

# Religions for Peace

## **A Multi-religious Call for Action on Climate Change: A Statement of the Executive Committee of *Religions for Peace***

20 September 2014

### **Introduction**

We, the members of the Executive Committee of *Religions for Peace (RfP)*, respectful of our religious differences, call on religious believers and all men and women of good will to an urgent and sustained response to the challenge of climate change. Meeting it will require concerted action based upon a deep understanding of its scientific, economic, political and—above all—its moral and religious dimensions.

Each of our religious traditions has its own experience of the goodness, beauty and mystery of the natural world with its abundance of life. Assisted by modern science, we today recognize the incessantly dynamic inter-relations among all natural systems and forms of life. We affirm that the human engagement with nature can and needs to be profoundly positive and creative and that harmony with nature remains the key to sustainable human development.

Protecting the earth and its climate is understood by us—each according to her or his tradition—as a serious religious obligation. We hereby affirm that our respective religious traditions call us to actively work together to protect the earth and its climate. We pledge to advance collaborative action based on the best scientific evidence.

### **The Challenge of Climate Change**

Today, the converging scientific consensus makes clear that the collective impact of human life is profoundly altering the earth's ecosystem and, in turn, imperiling the intricate web of life supported by it. We are bearing witness to climate change in extreme and erratic weather events, the melting of polar ice caps and rising sea levels. Whilst there are many causes of climate change, CO<sub>2</sub> production from the burning of fossil fuels is a primary driver of it. A mean increase of 2 degrees Celsius has been identified as the upper limit that can occur without a significant risk of uncontrollable and potentially irreversible changes in climate. The key to limiting global warming is to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions roughly by two-thirds by 2050 and to near zero by around 2070, all in the context of growing energy use. Failure to hold warming below 2 degrees Celsius could lead to major disruptions in the world food supply, and potentially catastrophic repercussions in the Arctic, the oceans, the rainforests and the tundras. Those in turn could multiply a 2°C increase into much higher temperatures and further climate disruptions.

Climate change is having a disproportionate affect on the most vulnerable populations. Large scale natural disasters cause economic insecurity, displacement and prevent sustainable development. Yet, no country or population is immune to the disastrous effects of climate change; the interlocking character of all natural systems means that the survival of humanity on earth is at risk if a solution is not found today.

Finding an equitable solution is made more difficult because the world's "bottom billion," cruelly ensnared in a structural poverty trap, need and deserve a higher standard of living that requires more energy. With another 5 billion people in low and middle income countries anticipated to utilize more fuel to increase their standard of living and the world's population expected to grow by another 2 billion by 2050, finding a solution is both urgent and complex.

Climate change cannot be curbed effectively by a single nation alone; all countries must urgently commit to the deep decarbonization of their energy systems, shifting from high-carbon energy (coal, oil and natural gas) to low-carbon energy (such as wind, solar and hydro power). To do this, the human family will need to make radical and fundamental commitments to organize and deploy the best of its energy, creativity and skill and to engage in unprecedented forms of sustained global cooperation. Scientific institutes, businesses, governments, religious communities—indeed all sectors of society—will need to unite to form a concerted and sustained effort.

### **The Fundamental Moral Character of the Challenge**

The challenge of decarbonizing our energy systems is radically moral in character. Simply stated: we know well enough what we must do if we are not to destroy the natural systems upon which we and the complex web of life depend, but will we do so? That is the fundamental moral choice that stands before us. It is fundamentally a collective choice: we must summon together our collective wills to decide to act—to do what we know we must do.

This will require the cultivation of new public virtues that orient the entire human family to summon the will to confront climate change. Old habits of waste, complacency, overly prolonged indecision and the unwillingness to work together must be replaced with new habits of conservation, innovation, decision to act boldly and a willingness to work in a global partnership. Our diverse religious traditions can and must make clear that these climate sensitive virtues must be chosen intentionally as values to be accepted, cultivated and duly celebrated by the global community. The cultivation of these virtues is integral to the practice of religion in our time.

### **Capacity and Moral Obligation**

Our religious traditions agree that the greater one's capacity to address a grave threat, the greater is one's moral responsibility to do so. Thus, while all people have the responsibility to limit climate change, those with the greatest possibility of doing so, particularly those whose vital well-being has been well-secured and whose life styles often include the abundant waste of energy have the greatest responsibility. This is true also of states. The states that produce the most CO<sub>2</sub>, as well as those with the greatest wealth and those with the greatest potential to decarbonize their energy production must take the lead in climate protection. This must include appropriate ways to transfer vitally needed technology and finances from the most to the least developed states.

### **Multi-religious Commitment to Act**

We pledge to act together to advance collaboration for the protection of the earth and its climate.

In this spirit, we call on

**The United Nations and Member States to:**

- 1) Commit pledges to the Green Climate Fund and other institutions that protect the poor from the havoc of climate change and that enable the poor to participate in global solutions.
- 2) Achieve a far-reaching and binding global climate agreement in Paris in 2015. The new agreement must be ambitious enough to keep temperatures well below a mean 2 degree Celsius rise; fair enough to distribute the burden of mitigation and adaptation in an equitable way; legally binding so as to guarantee effective national climate policies designed to decarbonize energy production and use; and clearly linked to and harmonized with the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals.
- 3) Hold the global business community to standards of responsibility, partnership, social justice, and transparency in the fight against climate change, so that the world's businesses, and notably the energy sector, acts within a framework of global climate responsibility.

**The Religious Communities to:**

- 1) Educate your believers about the urgent religious obligation to take action to address climate change.
- 2) Build and foster the virtuous habits essential to re-orienting the human family for the sustained and bold cooperation to address climate change.
- 3) Advocate for climate friendly policies within your respective communities and countries.
- 4) Work to operate your sites of worship as “green congregations” that function in environmentally sensitive ways.

***Religions for Peace* to:**

- 1) Equip *R/P* inter-religious councils, bodies, and women of faith and youth networks at the local, national, regional and international level for concerted multi-religious action to protect the earth and its climate.
- 2) Engage religious believers—from the most senior leaders to the grassroots—across the *R/P* global network in activities to help protect the earth and its climate.
- 3) Advance environmentally sensitive micro-development schemes in local “congregations” in developing countries.

**All Men and Women of Good Will to:**

- 1) Make life choices in harmony with nature and minimize your carbon footprint.
- 2) Call upon your leaders to adopt earth friendly climate protection policies and encourage investment in environmentally sound energy sources and technologies.

**Message of Hope**

Each of our traditions has its own experiences of the ultimate truth, goodness and beauty of reality. These invite us into a confident hope that we may find the strength to take the needed action together.