

Religions for Peace

Religions for Peace International Executive Committee

Shared Well-Being: Multi-Religious Values for Sustainable Development

The nations of the world have adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals are for everyone on earth. They aim to end poverty and hunger; ensure clean water, affordable energy, health care and education for all; protect the world's ecosystems and shift to a sustainable use of the earth's resources; and build more inclusive, just and peaceful societies.

We enthusiastically urge the implementation of the SDGs and the embrace of the unifying concept of “*sustainable development*.” Together, they are critical for the progress of all peoples. They make it clear that “social inclusion” and “environmental sustainability” are integral to development. We applaud the fact that, in shaping the goals, there was wide consultation among the peoples of the world—underlining the fact that every person is called to be a subject of development.

We believe that our respective religious traditions share far-reaching moral values that underpin the SDGs. In addition, they advance personal and social virtues that are necessary for their achievement. We are convinced that each religious community can fold these vital goals into its own holistic notion of human flourishing. And by cooperation across our traditions and with others, we believe that the best fruits of the modern sciences can be combined with the tested wisdom of millennia of religious experience in the service of sustainable development.

A Basic Moral Case for the SDGs

The facts are scandalous. Almost two and a half billion people are mired in poverty, living on less than \$2 a day. Almost a billion go hungry every day, in a world where about a third of all food is wasted. People in the richest countries live on average twenty years longer than people in the poorest countries. The chasm between rich and poor grows deeper. A mere eighty people now control as much wealth as half of the world's population. If trends continue, the richest 1 percent will soon own more than all the rest. Inequality within countries has become especially stark, including in the world's wealthiest nations.

At the same time, the human family is trespassing crucial planetary boundaries and disrupting the earth's natural balance, with potentially catastrophic consequences. The burning of fossil fuels that powers our modern global economy is sabotaging the progress it promises. The world's poor are already paying dearly for these transgressions. The bottom three billion people account for a mere 6 percent of carbon dioxide emissions, and yet they will continue to bear the brunt of climate change.

This state of affairs is not sustainable, tolerable, or morally acceptable. Our best natural and human scientists share that we have the collective human capacity to change course toward sustainable development. Diverse religious and moral traditions agree that the greater the capacity to address a grave moral threat, the greater the responsibility to do so. Our collective capacity to include all people in

sustainable development founds a basic moral imperative: refusing to advance sustainable development is a destructive self-contradiction that will sabotage our possibilities of living in harmony with one another and the natural world.

Shared Well-Being—a Multi-Religious Vision of Integral Sustainable Development

As we commit ourselves to implement the SDGs, we recall that our respective religious traditions point—each in its own way—to a vision of “shared well-being” based on the profound reciprocity between human dignity and social well-being that is anchored in each religion’s respective experience of the Sacred. Indeed, this notion of shared well-being was unanimously affirmed by over 700 diverse senior religious leaders—including men, women and youth—during the *Religions for Peace* World Assembly in 2013. We are convinced that advancing shared well-being can powerfully support sustainable development.

Shared well-being includes a conviction that the call to develop is an inner summons that beckons every person to unfold his or her personal dignity across all dimensions—cultural, social, economic, political, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, and religious. It is based on the understanding—common to religious traditions—that human beings find meaning in being and becoming, rather than simply having and accumulating.

As the same time, shared well-being includes the conviction that the call to personal development is directly related to the obligation to build up the common good, which includes the natural world. We believe that human beings are oriented beyond selfish egoism toward solidarity, beyond conflict toward cooperation. We affirm that people find true meaning through caring relationships with others and that, ultimately, all are in varying ways responsible for all. Just as each is called to contribute to the common good, each is, in turn, to be supported by it. This profound reciprocity extends across time and must include concern to live in harmony with the environment.

Our traditions teach that a foundation of shared well-being lies in this deep reciprocity between personal and communal development. This calls for the patient and resolute cultivation of both personal and social virtues. We believe that these personal and social virtues are foundational to the personal and social “capital” essential to the achievement of the SDGs.

This positive reciprocity between the concrete flourishing of human dignity and the common good across generations also provides us with a framework to assess the relative adequacy of our political, economic and social systems. To the degree that these systems thwart or ignore this profound reciprocity, they will need to be reformed to make them better servants of a truly integral sustainable development. Only in this way will the SDG goal of promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies be achieved.

So while the success of the SDGs will clearly depend on the power of science and human ingenuity, we are convinced that the moral impulses that animate our respective traditions are equally important. Each of our religious communities has its own way of understanding the call to support the integral development of the “other.” These traditions are specific to each religious community, and include

striving for justice, accepting self-sacrifice for the well-being of others, bearing innocent suffering for peace, returning good for evil, extending forgiveness and expressing universal compassion and love. These priceless virtues can powerfully build up the common good, particularly where it has been deeply wounded.

We commit to uniting the best of science with the shared wisdom of our respective religious traditions to advance sustainable development that nurtures human dignity and the common good in harmony with the earth.

Calls to Action

As we religious representatives commit to help implement the SDGs, we call upon:

All peoples to adopt the values and cultivate the virtues of sustainable development in their personal and professional lives;

All nation states to embrace a holistic notion of sustainable development and prioritize the achievement of the SDGs as policy goals, and for each state to work in solidarity with the others, especially those with greatest needs;

All governments and relevant inter-governmental bodies to establish just frameworks and institutions for the operation of national and global economies—including for trading, investing and other business operations and taxation—that promote sustainable development.

The business community to use its creativity and ingenuity to support sustainable development and an economy of inclusion that eschews short-term thinking that does not build true value and that creatively links profits to the shared well-being of all people;

Civil society to partner with nations in the implementation of the SDGs, and to hold political leaders accountable for the success of the SDGs;

Religious communities and each religious believer to support the SDGs through action, education and advocacy and to help build the trust that can support collaboration for sustainable development.

Conclusion

Let us choose solidarity over narrow self-interest, true values over fleeting and self-centered satisfactions, and “welcome” over “exclusion.” Let us honor deeply—each in his or her own way—the mysterious beauty of human dignity and the priceless wealth of our common good.