, of which two thirds will be raised locally;
- The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana intends to plant 200,000 trees in four areas and to create community woodlands with 100,000 seedlings;
- The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon has already planted more than one million trees since the early 1960s; its seven year plan includes a further 100,000 seedlings.
- The Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania is to promote the use of economic charcoal cookers, encourage green burials which don't use wooden coffins; and develop alternative income sources, such as bee keeping, to replace harvesting of firewood.
- As well as large-scale planting of trees, vetiver (a perennial grass), jatropha (a succulent shrub) and mangroves on church land, the Church of South India will promote using bamboo and vetiver as fencing instead of concrete walls in churches and schools.

Putting their own houses in order

The churches are also getting their houses in order by looking at ways of 'greening' their buildings, institutions and pilgrimage sites, both in terms of making them more energy efficient and also in switching to renewable energy systems.

- The Armenian Apostolic Church is installing solar power in church properties and some public buildings such as kindergartens and bath houses;
- The Quakers in Britain are taking their main conference centre, Swarthmoor Hall in Cumbria, 'off-grid' in two to three years' time and considering whether to make some of their land available for commercial wind turbines;
- The Church of England intends to reduce its carbon footprint by 80 per cent by 2050 and 42 per cent by 2020;
- As well as looking at their own properties, the Orthodox Church of Poland will distribute practical guidelines on environmental protection to all Orthodox households during the traditional pastoral home visits after the Feast of the Epiphany. They'll also print all Orthodox books and publications on environmentally friendly paper;
- The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change (a partnership of 13 Catholic organisations in the US) will look at how to tailor Catholic investments to support renewable energy technology and companies reducing their energy use and promoting sustainable energy.

Major education programmes

All the faiths are embarking on widespread education and awareness-raising programmes, both internally to train their own leaders, and also externally, among their communities and in the millions of schools and youth programmes they run (faith groups are involved in more than half of all schools worldwide).

- The Catholic Coalition of Climate Change (a partnership of 13 national Catholic organisations worldwide) is expanding Catholic education to make teaching on climate change, the environment and the care for creation much more central in schools and also in the training of priests, deacons and lay ministers;
- The Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, the Greek Orthodox Church, (10 million believers in 53 countries) is to establish a new Environmental Centre – using eco-friendly materials and sustainable energy – in South Africa to facilitate education and action throughout Africa;

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- The Jesuits are setting up a task force to promote action on the environment and launching a website to keep Jesuits around the world informed on the environment;
- The Church of England is to launch an extensive 'education for sustainable development' programme, with all 4,700 church schools becoming sustainable schools by 2016;
- The Armenian Apostolic Church is to broadcast twice-monthly 30-minute programmes on Green Theology on its Shoghakat TV channel from 2010;

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimages are still the world's biggest travel events. Many faiths are looking at ways in which they can improve the carbon footprint of both their pilgrimage sites and the sacred lands.

- The ecumenical faith-based body Operation Noah wants Christians to pledge to renounce flying (except in personal or family emergency) and cycle or walk to church;
- The Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales wants to promote environmentally sensitive pilgrimages and re-discover ancient routes that deepen our spiritual relationship with the natural world;
- The Orthodox Church of Poland intends to introduce eco-tourism rules and encourage greater participation in traditional walking pilgrimages to holy places;
- The Jesuits, the largest male religious order in the Catholic Church, are to run all their retreat centres in an ecologically sensitive way, sourcing local, organic and fairtrade food, and auditing buildings to ensure a faith consistent use of assets.

KEY CHRISTIAN DELEGATES

Rev Canon **Sally Bingham**, president of the US-based Regeneration Project; Rt Rev **Richard Chartres**, Bishop of London, Church of England; **Brian Cuthbertson**, head of environmental challenge, Church of England; **Mark Dowd**, Campaign Strategist, Operation Noah, UK; Rev **Harper Fletcher**, Executive Director, GreenFaith; Archbishop **Hilarion Alfeyev**, Chairman of Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations and Bishop of Volokolamsk; Fr **Michael Higgins**, President of the Conference of the Franciscan Family, Order of Friars Minor; Fr **Roberto Jaramillo**, Regional Superior of the Society of Jesus of the Amazon Region; **Rev Dr Samuel Kobia**, General Secretary, World Council of Churches, until August this year; His Excellency **Seraphim Kykkotis**, Archbishop of Johannesburg and Pretoria and Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa; Fr **Sean McDonagh** SSC, International Environment Officer, Columbas; **Daniel Misleh**, Executive Director of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change; Archbishop **Valentine Mokiwa**, President of the All Africa Conference of Churches; Rt Rev Dr **Nyansako-ni-Nku**, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon; Pastor **Tri Robertson**, Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Boise, Idaho, US, and author of the 2007 book, *Saving God's Green Earth*; Helen **Rowlands**, leading Quaker educationalist; Dr **David Ryall**, Assistant General Secretary, Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales; Rt Rev **Thomas Samuel**, Bishop of Madhya Kerala, Church of South India; Rt Rev **Frederick Shoo**, Assistant Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church; **Susan Stephenson**, executive director, US-based Regeneration Project; Bishop **Walter Thomas**, of New Psalmist Baptist Church, Baltimore, Maryland, US (huge church – congregations of 7,500+); Rev Dr **Olav Fykse Tveit**, General Secretary, World Council of Churches (Norwegian theologian and youngest General Secretary for close to 60 years); Mrs **Nada Zarour**, president of AFDC, a Lebanese NGO which works with Maronite and Druze communities on reforestation.

In addition, a choir from the Baltimore New Psalmist Church from the US will sing (in Windsor Castle, and at the public event on November 4 at the Friends House in Euston) their new, gospel-style version of the Anglo-Saxon poem *Dream of the Rood*, called *What the Cross Would Say*, a reminder of a time in the Christian tradition when nature itself has been imagined to speak. The New Psalmist Church is a predominantly African American church with a 7000-strong congregation and music ministry. It has its own Seven Year Plan which includes eco-twinning, water projects, allotments for children, an annual Science Fair to explore new creative ideas to preserve our living planet, and an annual Creation Celebration, the first of which is being held this month, October 2009.

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