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“Love your local ecosystem,' says Catholic religious, connecting spirituality to ecology”

By Barbara J. Fraser

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Catholic News Service

COCHABAMBA, Bolivia (CNS) –Everywhere he goes, Australian Christian Brother Moy Hitchen urges people to get out into nature and listen to the earth.

"I'm trying to say 'Love your local ecosystem,'" he said. "Get out there and find the rocks, the soil, the trees, the bushes, the birds that belong to (your) part of the world, and then think, what does the earth want us to do?"

As the Christian Brothers' international promoter of environmental justice, Brother Moy's travels have taken him from rural villages in Melanesia, where he learned about ancestral farming and hunting practices, to a school in India where 3,000 elementary and high school students share the grounds with hawks, mongooses, squirrels and parrots.

In a sprawling slum in Nairobi, Kenya, he was struck by the contrast between environmental disaster – a "filthy black river (of) industrial waste, human sewage and plastic bags full of household garbage" – and vestiges of the natural world were struggling to survive.

"I saw five species of birds from the local area and 12 species of plants in that slum, hanging on by their claws and by the tips of their roots," he said. "If the people in the slum don't deserve a decent environment, who does? The slum will only be rehabilitated when the earth is back, when the river is clean and the trees are growing."

Part of Brother Moy's job is to visit Christian Brothers around the world and encourage them to understand that ecology is an issue rooted in both spirituality and justice.

"The great spiritual traditions are in partnership with the earth," he said during a visit to Christian Brothers working in this central Bolivian city. "And the Congress of Consecrated Life in Rome in 2004 had 16 recommendations, one of which was to maintain a triple dialogue – dialogue with the poor, dialogue with the world religions and dialogue with the earth."

Brother Moy sees a close connection between social justice and ecological justice. The cry of the earth, he said, can be heard in the cry of the poor. In much of the world, when farmers can no

longer make a living on their exhausted land, they migrate to the shantytowns in and around cities.

"Every piece of damaged countryside sends another family to the city," he said, "so environmental degradation and poverty are interconnected."

While indigenous people and farm families in developing countries are keenly aware of the need to live in balance with nature, that bond has been lost in industrialized countries, he said.

"In the First World, city students in our schools don't know their local ecosystem," while students in Christian Brother-run schools in New Guinea and India were able to tell him that their local ecosystems were "swamp forest, savannah woodland, rain forest or delta," he said.

One result of that disconnection from nature, Brother Moy said, is that people in industrialized countries consume more than their share of the earth's resources.

"That's my biggest challenge," he said. "I'm talking to people about their ecological footprint. The ecological footprint of my own country, Australia, is four times what the earth can sustain. If everybody lived like we live, you would need four planet earths."

In his visits to Christian Brothers around the world, he urge them to find ways to simplify their lifestyles.

"It might be things like no cars," he said. "There might be quite hard decisions to be made about diet, about lifestyle, about where you live."

For examples of what can happen when a society strains its natural resources beyond the breaking point, Brother Moy turns to the Bible. In the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he said, "the holy oak, the sacred mountain, the rock he had the dream on – the earth is charged with divine presence, that Holy Land we're talking about all the time. The promised land."

The prophet Amos, who was a shepherd, compared God's voice to the roar of a lion. But by Jesus' time, he said, "there were no lions, no more leopards, no more deer. The promised land was destroyed by the agricultural and pastoral practices of hundreds of years. There's been massive ecological devastation going on, and it's in the Bible if you read it carefully enough."

Brother Moy said he encourages the Christian Brothers to adopt and teach the principles of the U.N. Earth Charter, which offers guidelines for stewardship of the earth. Despite the ecological disasters he has seen, he said, he finds hope in the earth itself.

"I need weekly to get out into that local ecosystem – rocks, soil, air, water, trees, plants, birds," Brother Moy said. "I really believe that the earth, whatever we've done to her, is saying: 'I want to heal. I want to be healed. I want you to be part of the healing.' And she will assist us in that growth toward God."

January 5, 2007

“India's sullied river 'goddess'”

During a festival this month, some 75 million Hindus will wash in the stubbornly filthy Ganges River.

By Sunita Nahar and Lilly Peel
Contributors to The Christian Science Monitor
VARANASI, INDIA

An old man in a loincloth squats on the banks of the sacred Ganges River scrubbing his clothes. Nearby, sewage gushes from a pipe as water buffaloes contentedly wallow in the river's murky waters.

Upstream, a bright-eyed woman clad in a fuchsia sari stands waist-deep, pouring a stream of the river's holy water from a brass pot and reciting prayers while a plastic bag of garbage washes up on the shore.

This river is known to Hindus as goddess Ganga, one of the main arteries at the heart of India's spiritual and physical life, who provides a lifeline of fresh water to the 400 million people who live on her banks.

Starting Wednesday and for the next six weeks, legions of devout Hindus will celebrate the "Ardh Kumbh Mela" or Half Grand Pitcher festival in the city of Allahabad, at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers. Allahabad is one of four spots where Garuda, the winged steed of the Hindu god Vishnu, is said to have rested during her battle with demons over a pitcher of divine nectar.

But chronically high levels of pollution have turned this river goddess into a potential killer. For the nearly 75 million pilgrims - setting the record for the world's largest gathering of people - who will travel here to bathe their sins away, sip the river water, or cremate their dead, the "holy dip" is believed to usher them more quickly into a state of nirvana.

Leading Indian environmentalists claim the \$100 million Ganga Action Plan (GAP), launched 20 years ago to treat sewage dumped in the river, has failed. They blame poor planning, corruption, lack of technical knowledge, and a gross miscalculation of the volume of waste from Varanasi, a teeming city of around 1.2 million people, which they say has left pollution levels worse than ever.

Kicked off in 1986 by former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the GAP aimed to divert and treat the waste and bring the quality of water up to bathing standards. However, in Varanasi, where raw sewage spews into the river from 30 sources, levels of fecal coliform bacteria are up to 3,000 times the accepted Indian standard and 1.5 million times the safe level for drinking.

The river's destitute state is no mystery to the hordes of fervent devotees. This year, hundreds of Hindu holy men have threatened to commit mass suicide during the festival to protest what they say is a lack of government action, the Daily Telegraph reported last week.

Among the devotees completing the daily dawn ablutions before the festival was Veer Bhadra Mishra. Clad in a white cotton dhoti, the tall, silver-haired priest cups his hands and lifts the water to his mouth. But he leaves out one part of the ritual - he does not drink it. As the mahant, or spiritual and administrative head of Varanasi's second largest temple, he believes the water is holy. But as a professor of hydraulics and a leading campaigner to clean up the Ganges, he knows it is not pure.

The 66-year-old has been campaigning to clean the river since 1982, when he founded the Swatcha Ganges Abhiyaan (Campaign for a Clean Ganges) organization, an effort that combines his knowledge of the spiritual with the scientific.

"On a practical level 400 million people rely on this water. Spiritually for practising Hindus, the river is a medium of life. We want to touch our mother, submerge our bodies in the water, sip the waters. But we only have human bodies. If the river is polluted they will die, and with them their heritage, culture and faith," he says.

"The Ganga is the silken thread which binds this country together. What will happen if it breaks?"

Mishra says GAP has categorically failed. "The planning was hasty and unscientific. They did not know how many million litres of sewage flowed into the river, what the organic content of the water was, or whether there were chemical pollutants in the water." Varanasi produces about 39 million gallons of sewage per day, but can treat only about 26 million litres.

Each day, samples of the water are tested in the campaign's laboratories. The tests reveal a toxic cocktail of industrial chemicals, pesticides, heavy metals and arsenic quite apart from the refuse, corpses and animal carcasses that float past chanting pilgrims. Ninety per cent of the pollution comes from sewage.

The treatment plants are crippled by poor maintenance as well as electric power cuts. For the five months of the monsoon the pumps cannot function at all due to flooding.

With the help of William Oswald, an engineering professor at the University of California at Berkeley, Mishra came up with an alternative solution. Oswald's scheme would use gravity to divert the waste downstream into a series of treatment ponds built on wasteland outside the Varanasi city limits, using bacteria and algae to eliminate chemical and biological pollutants.

The plan was unanimously approved by the city council eight years ago, yet the state and central governments turned it down.

Ujjwal Raman Singh, minister of environment for the state of Uttar Pradesh, insists the level of organic matter has gone down despite more domestic sewage being pumped into the river. But he admits there are shortcomings.

"Money was not properly utilized," he says. "There was a faulty bidding system, global tenders were not allowed, and money was instead given to petty contractors who did not have a clue about the technical or financial know-how to deal with the matter."

He says the solution lies in more electric-powered plants, but that will require more government financing.

Some residents blame the state. Sanjay, a silk weaver, says, "The government takes the money but the river never gets cleaner. If we complain to the local administration they ignore us."

Others blame the local population. "The government can't do anything unless the people change," says Varanasi guest house owner, M.P. Sahi. "Until people learn not to throw corpses in the river or empty their rubbish there, and factories stop their pollution, nothing will change."

For Mishra, who founded the Swatcha Ganges Abhiyaan (Campaign for a Clean Ganges) organization, the battle to change the attitudes of both the authorities and the people continues. He says his campaign has been a bit like a game of snakes and ladders: When it has gained speed, a snake comes and swallows it up.

"But one day," he says, "I will dodge all the snakes and save mother Ganges."

January 8, 2007

From HealthNewsDigest.com

"Who are the Women Leaders in the Environmental Field?"

Jan 8, 2007, 07:00

Most environmental organizations appear to be run by men. But who are the women leaders in this field? I'd love to know about them. – Leona Klippstein, Carthage, NC

The ranks of environmental advocacy are teeming with female "movers and shakers," both at the community level and in some of the highest posts, though one would not know it from watching mainstream TV networks that tend to let men do most of the talking.

For starters, it was a woman, Rachel Carson, who ignited the modern environmental movement with her 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, which brought widespread attention to problems with pesticides. The book led to a U.S. ban of the pesticide DDT, spurred the founding of several influential environmental groups and helped blaze the trail for passage of the nation's bedrock environmental laws in the early 1970s.

And it was Lois Gibbs who in 1978 pressured New York authorities to evacuate and clean up Love Canal, a chemical-dump-turned-housing-development suffering from high incidences of birth defects and cancer. Gibbs also lobbied Congress to pass “Superfund” laws mandating cleanup of similar sites. Today she runs the Center for Health, Environment & Justice (CHEJ), which helps communities with similar problems.

Wangari Maathai has led thousands of women in Kenya in restoring denuded lands through tree planting, and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her efforts. Another green heroine was Dorothy Stang, who was murdered in 2005 by land speculators angry at her efforts to preserve Amazon rainforest.

Not all of environmentalism’s leading female lights have such a high profile, but their work is key nonetheless. Deb Callahan turned the League of Conservation Voters into a strong political force during her decade-long stint as Executive Director. Frances Beinecke became the first woman president of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) in 2006. And Betsy Taylor founded the Center for a New American Dream (CNAD), which provides resources for people who want to “green up” their lifestyles.

Mary Evelyn Tucker co-directs the Forum on Religion & Ecology and has organized major environmental conferences bringing together religious leaders of all faiths. A woman, Mary Pearl, heads wildlife Trust, an international network of scientists engaged in work to save endangered species. And Rebecca Wodder has been president of American Rivers, the nation’s leading river conservation group, since 1995.

Theo Colburn, senior scientist at the World Wildlife Fund, co-authored the 1996 book, *Our Stolen Future*, which brought worldwide attention to the fact that common contaminants can interfere with human fetal development. And Laurie David, wife of TV icon Larry David, produced Al Gore’s *Inconvenient Truth* and founded Stop Global Warming, an effort to engage everyday people in addressing climate change.

Thousands of other women--in boardrooms, in offices and “in the trenches” all over the globe--work tirelessly on environmental issues, which affect us all equally regardless of sex, race or natural origin.

CONTACTS: CHEJ, www.chej.org; NRDC, www.nrdc.org; CNAD, www.newdream.org; American Rivers, www.americanrivers.org; Forum on Religion & Ecology, www.environment.harvard.edu/religion; *Our Stolen Future*, www.ourstolenfuture.org; Stop Global Warming, stopglobalwarming.org.

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www.HealthNewsDigest.com

January 15, 2007

“Evangelicals, scientists join forces to combat global warming”

By Rodrique Ngowi, Associated Press Writer

January 14, 2007

BOSTON --Leading scientists and evangelical Christian leaders have agreed to put aside passionate differences over the origin of life and work together to curb alarming levels of global warming that threaten the survival of life on Earth.

Representatives met recently in Georgia and agreed on the need for urgent action to drive down growing environmental degradation. Details on the talks will be unveiled in Washington on Wednesday, according to a joint statement.

"Whether God created the Earth in a millisecond or whether it evolved over billions of years, the issue we agree on is that it needs to be cared for today," said Rich Cizik, vice president of government relations for the National Association of Evangelicals, which represents 45,000 churches.

Eric Chivian, director of the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School agreed, saying, "scientists and evangelicals have discovered that we share a deeply felt common concern and sense of urgency about threats to life on Earth, and that we must speak with one voice to protect it."

Chivian and Cizik, who both participated in the talks, declined further comment beyond their written statements.

In February 2006, 86 evangelical leaders signed a statement to fight global warming, saying human-induced climate change is real, its consequences will hit the poor the hardest and Christian moral convictions demand urgent response to the problem.

They argued that governments, businesses, churches and individuals all have a role to play. Signatories included presidents of evangelical colleges, aid groups, churches and pastors of megachurches.

The powerful National Association of Evangelicals, however, did not join the initiative. It is unclear whether Cizik's involvement in the new campaign will convince the organization to adopt environmental conservation as a central agenda.

Evangelicals and scientists previously failed to launch a large-scale joint initiative partly because they focused more on differences between evolutionary science and a literal interpretation of the Bible -- a rift dating back to Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection.

Those who met in Georgia, however, are expected to argue that the threat to life on Earth is too great to let the rift prevent them from working together to combat greenhouse emissions that lead to global warming.

"Scientists and religious leaders really make a powerful team. They both start and end as truth seekers, they are both rooted in ethics and morals," said Kevin Knobloch, head of the Union of Concerned Scientists, which did not take part in the consultations. "Scientists speak and apply facts to understand the amazing miracle of life, and clergy seek and apply faith and spirituality in the same quest."

The development reinforces a momentum created by former Vice President Al Gore's documentary on global warming, "An Inconvenient Truth," California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's environmental policies and businesses that are increasingly responding to public concerns over the problem, said Katie Mandes, spokeswoman for the Pew Center on Global Climate Change.

"The momentum is building, and consensus among groups such as these – the religious and scientists -- can only help," Mandes said.

Speakers at the Wednesday announcement will include megachurch Pastor Joel Hunter, who refused to take the leadership of Christian Coalition of America because the organization wouldn't let him expand its agenda to include the environment and poverty.

Others are Harvard biologist and two-time Pulitzer prize winner Edward O. Wilson, and NASA scientist James E. Hansen who came under fire from the White House after a December 2005 lecture in which he called for urgent reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to slow global warming.

"The evangelicals have a lot of clout on the conservative side of the political spectrum and their voice would be a very welcome one," said Jim Presswood of the Natural Resources Defense Council. "To the extent that they weight in, they only make that point clear that this is something we need to deal with because it is the right thing to do."

On the Net:

Evangelical Climate Initiative: <http://www.christiansandclimate.org/>

Union of Concerned Scientists: <http://www.ucsusa.org/>

Natural Resources Defense Council: <http://www.nrdc.org/>

The Pew Center on Global Climate Change: <http://www.pewclimate.org/>

“Mystics' river: Pilgrims take the plunge in the Ganges”

For Hindus, a swim in the Ganges is a sacred act. But as untreated sewage and chemical waste cloud the waters, holy men have threatened mass suicide unless the river is cleaned

By Justin Huggler

Published: 15 January 2007

You could see the lights from hundreds of miles away - they had turned the night sky over this usually sleepy, dirt-poor corner of India a bright orange. And as we came over a rise, we saw them spread out, thousands of lights glittering along the river banks. There were spinning wheels of lights that whirled round and round, lights that burst in imitation of a firework going off, lights that cascaded down what looked like Hindu temple towers, sprung up suddenly on the soft sand river banks. This was the Las Vegas of holy men. Crowning one of the ornate gateways on the sand was a large illuminated portrait of a sadhu. Next to him was a picture of a follower, complete with a motorised arm that gently fanned his master.

This was the scene that greeted millions of Hindu pilgrims as they massed at the city of Allahabad yesterday for the sacred ritual of bathing in the river Ganges. And as dawn approached, sadhus, or holy men, emerged from tents lining the shore, naked in front of the crowds, and processed to the river bank to immerse themselves in the water.

Others were preparing ornate silver thrones that would carry them to the water's edge - perched on the back of a trailer driven by a tractor.

It can be surprisingly cold in north India in January, and by this stage the temperature was around 3C. A fine mist was hanging over the river banks. The naked holy men stood unabashed in front of the gathered crowds, and seemingly oblivious to the cold.

They were heading for what is known here as a "holy dip", a brief immersion in the water at the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna that is believed to wash away all of a pilgrim's sins. The water did not look inviting - in fact it looked distinctly chilly. "When you go in you do not feel cold at all," said Nigamber Yogendra Puri, one of the sadhus. "You feel warm because it is God's will."

Looking somewhat incongruous beside the naked sadhus was Ashok Kumar Singh. He had finished his "holy dip" and dressed again in smart shirt and trousers, but had left his black slip-on shoes to one side and was standing on the sand in his socks to pray as the sun rose. A civil servant, Mr Singh had taken special leave to be here. He could only stay one day and would have to return to work the next day.

But Mr Singh was a rare figure among the crowds. Most were from a poorer background - there were few CEOs or call centre workers to be seen. On a hilltop a group of young men were dancing excitedly Bollywood-style, as one of them beat a large drum. They were a party of milkmen from Madhya Pradesh, in central India, and it was their first time for a "holy dip". They had clubbed together to travel here.

Some of the pilgrims were decidedly exotic. We stopped one man to ask where he had come from. He smiled enigmatically and pointed at the sky. "You mean from the sky?" we asked. He nodded beatifically and smiled. A sign above a tent near by read: "All India Saints' Association".

Bajrav Giri, a sadhu clad in orange robes, with long hair and matted beard, had come from Jaipur in Rajasthan, a trip of several hundred miles, but he had not had to pay a penny. He had begged lifts from cars and trucks along the way, relying on the respect Indians still have for sadhus, who renounce all worldly goods and relationships to live a life of pure prayer. Even the buses had let him ride for free. This is an India apart from the call centres and flashy new cars of the cities - an India that has barely changed in centuries.

What looked like carved marble Hindu temples turned out on closer inspection to be life-size models made out of plywood frames and white sheeting. Around them a tent city had been built along the river banks to house the pilgrims. It could have been a refugee camp, but for the fact that everyone was happy.

Hindus believe that, during a battle between gods and demons over a pitcher of divine nectar, four drops fell to earth. Bathing festivals are held every six years at the sites. For the poor who make up the mass of pilgrims, they are a major event. Many had come to stay for several weeks.

The crowds were far smaller than expected yesterday, the first of several auspicious bathing days - and the reason may have been something else that was making the water look uninviting: the gleam of toxic sludge on the surface.

The Ganges and Yamuna have been getting steadily more polluted over the years, both by factories pumping chemical waste into them, and by the influx of untreated sewage. The Yamuna, which passes through the capital, Delhi, before it reaches Allahabad, is particularly noxious, full of foul-smelling black slime.

This year, the holy men have finally had enough, and a major sadhus' organisation has announced it will boycott the "holy dip" this year to force the national government to clean up the rivers. Thousands of sadhus have even threatened to commit mass suicide unless action is taken, and the government also does something about falling water levels.

The boycott did appear to be having an effect yesterday, with overzealous police, who had been expecting much bigger crowds, herding the pilgrims unnecessarily.

In an effort to calm the sadhus' anger, the authorities have flushed the rivers with fresh water from canals and dams upstream. They have also kept dams open to try to raise the dwindling water level - to the dismay of farmers who say that water they desperately need for irrigation is disappearing to replenish the Ganges.

January 16, 2007

UU WORLD

“UU congregations take on the environment”

Turning the UUA's Seventh Principle into a call to action.

By Donald E. Skinner

Winter 2006 11.1.06

In the face of global warming, killer hurricanes, and government apathy, it's pretty clear that someone needs to save the world from impending environmental disaster. And who better to do it than Unitarian Universalists?

As a religious people, UU individuals have always been engaged in environmental work, from supporting the Endangered Species Act and Earth Day to the banning of DDT. Delegates to General Assembly have approved at least sixteen environmental statements and resolutions since 1961, covering topics as diverse as Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, population control, hazardous waste, and mountaintop coal removal.

And increasingly now, churches are getting into the act with environmental programs that involve the whole congregation. One of reasons for that movement is the Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth (UUMFE), formerly known as the Seventh Principle Project (for the UUA's Seventh Principle, which calls on Unitarian Universalists to affirm and promote "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part").

UUMFE, an affiliate organization of the UUA founded in 1990, has doubled its membership in the past year, from 200 to 400 people. UUMFE's most visible program is the Green Sanctuary program through which congregations develop an awareness of issues, encourage personal lifestyle changes, and work to heal environmental injustices. Right now, fifty congregations are accredited as green sanctuaries with another fifty working toward accreditation.

The Rev. Katherine Jesch, UUMFE's director, attributes the organization's dramatic to its efforts to increase the visibility of environmental issues within the UUA and to the increasing urgency of specific environmental issues such as global warming and Hurricane Katrina. "Four or five years ago no one knew how to find us," she said. "But as we've become more visible and as other factors have risen to prominence such as global warming and Hurricane Katrina, I think we've reached a tipping point."

No congregation exemplifies the new greening better than All Souls Church, Unitarian, in Washington, D.C. About four years ago, the acting church administrator, concerned about the amount of trash the church was generating, asked two members to begin a recycling program. From that small beginning, the impetus quickly grew to develop more environmental projects and form a Seventh Principle Committee.

Since then, environmental issues have become more visible at All Souls. The church has twice-monthly Zero Trash Sundays, with cloth napkins and china in place of paper products, dramatically reducing the amount of trash. They have also developed a "Talking Trash" curriculum for high school youth, hosted a city-wide fair trade fair, and produced an environmentally-themed original musical. All Souls is working on becoming a Green Sanctuary.

“We’re starting to open a lot of eyes in the congregation,” said Pamela Sparr, co-chair of the Seventh Principle Committee. Sparr said her group has been able to link environmental justice with racial justice in ways that help people understand that both are connected and. “One person had this huge ‘Aha!’ moment when she realized that improving the environment was not just about trees and endangered species, but about people as well,” Sparr said. “We made a connection between toxic materials and Hurricane Katrina, explaining that part of the toxic sludge that Louisianans are having to deal with now came from factories that produced the raw materials for things like plastic plates and cups.”

In Minnesota’s Twin Cities, members of five UU congregations have created UU EcoMinds, a group that has joined with an interfaith organization to work on the issue of global warming. EcoMinds members knocked on doors for four weekends, generating 725 postcards to the governor and legislators, coming close to winning passage of a measure that would have reduced the state’s dependence on coal as an energy source and increased wind power and other clean, renewable electricity sources.

One of those congregations, the Minnesota Valley UU Fellowship in Bloomington, also was recognized by a local newspaper as an “Earth Hero” for selling energy-saving compact fluorescent light bulbs.

Lisa Herschberger, a Minnesota Valley member, said members of her congregation are much more aware of environmental issues than they were previously. “I wouldn’t say a wholesale transformation has occurred yet,” she said, “but I do think there have been broad incremental changes in many people especially around the issues of global warming and sustainable living.”

The 150-member Cedars UU Church in Bainbridge Island, Washington, used the Green Sanctuary program to become better known in the community. It sponsored an environmental film series and is planning four workshops on issues including home energy conservation and alternatives to gas-guzzlers. It was part of a coalition that organized Earth Day activities last spring.

“Leadership from a UU church is a natural on issues like this because these are moral issues,” said Barry Peters, chair of the Green Sanctuary Steering Committee at Cedars UU Church. “For a church to step forward and say ‘Will you join us in focusing on these issues?’ people feel a greater comfort than if the invitation came from a political party or other secular group.”

Harold Wood concurs. He had been a member of the Sierra Club for thirty years when he discovered and joined the twenty-five-member UU Fellowship of Visalia, California, two years ago. It was the Seventh Principle that drew him in: “When I found out about the Seventh Principle I said, ‘This is what I have always believed.’ It’s a different way of working on environmental issues. I love it and it has changed my life.”

January 18, 2007

“Unlikely Partners Fight Global Warming”

WASHINGTON, Jan. 17, 2007 (AP) Saying they share a moral purpose, a group of evangelicals and scientists said they will work together to convince U.S. leaders that global warming is real.

The Rev. Rich Cizik, public policy director for the National Association of Evangelicals, and Nobel-laureate Eric Chivian, director of the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School, were among 28 signers of a statement that demands urgent changes in values, lifestyles and public policies to avert disastrous changes in climate.

“God will judge us for destroying the Creation. Therefore, we as evangelicals have a responsibility to be even more vigilant than others,” Cizik said at a news conference Wednesday.

“Science can be an ally in helping us understand what faith is telling us,” he said. “We will not allow the Creation to be degraded, destroyed by human folly.”

Among the project's supporters are Edward O. Wilson, a two-time Pulitzer prize-winning scientist and author; James Hansen, a prominent NASA climatologist; and Calvin B. DeWitt, president of the Academy of Evangelical Scientists and Ethicists.

Chivian said evangelicals and scientists are not as odd a couple as they may seem.

“We discovered that we were both speaking from our hearts and our minds. We found that we really like each other,” he said.

Not all evangelicals were on board.

The Interfaith Stewardship Alliance, formed by evangelicals who say scientific evidence counters claims of climate change, derided Wednesday's announcement as “just another attempt to create the impression of growing consensus among evangelicals about global warming. There is no such growing consensus.”

The alliance charged that the National Association of Evangelicals' board never approved the new collaboration. The NAE said its board approved a “dialogue,” but no specific actions.

The new effort represents the boldest evangelical step yet into the world of environmental activism.

To start, the coalition is meeting with congressional leaders, both Democrat and Republican, organizing a summit on environmental issues and developing public relations tools such as a “Creation Care” Bible study guide.

It also has requested a meeting with President George W. Bush. Senators Barack Obama, Richard Lugar and Olympia Snowe, all signaled their support Wednesday for the collaboration of evangelicals and scientists. Obama is a Democrat and the others are Republicans.

Their pairing grew from a retreat last year at which all sides agreed that human behavior and public policy have put the environment at risk.

In the past, conservative Christians who embraced that cause have met significant resistance.

The Rev. Joel Hunter of Northland megachurch in Longwood, Florida, refused to become president of the Christian Coalition of America last year because he said the group would not expand its agenda to include the environment and poverty. Hunter has now endorsed the new project.

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“Climate change unites science and religion”

17:29 17 January 2007

NewScientist.com news service

Phil Mckenna

Laying down their swords over how we came to exist, leaders from scientific and evangelical communities in the US joined forces today in an unprecedented effort to protect what we have. Speaking at a press conference in Washington DC, members of the newly formed group expressed concerns about planetary threats caused by humans including climate change, habitat destruction, pollution, and species extinction.

The group issued an “urgent call to action” signed by 28 coalition members including university professors, federal biologists, directors of conservation organisations, seminary officials, evangelical organization leaders, and "megachurch" pastors.

The statement, sent to President George W Bush and Congressional leaders urges fundamental change in public policies and states that “business as usual cannot continue yet one more day”.

Deep reverence

The group was spearheaded by leaders of Harvard University’s Center for Health and the Global Environment in Boston, Massachusetts, and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), an umbrella group that encompasses 45,000 churches, and represents 40% of the Republican Party’s supporters. The NEA announced their green intentions in early 2006, but now members from both organisations are calling for a united front on environmental issues.

“We share a very deep reverence for life on earth, whether that life was created by God or evolved over billions of years, it exists, is sacred to all of us, and is being endangered by human activity,” said Eric Chivian, Director of Harvard’s Center for Health and the Global Environment. “It doesn’t matter if we are liberals or conservatives, Darwinists or Creationists, we are all under the same atmosphere and drink the same water and will do everything we can to work together to solve these problems.”

"Creation care agenda"

Reverend Richard Cizik, NAE's vice president for government affairs, says that by working together the two groups can have a larger impact. "We have formed a partnership which we think has the power to reach far and wide and be very persuasive in promoting a creation care agenda," Cizik says. "We are driven by an overriding sense that we cannot fail, we must not fail, there is too much at stake."

Having met for the first time at a retreat in late-November 2006 in Thomasville, Georgia, the group now plans to meet with Congressional leaders from both Republican and Democratic parties on Thursday to encourage action on environmental issues.

Inconvenient truth

Today's statements are not the first time evangelicals have expressed concern over the environment. In February 2006, 86 evangelical leaders signed a statement to fight global warming. The statement declared that human-induced climate change is real, its consequences will hit the poor the hardest, and Christian moral convictions demand urgent response to the problem. Today's announcement follows the showing of *An Inconvenient Truth*, former Vice President Al Gore's documentary on global warming, in thousands of churches across the US in recent months.

Scientists signing the letter included Harvard biologist and author of *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*, Edward O. Wilson. It was also signed by leading climate scientist James Hansen, who came under fire from the White House after calling for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to slow global warming in December 2005.

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01 April 2006

January 19, 2007

CHRISTIAN POST 18-1-07

'Latte-Sippers, Bible-Thumpers' Tackle Climate Change

Two unlikely communities came together on Wednesday, fusing words of faith and science into a powerful weapon against climate change.

Thu, Jan. 18, 2007 Posted: 10:15:06 AM EST

WASHINGTON – Two unlikely communities came together on Wednesday, fusing words of faith and science into a powerful weapon against climate change.

A newly formed coalition of leading evangelicals and scientists is garnering the attention of the political, science, and faith communities for its ability to overcome long-held differences and unite in one voice to speak about the global environment.

“By standing together, we’re saying as evangelicals that science can be an ally in helping us understand what Creation is telling us about itself and indirectly about its Maker,” said the Rev. Rich Cizik, vice president for government affairs of the National Association of Evangelicals.

The coalition – which began with talks between Cizik and Eric Chivian, Nobel laureate and director of the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School – released the statement “Urgent Call to Action” signed by 28 evangelical and scientific leaders.

Statements were sent to President George W. Bush, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, congressional leaders, and national evangelical and scientific organizations urging “fundamental change in values, lifestyles, and public policies required to address these worsening problems before it is too late.”

The coalition aims to use scientific facts coupled with Christian voices to press for changes in energy consumption and other factors affecting the environment in public policies and in churches.

Although there was apparent harmony between the two communities at the press conference, both sides admit they had misconceptions of each other going into the historic Melhana retreat last year which resulted in the formation of the coalition.

Chivian said he expected some of the evangelicals would see him as a “latte-sipping,” “New York Times” reader, while scientists might see evangelicals as “Hummer driving, Bible-thumping, fire-breathing” Christians.

However, the Harvard scientist said, “We discovered that we both were speaking from our hearts and our minds that we really liked each other, and we were there because we share a very deep and profound concern for what was happening to the creation, the global environment.”

Collaboration between Christians and scientists on a public issue is not unique to the coalition. The Purpose Driven Life author Rick Warren has often emphasized the need for partnerships between the government, non-governmental organizations, and the church. During the annual “Purpose Driven” HIV/AIDS Conference, Harvard scientists, senators, White House representatives and NGOs convened to learn and network with each other to fight the global epidemic.

Joel Hunter, senior pastor of the Northland Church, a Florida-megachurch, agrees that there is a necessity for partnership between the groups. He said the scientific community has the facts needed to present to congregants and the church has the number of activists needed to make a “significant impact.”

“We believe that in these days, God is putting together groups of people with a common cause who might have seemed adversarial at times in the past,” noted Hunter. “These new collaborative efforts will make the world healthier and safer for everyone.”

Not all evangelicals support the coalition though. The Interfaith Stewardship Alliance, formed by evangelicals, argues that scientific evidence counters claims of climate change. ISA responded to Wednesday’s announcement as “just another attempt to create the impression of growing consensus among evangelicals about global warming.”

“There is no such growing consensus,” it stated, according to The Associated Press.

Michelle Vu
Christian Post Reporter

January 22, 2007

Sunday, January 21, 2007

“Environmentalists get new ally: Evangelicals seek action to fight global warming”

By Peter Smith

psmith@courier-journal.com

The Louisville Courier-Journal

A political climate change lies behind a new statement by scientists and evangelical Christian activists, who are calling for action on global warming and other ecological crises, supporters say.

The statement, issued Wednesday in Washington, declared that the Earth is "seriously imperiled by human behavior" and called on Christians to target "a cascading set of problems such as climate change, habitat destruction, pollution and species extinctions."

"This is a sign the momentum is picking up, that Christians are realizing more and more this is not a special-interest issue, it's an issue that affects all of humanity and the goodness of creation," said Norman Wirzba, a philosophy professor at Georgetown College in Kentucky who writes on the relationship between religion and the environment.

Richard Cizik, a vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals -- an umbrella group including a wide spectrum of conservative Protestants -- helped organize last week's announcement along with scientists. The statement seeks to bring together groups that have long been at odds over such topics as evolution.

The statement does not contain specific recommendations -- such as curbs on using fossil fuels. But Cizik said the point of the statement is to promote general principles that could lead to policies. "We know enough to go beyond debating endlessly whether climate change is occurring," something he said is "settled fact."

Matthew Sleeth, a Wilmore, Ky., author who attended the announcement, said it's "all great to have these proclamations, but eventually it has to result in change, and people have to change their activities."

Sleeth, author of the book, "Serve God, Save the Planet," is a former emergency room doctor who became involved in environmental issues in part after seeing patients get sick and even die from air pollution.

There is little scientific debate about whether humans are causing the planet to warm, with many leading scientists saying greenhouse gas emissions are playing a larger role than natural cycles. Questions remain, however, over how much and how rapidly climate change will occur, and what, if anything, people can do to prevent or adapt to any potential catastrophic upheavals.

But some evangelicals still question the cause of climate change.

"I do agree with the scientists that there is global warming. ... The question becomes, what percentage of the impact is caused by human carbon-dioxide emissions?" said Gregg Allison, an associate professor of Christian theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. He is among evangelicals who signed a statement last year questioning the human impact on global warming.

He said he agrees with a minority of scientists who attribute warming mainly to natural causes. He said poor people would be hurt the most by efforts to radically shift economies away from fossil fuels.

He said he does agree with last week's statement calling for greater care of the environment and said there are other reasons to reduce the use of fossil fuels -- such as preserving them for future generations.

Evangelical Christians are a core constituency of the Republican Party. Neither have traditionally favored strict environmental regulations.

But concern over global warming is prompting "new alliances," said John Green, a senior fellow with the Washington-based Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

"It's really a two-front war," Green said. "The first front is to convince their co-religionists this is the way to go. ... The second front is the political front," to pressure politicians into approving new policies.

Green said Republicans would be more receptive to proposals emphasizing market forces and private initiatives than lengthy codes of regulations.

The Rev. Kevin Smith, pastor of Watson Memorial Baptist Church in Louisville and first vice president of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, said that for many evangelical pastors in Kentucky, global warming is "probably not on their radar screen, and not (because) of any negativity on their part." He said there is less environmental awareness in this part of the country.

Smith said he's still weighing "conflicting arguments" on global warming but that living in industrial New Jersey gave him strong evidence of how people can harm the environment. "There's so much gook going up into the air," he said.

Nancy Jo Kemper of the Kentucky Council of Churches, a coalition of moderate and liberal Christian denominations that has issued calls for stronger environmental regulations, said she's encouraged by a growing evangelical emphasis on "creation care."

"It is a unifying area in which religious groups, not merely evangelical Christians, can work together, and that may open the door to better dialogue and understanding on a raft of other things," she said.

Cizik said before his group does any lobbying, houses of worship "ought to make themselves energy-efficient first and do what they can do by way of personal example."

Campbellsville University in Kentucky is doing just that -- building a chapel using geothermal heating. "We had better start paying closer attention to what human behavior is doing," said Michael Carter, president of the Baptist-affiliated school.

Reporter Peter Smith can be reached at (502) 582-4469. Reporter James Bruggers contributed to this story.

Article published Jan 21, 2007

"U.N. climate conference inspired nun"

By STACY MILBOUER

Nashua (NH) Telegraph Staff

We don't often associate those who have chosen a religious vocation with cutting-edge scientific issues. But 62-year-old Sister Cecile Leclerc, a teacher at Presentation of Mary Academy in Hudson, became only one of two nuns and 15 Catholic religious in the world chosen as a delegate to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Nairobi, Kenya.

Sister Leclerc, who has master's degrees in physiology and environmental studies, is now back teaching science as she has for the last 40 years, but her life is not the same as it was before she left for Nairobi in November.

"When I came back, I was such a changed person," she said. "I saw that we in the United States live on kind of an island of prosperity. We need to open ourselves up to the world and see what's

going on outside our nation. What we do here affects people we'll never meet. We need to know that, and we need to teach our children that."

This is the first time in the history of these conferences that a Catholic religious contingent attended as delegates. Sister Leclerc was part of a group of 15 Catholic sisters and priests among the 6,000 delegates at the world conference.

"The reason the 15 of us were there was to get together as a group of Catholic religious from around the world and discuss what we learned, what we could do about it and how ethics, morals and religion fit into the issue of world climate change," Sister Leclerc said. "At the end, we decided to send a letter to the pope via the papal nuncio, who was at the conference. We know the pope has taken a stand on the environment, but we felt he should take a specific stand on climate change, because that affects the poor the most."

Sister Leclerc said she learned that and so much more at the conference.

"I came back knowing we can no longer be parochial; we have to be global. We have to think global," she said. "What we do right here in this country affects people around the world. And what they do affects us. The people in these Third World countries have to pollute to stay alive. So if we help them, we're helping ourselves."

This is something Sister Leclerc said she saw with her own eyes.

"Right now, there is glacial melting in Mount Kenya that's affecting the whole country," she said. "Nairobi is lush because of this, but when that glacier melts completely, all that will change. I think that's why the conference was held there."

Sister Leclerc holds up two lite photographs: one shows the Lake Victoria area of Nairobi taken in 2003. It looks green and lush and verdant. The same lake three years later appears arid and lifeless.

"You can see the effects of climate change much more dramatically in other parts of the world than you can here, but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist and it won't affect us," she said. "And the thing I learned is how much it is affecting people right now. People are pouring into Nairobi begging for food and water."

Sister Leclerc's life-altering experience was about the workshops she took on climate change and global warming at the U.N. conference center in Nairobi and the discussions she held with her fellow Catholics, but it was also about how those issues affect people at a very basic level.

It wasn't enough for her to stay within the comfortable and secure U.N. compound, she insisted on venturing out to the city of Nairobi, which she said is "80 percent slum."

"I had a hard time finding someone to take me there," Sister Leclerc said. "It was too dangerous to go alone, and it was suggested that I not go at all. But I had to. I had to see for myself how

people were really living in a country so directly affected by global warming, AIDS and poverty.”

Sister Leclerc also had a delivery to make. Before her trip, her PMA students raised \$500 to buy a cow for the St. Nicholas Home for Children, an orphanage in Nairobi, and she wanted to present the money in person.

Finally, she found someone willing to take her on the trip, which she said was harrowing and eye opening.

“Within a mile of the conference center, there were nine major slums,” she said. “I couldn’t believe how these people were living. There is no sewage, no fresh water. Most people in our country wouldn’t allow their pets to live the way people are living there. Maybe more isn’t done because we don’t know about these conditions. But really, it’s a matter of choosing not to know.”

When she did get to the orphanage, where 200 children whose parents died from AIDS are living, Sister Leclerc was amazed at what she found.

“These children were so happy,” she said. “They don’t have any parents, but they had food, clothes and love. They were all smiling and so grateful that someone was taking care of them and they weren’t on the streets.”

Here Sister Leclerc starts to cry. She can’t mention the children without tearing up.

“I just wanted to go there and give the money, but these wonderful children put on a show for me,” she said. “They sang and read poetry.”

And Sister Leclerc was happy to see that the orphanage was teaching the students about sustainable living, a key in ending poverty and in sound environmental practices, she said.

“They are teaching these children how to raise chickens and grow food so that they can sustain themselves and the community,” she said.

Sister Leclerc may have left Nairobi, but Nairobi has not left her, and it probably never will. She plans to teach her students about world climate change and world poverty. She also plans a presentation for her religious community and other schools. And she e-mails the orphanage and conference colleagues in Nairobi nearly every day.

For more information about the Climate Control Conference in Kenya, visit www.unfccc.int.

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WACO (Texas) TRIBUNE

“Can the God-fearing truly go green? Opinions vary locally, nationally”

Sunday, January 21, 2007

By Cindy V. Culp

Tribune-Herald staff writer

Some Christians may soon be hearing about environmental causes from the pulpit if a newly formed partnership between scientists and evangelical leaders gains traction in local congregations.

Science and religion are often at odds when it comes to talking about how and when Earth was created. But those involved in the effort say the two groups actually have a lot in common, including the belief that protecting the planet is a “profound moral imperative.”

“God will judge us for destroying the Creation,” Rich Cizik, public policy director for the National Association of Evangelicals, said last week at a Washington, D.C., news conference where the partnership was announced. “Therefore, we as evangelicals have a responsibility to be even more vigilant than others. Science can be an ally in helping us understand what faith is telling us. We will not allow the Creation to be degraded, destroyed by human folly.”

The coalition was formed after meetings between officials from the Harvard Center for Health and the Global Environment and the National Association of Evangelicals. The association’s involvement is key not only because it has 45,000 member churches in the United States, but because last year it refused to join an effort to get Christians more involved in the fight against global warming.

The coalition has 28 members who range from university professors and federal biologists to megachurch pastors and other evangelical leaders. To kick off the effort, they released a mission statement called an “Urgent Call to Action.”

The document urges leaders in all realms — faith, science, business, politics and education — to work together to stem the tide of human threats to the environment. It advocates changes at both the individual and public policy level, saying “there is no excuse for further delays.”

Getting down to it

Among specific issues the group pledges to address are global warming, pollution, habitat destruction, species extinction and the spread of human infectious disease.

The group’s first official action was to meet with members of Congress. They also have pledged to hold a summit on Creation and to develop teaching materials for churches, including a “creation care” Bible study guide.

Locally, numerous churches are members of the more than 60 denominational groups affiliated with the National Evangelical Association. Even so, area church leaders were not familiar with the new effort when contacted by the Tribune-Herald.

What's more, area opinions on the coalition's aims vary widely, even as furor mounts over plans for eight coal-fired power plants in Central Texas, including three in McLennan County, and how such plants might impact air quality. The issue of water quality, specifically involving Lake Waco and upstream dairies, has been the subject of debate for years.

Fellowship Bible Church is one local congregation whose denomination is a member of the National Evangelical Association. Senior Pastor Grant Kaul says he is all for conservation and responsible use of natural resources. That clearly fits within the Bible's message to be good stewards of God's creation.

At the same time, Kaul disagrees with "extreme" environmental efforts advocated by some and is not convinced of scientific consensus on issues like global warming. Kaul said he also isn't sure how environmental concerns would work their way into his church, except through general exhortations to good stewardship.

"It's not a major focal point at this time," he said.

Douglas Shafer, senior pastor at First Assembly of God in Waco, another church whose denomination is part of the evangelical association, expressed similar thoughts. Christians should definitely be good stewards of creation, he said.

But what that means is a matter of individual conviction, Shafer said. For some Christians, recycling is a spiritual issue. For others, it's not, he said, drawing a parallel to differences of opinion over alcohol consumption.

Environmentalism becomes problematic, Shafer said, when people take questionable science and push an agenda based on it. That is what has happened with many environmental issues, he said, noting that he doesn't believe there is clear evidence to support the idea of global warming.

"You shouldn't overemphasize it or elevate it to being an idol," Shafer said.

From left to right

Churches not affiliated with the evangelical association also have varying viewpoints.

Nika Davis, pastor of Second Missionary Baptist Church in Waco, said he can see environmentalism becoming a bigger issue among Christians because human selfishness appears to be at the root of problems like global warming. Having curricula geared specifically toward churches would help in broaching the topic, he said.

Julie Pennington-Russell, pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Waco, said she believes efforts like the one being led by the coalition are long overdue. For too long, political overtones have kept many faith groups out of the discussion, she said, even though "caring for creation makes all the sense in the world."

As a congregation, Calvary has not tackled environmental issues full force, Pennington-Russell said. But it has made some efforts. For example, it is getting a recycling program established and has switched from buying foam products to paper ones.

Also, Calvary was one of thousands of congregations that last year showed *An Inconvenient Truth*, former Vice President Al Gore's controversial film about global warming. That event was driven by several members who are passionate about environmental issues, Pennington-Russell said.

Scott Freeman, pastor at Northside Church of Christ in Bellmead, also is excited. He was one of 86 leaders who last February signed on to the first major effort to get evangelicals involved in environmental issues.

The fact that the evangelical association has gotten aboard the environmentalism bandwagon should help the cause tremendously, Freeman said. Based on his previous experience as a skeptic, he believes Christians will see topics like global warming as a spiritual issue once they get all the facts.

Pastor John Collier of Waco's Parkview Baptist Church disagrees. Although Christians must be good stewards of God's creation, he said, he doesn't believe in global warming. Rather, he thinks Earth goes through cycles and is currently experiencing a warm phase.

"God is in absolute control of the situation, and whether it's hair spray that they say is going to knock out the ozone or whether it's all the emissions, he knew all of these things would come to pass," Collier said. "I don't want to oversimplify, but I think we're — excuse the pun — getting too heated up about global warming."

Collier says he believes churches should focus on the eternal, meaning saving souls for Christ. Ever since the fall of man, Earth has been deteriorating, he said, and it will continue to do so no matter what efforts are launched.

Such views are held by many Christians. Some prominent evangelical leaders support a group called the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance, which contends global warming is not the threat scientists say it is.

The alliance derided last week's announcement as "just another attempt to create the impression of growing consensus among evangelicals about global warming. There is no such growing consensus."

Potential for change

Despite the divide, the new initiative has real potential for change, says Susan Bratton, chairwoman of the environmental studies program at Baylor University.

Politicians of all stripes are more likely to get serious about environmental issues if more voters are concerned about them, Bratton said. More importantly, individuals are more likely to make eco-conscious choices in the context of faith.

One of the biggest impediments to such choices is money, Bratton said. As things are now, it generally costs more to go green. But if people believe they are being called by God to make choices, it takes the issue out of an economic framework, she said.

“In a Christian context,” she said, “it’s not just about the pocketbook anymore.”

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

February 1, 2007

UNEP PRESS RELEASE

“Putting Globalization on More ‘Intelligent’ Path Unites UNEP’s 2007 Champions of the Earth”

Award Winners Announced on Eve Of UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum

NAIROBI, 1 February 2007 -- Seven leaders whose achievements range from chemical safety, sustainable waste management and the greening of sporting events to the conservation of deserts, rainforests and the global climate are to be honoured as Champions of the Earth 2007, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) announced today.

The winners, who will be presented with their awards at a special ceremony in Singapore on 19 April, were named as:

- * His Excellency Mr. Cherif Rahmani for advancing environmental law in Algeria and for his role in leading the International Year for Deserts and Desertification.
- * Elisea ‘Bebet’ Gillera Gozun for pushing forward the environmental agenda in her native Philippines by winning the trust of business leaders, non-governmental organizations and political decision-makers alike;
- * Viveka Bohn of Sweden for playing a prominent role in multilateral negotiations and her leadership in global efforts to ensure chemical safety;
- * Her Excellency Ms. Marina Silva of Brazil for her tireless fight to protect the Amazon rainforest while taking into account the perspectives of people who use the resources in their daily lives;
- * Al Gore of the United States for making environmental protection a pillar of his public service and for educating the world on the dangers posed by rising greenhouse gas emissions;
- * His Royal Highness Prince Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan for his belief in transboundary collaboration to protect the environment and for addressing environmental issues in a holistic manner; and

* Jacques Rogge and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for advancing the sport and environment agenda by providing greater resources to sustainable development and for introducing stringent environmental requirements for cities bidding to host Olympic Games.

News of the winners comes in advance of UNEP's annual gathering of environment ministers taking place next week at the organization's headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The risks and opportunities of globalization, in relation to environmental issues, will be high on the agenda of the conference.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, said: "Steering globalization onto a more intelligent and sustainable trajectory requires the commitment of Governments, the private sector, local authorities and civil society—but it also needs individuals capable of catalyzing change, empowering others and inspiring action."

"The men and women we are recognizing today are indeed role models who have committed themselves to realizing a more just, equitable and sustainable world. Proof, if proof is needed, that globalization can be sustainably managed if we harness the intelligence, energy and vision so self evident in these Champions of the Earth 2007", he added.

The awards, presented for the third time, recognize prominent and inspirational environmental leaders from each region of the world. Through leadership, vision and creativity, each Champion has made an impact at the policy level.

The winners will be honoured at a gala event hosted by UNEP, the Singapore Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources (MEWR) and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), with the support of various sponsors and partners including Asia-Pacific Resources International Holdings (APRIL).

On 19 and 20 April 2007, UNEP and the United Nations Global Compact will co-host the inaugural "Global Business Summit for the Environment" (B4E) in Singapore.

Linked with the UNEP Champions of the Earth award event, the Summit will seek to showcase visionary leadership in corporate environmental responsibility.

Notes to Editors on the Winners

AFRICA

H.E. Mr. Cherif Rahmani - Algeria

H.E. Mr. Cherif Rahmani's career has been guided by a profound commitment to the protection of our planet. As a Minister, he has worked tirelessly to greatly advance environmental law in Algeria. Under his guidance, new specialized institutions have been established with the aim of creating and implementing an environmental policy, which is at the service of sustainable development.

He has also established model financial and economic instruments aimed at promoting a tax system in Algeria based on international criteria that adhere to the polluter pays principle. He has brought a fundamental contribution to the implementation of the National Action Plan for Environment and Sustainable Development. This approach, adopted by the Algerian Government, is based on four major objectives: improving the health and quality of life; improving the productivity of natural capital; reducing economic losses and improving competitiveness; and improving the global environment (e.g. reducing greenhouse gases and impacts of climate change).

Mr. Rahmani has made significant contributions in his capacity as President of the Foundation 'Deserts du Monde' and as Honorary Spokesperson of the United Nations International Year of Deserts and Desertification. For example, he led the creation of the Institute of Deserts and the Museum of Deserts, the rehabilitation of Fort de Tinerkouk, the International Conference on the Biodiversity of Deserts (Brazil), the International Conference on Women and Desertification (Italy), the Second International Symposium on Desertification and Migration (Spain) and the International Scientific Conference on Deserts and Desertification (Tunisia), as well as the organization of the Third Festival of Cultures and Civilizations of the People of the Deserts.

Contact: Ms. Lylia Harchaoui, E-mail: l.harchaoui@yahoo.fr; Mobile: +213-71-85-6287; Tel/fax: +213-21-43-2832.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Elisea "Bebet" Gillera Gozun - Philippines

Mrs. Elisea "Bebet" Gillera Gozun's commitment to public service and her passion for the environment has given her the energy to overcome obstacles, persuade disbelievers and shape alliances.

Her leadership in World Bank projects resulted in tangible results such as the introduction of pollution charges for industrial effluents in the Philippines, the establishment of the ECOWATCH programme – an innovative public disclosure programme of environmental performance of priority industries – and the "Brown Fund"- the first tripartite funding source for local urban environmental initiatives, jointly managed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), business and government.

Mrs. Gozun recognized that without the local communities, the private sector and local governments on board led by mayors, no national policy could succeed. She has pushed for the introduction of community-based waste recovery, recycling and reuse in the Philippines and has also worked for the establishment of materials recovery facilities and on upgrading the quality and capacity of landfills for the residual wastes. To implement the pilot schemes in environmental management, she has attracted international funding and mobilized local resources. As a result, today there is a wide network of participating communities, with dramatically improved health situations due to better solid waste management.

Her personal integrity, combined with a keen pragmatic sense for what is politically feasible to constitute a viable solution, have won her the trust of business leaders, NGOs and political decision-makers alike.

Contact: Ms. Elisea “Bebet” Gillera Gozun, E-mail: bggozun@hotmail.com; Mobile: +63-917-530-5854; Tel: +63-2-941-7233.

EUROPE

Viveka Bohn - Sweden

Ms. Viveka Bohn has played a prominent role in multilateral negotiations, including environmental treaties such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). Her leadership has been especially evident in global efforts to ensure chemical safety, which has been increasingly recognized as a key crosscutting issue in the pursuit of sustainable development.

She is also being recognized for her work on chemicals with the adoption of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) by the international community. This important new global policy framework will catalyse and guide efforts to achieve the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation goal of sound management of chemicals by 2020. As President of the Preparatory Committee for the Development of SAICM, she was central to this body’s evolution and was instrumental in its finalization at the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM) in Dubai in February 2006.

As head of the Swedish project secretariat for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, Ms. Bohn worked tirelessly on issues related to sustainable consumption and production, and the fruits of her labour were recognized when she was elected co-chair of the follow-up Marrakech process.

Contact: Mr Per Thege, E-mail: per.thege@environment.ministry.se; Mobile: + 46-70-605-6036

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

H.E. Ms. Marina Silva – Brazil

H.E. Ms. Marina Silva has been a tireless fighter for the protection of the Amazon rainforest. Her work has championed conservation while taking into account the perspectives of people who use the resources in their daily lives. In this respect, she is a champion of the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which promotes conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of the benefits of biodiversity.

Ms. Silva has recognised that, in protecting the environment, building a coalition of support demands adherence to a core set of values. Her belief that the success of the fight to save life on Earth demands that principles are at the forefront of our efforts has made her a deserving recipient of the 2007 Champions of the Earth award.

As a member of Brazil's senate, she has successfully legislated rainforest preservation, defended her people against poverty and protected their way of life. As the Brazilian Minister of the Environment since 2003, her contribution to preserving the biologically diverse, complex and rich Brazilian Amazon is remarkable, with deforestation estimated to have decreased by more than 50 per cent in the last two years – a result undoubtedly linked to a new government process implemented by her and fundamentally based on the idea of a cross-cutting approach to environmental issues in all governmental and non-governmental sectors.

Contact: Mr. Fernando Lyrio, E-mail: fernando.lyrio@mma.gov.br; Tel: +55-61-4009-1416/1003

NORTH AMERICA

Al Gore – United States of America

During Al Gore's 16-year career in the United States Congress and his eight-year term as Vice-President, he has made protecting the environment a pillar of his public service. He led Congressional efforts to clean up toxic dumps leading to the formation of the Superfund and held the first hearing on global climate change. In conjunction with his numerous trips around the world to visit those habitats most threatened by human intervention and climate change, he worked to educate fellow members of Congress and the American public on the dangers posed by rising atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations as well as political inaction in the face of a growing environmental crisis.

Mr. Gore and President William Clinton expended great efforts to protect habitat across the United States and expand terrestrial and aquatic national parks and wildlife refuges. He also helped in the negotiating and drafting of the Kyoto Protocol aimed at cutting emissions of greenhouse gases.

Since the conclusion of his public service he has continued his committed efforts on behalf of the environment. His critically-acclaimed documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* – based on his presentation on climate change and which he has shown more than 1,000 times across the world – has become the third-highest grossing documentary in the history of the United States. Mr. Gore continues to incorporate his passion for the environment into his professional career, where he serves as Chairman of an investment management firm whose strategy incorporates sustainability in its investment research.

Throughout his 30-year career, as a politician, author, statesman and entrepreneur, he has made, and continues to make, critical contributions to the protection of the environment.

Contact: Ms. Stacy Schumaker, E-mail: stacy@carthagegroup.com

WEST ASIA

HRH Prince El Hassan Bin Talal - Jordan

To sustain natural resources for future generations, HRH Prince El Hassan Bin Talal has addressed environmental issues in a holistic manner. In particular, his belief in transboundary collaboration to protect the environment merits global recognition.

HRH has initiated, founded and has been actively involved in a number of Jordanian and international environmental institutions. As President of Jordan's Higher Council for Science and Technology (HCST), he has emphasized the need for relevant and improved environmental policies, strategies and programmes. HRH has ensured that HCST focuses on enhancing the quality of life of the inhabitants of dryland areas, empowering them to improve their standard of living using available resources without having to change their traditional way of life.

Also under his leadership, the Royal Scientific Society has been active in the field of environmental management and protection, specifically water quality management. HRH has supported global partnerships aimed at ensuring sustainable energy use, such as the Trans-Mediterranean Renewable Energy Cooperation, an organization, which has had a measurable impact on sustainable development and which has pointed the way to clean and equitable energy production by sharing capital and know-how.

Contact: Mr. Habib El-Habr, Director of UNEP Regional Office for West Asia; E-mail: habib.elhabr@unep.org.bh; Tel: +973-17- 812-755.

UNEP SPECIAL PRIZE

Jacques Rogge and the International Olympic Committee

As President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Mr. Jacques Rogge has played an important role in the development of the sport and environment agenda. The changes he has brought to the organization have reinforced the importance of the environment in the work of the Olympic Movement.

Mr. Rogge has perpetuated a policy that seeks to provide greater resources to sustainable development in and through sport at national, regional and international levels, and particularly at the Olympic Games. This policy enshrined in the Olympic Charter is an important development as it strives to promote Olympic Games which respect the environment and meet the standards of sustainable development. Furthermore, it aims to promote awareness among and educate the members of the Olympic family and sports practitioners in general of the importance of a healthy environment for sustainable development.

Since taking the helm of the IOC in July 2001, Mr. Rogge has introduced stringent environmental requirements for cities bidding to host Olympic Games. As a result of these measures, no bid is considered without a comprehensive environmental programme. He has played an active and personal role in encouraging organizers of Olympic Games (Turin 2006 and Beijing 2008, in particular) to fulfil their environmental pledges and commitments. Under his Presidency, the Torino Games were widely hailed as the greenest games and considered innovative and a model for future "green" games.

In addition, Mr. Rogge has endorsed the continuation of the IOC biennial World Conference for Sport and Environment and regional seminars for sport and environment. Under his leadership, the World Conference has become one of the most recognizable events on sport and the environment and continues to draw stakeholders from all sectors of the sporting world to discuss their role and contributions to sustainable development.

Contact: Mrs. Emmanuelle Moreau, Media Relations Manager, or Ms. Sandrine Chabert, Media Relations Coordinator, E-mail: pressoffice@olympic.org; Tel: +41-216-216-1111; Fax: +41-216-216-356.

Additional Notes to Editors

Background on the Champions of the Earth prize and all the laureates, including biographies and photographs, is available from <http://www.unep.org/champions/> or from UNEP DCPI at championsoftheearth@unep.org

The Champions of the Earth award, established in 2004, is presented by UNEP each year to outstanding environmental achievers and leaders.

No monetary reward is attached to the prize. Each laureate receives a trophy made of recycled metal especially designed by the Kenyan sculptor Kioko. The trophy represents the fundamental elements for life on Earth – sun, air, land and water.

UNEP invites nominations from individuals who have made a significant and recognized contribution globally, regionally and beyond, to the protection and sustainable management of the Earth's environment and natural resources. Candidates are judged by a senior UNEP panel with input from UNEP's regional offices.

UNEP's Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum runs from 5 to 9 February 2007, see www.unep.org/gc/gc24

For more information, please contact: Nick Nuttall, UNEP Spokesperson, on Tel: +254-20-762-3084, Mobile: +254-733-632755 or +41-79-596-5737, E-mail: nick.nuttall@unep.org

UNEP News Release 2007/03

UNEP PRESS RELEASE

“Infusing ‘Intelligence’ into the Globalized Economy”

24th Session of UNEP's Governing Council-Global Ministerial Environment Forum, 5 to 9 February

NAIROBI, 1 February 2007 – The environmental risks and opportunities posed by globalization and booming transnational trade will be brought into sharp focus next week at an international gathering of environment ministers.

The ministers, attending the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), will be searching for ways to put globalization on a more sustainable and intelligent path.

Globalization and trade is creating unprecedented wealth and lifting millions out of the poverty trap. But some of the wider costs, including those to economically important forests, wetlands, coral reefs and other central ecosystems are often factored out of the balance sheets. Similarly, the true economic value of the goods and services provided by nature can be all but invisible in national and global accounts.

Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel Prize-winning economist writing in a special Governing Council edition of UNEP's "Our Planet" magazine, calculates that tropical forests are worth at least \$100 billion a year just for their carbon storing value alone—an economic benefit lost when trees are unsustainably logged for timber and wood products for a fraction of their wider, true value.

An increasing body of opinion argues that the pace at which finite natural resources are being lost could mean that the engine of globalization may stutter and eventually run out of fuel, triggering potential tensions between nations and aggravating rather than alleviating poverty.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP's Executive Director, said: "It is akin to a company living off its capital rather than its interest or a farmer growing bumper crops but failing to save or invest in seeds and agricultural machinery for coming years."

"A worst-case analogy might be a family, heating their home by throwing the living room furniture onto the fire. Unless we better value natural resources and better calculate the external costs of international trade we risk killing the proverbial goose and her golden eggs", he added.

There are, however, numerous examples of intelligent ways of sustainably managing globalization -- from the certification of resources like timber and fish and green procurement strategies to new and creative financial and trading mechanisms like those enshrined in the climate change treaties", said Mr. Steiner.

"We need to harness the power of the consumer, match calls for international regulation from the private sector and set realistic standards and norms for the globalized markets. This is above all the responsibility of Governments who have the ultimate responsibility to define the wider aims and goals of a globalized world and devise the mechanisms and route maps need to achieve these", he added.

UN Reform

This year's annual gathering is set to be a landmark in several ways. In the growing spirit of UN reform and the request by the international community for greater cooperation and cohesion across the UN, UNEP will be joined by leading figures from several agencies.

These include Kemal Dervis, UN Development Programme Administrator, who will join Mr. Steiner in launching a joint Poverty and Environment Facility; and Kandeh Yumkella, Director

General of the UN Industrial Development Organization—UNEP is working with UNIDO in areas including biofuels and persistent organic pollutants.

Pascal Lamy, Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), will also be attending to help spearhead a special discussion on “Ensuring Coherence between the Trade and Environment Regimes”.

“I believe the presence of Mr. Lamy at UNEP’s Governing Council shows there is no longer one-way traffic in respect to trade and the environment. But a clearer and growing understanding that both sides have a tremendous amount to gain in working hand in glove to solve the challenges of a globalized world”, he said.

Civil Society

Mr. Steiner said he was also delighted that Gunter Pauli, founder of Europe’s first ecological factory and pioneering visionary behind the Zero Emissions Research Initiative (ZERI), would be attending to deliver a dinner address to delegates.

“Gunter Pauli is one of the most provocative and inspiring thinkers and speakers on creating a truly sustainable society in which waste is not waste but an input to another agricultural or industrial process—ideas now being actively pursued by Governments, like China, through their circular economy initiative”, said Mr. Steiner.

Civil society, including senior figures from trades unions, will also be part of the debate prior to and during the GC/GMEF. Those scheduled to attend include Mr. Guy Ryder, the General-Secretary of the International Trade Unions Confederation.

Climate Change and World Environment Day

The ever-accelerating challenge of climate change will be underlined on World Environment Day 2007 in early June in Norway with the theme “Melting Ice-A Hot Topic?”.

At the Governing Council, Helen Bjornoy, the Norwegian Environment Minister, will host a side event previewing World Environment Day where UNEP will also launch its strategy for International Polar Year.

GEO Year Book 2007

UNEP, as requested by Governments, will release its latest Global Environment Outlook Year Book on Monday, 5 February, at an opening press conference.

The Year Book will cover the state of the global and regional environment while addressing emerging issues like nanotechnology—the engineering of coatings and particles at sizes slimmer than a human hair.

The Year Book will also sketch out the current globalization landscape as related to the environment and suggest some routes towards a more intelligent path. It is among several reports and papers that have been produced to inform next week’s ministerial debate.

A further report, this time linking globalization, the rapid global demand for biofuels from crops and pressure on the last habitats of the orangutan in South-East Asia, will also be launched at a press conference on Tuesday, 6 February.

Mercury

Other issues before ministers, some of which link into the globalization debate, include discussions on how best to take forward the worldwide effort to reduce emissions from mercury.

Mercury, a heavy metal that can enter the food chain via fish, is linked to a wide range of human and animal health issues and wider environmental problems.

The Government of Spain is scheduled to present an initiative on the establishment of a Global Technological Centre for the Decontamination of Warehouse and Stored Mercury.

Note to Editors

Information on the 24th Session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum being held at UNEP headquarters between 5 and 9 February can be found at <http://www.unep.org/gc/gc24/>

This also holds a calendar of events, side events, press conferences and other key information, including on the 8th Global Civil Society Forum being held between 3 and 4 February.

For information on World Environment Day 2007, see <http://www.unep.org/wed/2007/>

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UNEP News Release 2007/04

February 2, 2007

UNEP-WMO PRESS RELEASE

“The evidence for human-caused global warming is now ‘unequivocal’, says IPCC”

PARIS, 2 February 2007 – The first major global assessment of climate change science in six years has concluded that changes in the atmosphere, the oceans and glaciers and ice caps show unequivocally that the world is warming.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concludes that major advances in climate modelling and the collection and analysis of data now give scientists “very high confidence” (at least a 9 out of 10 chance of being correct) in their understanding of how human activities are causing the world to warm. This level of confidence is much greater than what could be achieved in 2001 when the IPCC issued its last major report.

Today’s report, the first of four volumes to be released this year by the IPCC, also confirms that

the marked increase in atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O) since 1750 is the result of human activities.

An even greater degree of warming would likely have occurred if emissions of pollution particles and other aerosols had not offset some of the impact of greenhouse gases, mainly by reflecting sunlight back out to space.

Three years in the making, the report is based on a thorough review of the most-up-to-date, peer-reviewed scientific literature available worldwide. It describes an accelerating transition to a warmer world marked by more extreme temperatures including heat waves, new wind patterns, worsening drought in some regions, heavier precipitation in others, melting glaciers and Arctic ice and rising global average sea levels. For the first time, the report provides evidence that the ice sheets of Antarctica and Greenland are slowly losing mass and contributing to sea level rise.

“This report by the IPCC represents the most rigorous and comprehensive assessment possible of the current state of climate science and has considerably narrowed the uncertainties of the 2001 report”, said Michel Jarraud, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). “Progress in observations and measurements of the weather and climate are keys to improved climate research, with National Meteorological and Hydrological Services playing a crucial role.”

“While the conclusions are disturbing, decision makers are now armed with the latest facts and will be better able to respond to these realities. The speed with which melting ice sheets are raising sea levels is uncertain, but the report makes clear that sea levels will rise inexorably over the coming centuries. It is a question of when and how much, and not if”, he said.

“In our daily lives we all respond urgently to dangers that are much less likely than climate change to affect the future of our children”, said Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which, together with WMO, established the IPCC in 1988.

“The implications of global warming over the coming decades for our industrial economy, water supplies, agriculture, biological diversity and even geopolitics are massive. Momentum for action is building; this new report should spur policymakers to get off the fence and put strong and effective policies in place to tackle greenhouse gas emissions”, he said.

The report also concludes that:

* If atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases double compared to pre-industrial levels, this would “likely” cause an average warming of around 3°C (5.4°F), with a range of 2 - 4.5°C (3.6 - 8.1°F). For the first time, the IPCC is providing best estimates for the warming projected to result from particular increases in greenhouse gases that could occur after the 21st century, along with uncertainty ranges based on more comprehensive modelling.

* A GHG level of 650 ppm would “likely” warm the global climate by around 3.6°C, while 750 ppm would lead to a 4.3°C warming, 1,000 ppm to 5.5°C and 1,200 ppm to 6.3°C. Future

GHG concentrations are difficult to predict and will depend on economic growth, new technologies and policies and other factors.

* The world's average surface temperature has increased by around 0.74°C over the past 100 years (1906-2005). This figure is higher than the 2001 report's 100-year estimate of 0.6°C due to the recent series of extremely warm years, with 11 of the last 12 years ranking among the 12 warmest years since modern records began around 1850. A warming of about 0.2°C is projected for each of the next two decades.

* The best estimates for sea-level rise due to ocean expansion and glacier melt by the end of the century (compared to 1989–1999 levels) have narrowed to 28-58 cm, versus 9-88 cm in the 2001 report, due to improved understanding. However, larger values of up to 1 m by 2100 cannot be ruled out if ice sheets continue to melt as temperature rises. The last time the polar regions were significantly warmer than at present for an extended period (about 125,000 years ago), reductions in polar ice volume caused the sea level to rise by 4 to 6 m.

* Sea ice is projected to shrink in both the Arctic and Antarctic regions. Large areas of the Arctic Ocean could lose year-round ice cover by the end of the 21st century if human emissions reach the higher end of current estimates. The extent of Arctic sea ice has already shrunk by about 2.7% per decade since 1978, with the summer minimum declining by about 7.4% per decade.

* Snow cover has decreased in most regions, especially in spring. The maximum extent of frozen ground in the winter/spring season decreased by about 7% in the Northern Hemisphere over the latter half of the 20th century. The average freezing date for rivers and lakes in the Northern Hemisphere over the past 150 years has arrived later by some 5.8 days per century, while the average break-up date has arrived earlier by 6.5 days per century.

* It is “very likely” that precipitation will increase at high latitudes and “likely” it will decrease over most subtropical land regions. The pattern of these changes is similar to what has been observed during the 20th century.

* It is “very likely” that the upward trend in hot extremes and heat waves will continue. The duration and intensity of drought has increased over wider areas since the 1970s, particularly in the tropics and subtropics. The Sahel, the Mediterranean, southern Africa and parts of southern Asia have already become drier during the 20th century.

* The amounts of carbon dioxide and methane now in the atmosphere far exceed pre-industrial values going back 650,000 years. As stated above, concentrations of carbon dioxide have already risen from a pre-industrial level of 280 ppm to around 379 ppm in 2005, while methane concentrations have risen from 715 parts per billion (ppb) to 1,774 in 2005.

* A number of widely discussed uncertainties have been resolved. The temperature record of the lower atmosphere from satellite measurements has been reconciled with the ground-based record. Key remaining uncertainties involve the roles played by clouds, the cryosphere (glaciers and ice caps), oceans, deforestation and other land-use change, and the linking of climate and

biogeochemical cycles.

The IPCC does not conduct new research. Instead, its mandate is to make policy-relevant assessments of the existing worldwide literature on the scientific, technical and socio-economic aspects of climate change. Its reports have played a major role in inspiring Governments to adopt and implement the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol.

The Summary for Policymakers for IPCC Working Group I, which was finalized line-by-line by Governments during the course of this week, has now been posted in English at www.ipcc.ch. The full underlying report – “Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis” – will be published by Cambridge University Press.

The report was produced by some 600 authors from 40 countries. Over 620 expert reviewers and a large number of government reviewers also participated. Representatives from 113 Governments reviewed and revised the Summary line-by-line during the course of this week before adopting it and accepting the underlying report.

The Working Group II report on climate impacts and adaptation will be launched in Brussels on 6 April. The Working Group III report on mitigation will be launched in Bangkok on 4 May. The Synthesis Report will be adopted in Valencia, Spain on 16 November. Together, the four volumes will make up the IPCC’s fourth assessment report; previous reports were published in 1990, 1995 and 2001.

Note to journalists: For more information, please see www.ipcc.ch, www.wmo.int or www.unep.org, or contact:

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An archived webcast of today's launch is available, in English and French, via the IPCC website or WG I website, see either <http://www.ipcc.ch> or <http://ipcc-wg1.ucar.edu/index.html>

February 6, 2007

“World's churches go green and rally to cause”

By Paul Majendie
Reuters Tuesday, February 6, 2007; 11:14 AM

LONDON (Reuters) - Dire warnings from top scientists that mankind is to blame for global warming set off alarm bells everywhere -- but many of the world's churches have already "gone green" in the race to save the planet.

For Christians, Jews and Muslims, the message is the same -- mankind has "stewardship" of the earth which it has a duty to protect for future generations.

And environmentalists hailed churches for stepping up to the plate with a real sense of urgency.

"Caring for the environment is a key part of many religions. Any contribution which highlights and tackles issues such as climate change is very welcome," said Mike Childs of Friends of the Earth.

Last week's Doomsday warning from a U.N. panel of scientists -- temperatures are rising inexorably and mankind is the culprit -- dramatically underlined how the clock is ticking.

That gave added impetus to the campaign and religious environmentalists say pious words of intent are not enough.

Martin Robra, climate change spokesman for the World Council of Churches grouping 560 million Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican Christians, said the debate "must now shift from denial and delays to responsibility and remedies well within humanity's grasp."

So what are the churches doing?

The tide shows signs of turning in the United States, which is responsible for one quarter of the world's emissions of carbon dioxide and uses one quarter of the world's crude oil.

A group of 85 evangelical Christian leaders this month kicked off a campaign to mobilize religious conservatives to combat global warming.

With full-page newspaper advertisements and a television ad, they declared "With God's help, we can stop global warming for our kids, our world and our Lord."

CREATION CARE NEEDED

The push for "creation care" -- the idea that the environment is a divine creation that must be protected by humans -- was highly successful with its "What Would Jesus Drive?" campaign to get Americans to use more fuel-efficient vehicles.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, spiritual leader of the world's 77 million Anglicans, drives an eco-friendly car, bangs the green drum and argues "We are consumers of what God has made. We are in communion with it."

Catholics are also very much singing from the same hymn sheet with Pope Benedict making protection of the environment one of the keynotes of his papacy.

He has called on every Catholic to become environmentally friendly and dedicated an entire section of his 2007 World Day of Peace message to what he called "the ecology of peace," saying that disregard for the environment harms human existence.

"The destruction of the environment, its improper or selfish use, and the violent hoarding of the earth's resources cause grievances, conflicts and wars, precisely because they are the consequences of an inhumane concept of development," he wrote.

Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew, the Istanbul-based spiritual head of all Orthodox Churches, is planning to take a ship full of religious leaders to the Arctic Circle this summer to focus on global warming.

The Big Green Jewish Website seeks to galvanize British Jews into environmental action. The Greening Synagogues initiative in the United States opts for the practical -- programmable thermostats, energy-saving light bulbs.

And for Muslims, the issue is just as pressing.

"It is a question of trusteeship," said Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra, chairman of the Muslim Council of Britain's inter-faith relations committee.

"We believe that we are God's deputies on the planet and we have been given the responsibility to ensure we use God's gift in the correct manner and leave it in a fit state which can be passed on to future generations," he said.

Words were matched by actions in December when a meeting in Saudi Arabia of environment ministers from the Organization of the Islamic Conference issued a 12-point plan -- including calls for water, soil and land preservation.

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"God is great, God is green: People of faith are suddenly intense and vocal about global warming. But can they really make a difference?"

By Pamela Miller, Star Tribune

How many religious people does it take to change a light bulb?

Forget about one traditional snappy answer -- Why does it need to be changed? That's so last-millennium.

Across America, people of faith are taking the lead in the national conversation about global warming. To them, climate change is no joke, it's a moral imperative. Jews, Roman Catholics, Protestants and evangelicals are sermonizing about threats to God's green Earth, holding energy-reduction fairs and competitions, lobbying for lower carbon-dioxide emissions and broader use of wind power and biofuels, screwing energy-efficient bulbs into menorahs and installing solar panels next to the steeple.

"Global warming is harming God's creation and God's people," said Kendra Brodin of the Plymouth Center for Progressive Christian Faith at Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis. "It's wreaking havoc on the land and on human beings who are losing homes, jobs, safety, even their lives in storms, floods, droughts and heat waves."

At the State Capitol, Brian Rusche, executive director of the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition, said he's hearing more such laments.

"People are seeing eggs hatching three weeks early, things way out of sync, and wonder what they can do as individuals of faith and through the institutions of their churches and synagogues," he said. "And their actions are rippling out to policymakers and the public."

Rusche has also seen that interest at his church, Valley Community Presbyterian in Golden Valley. "We showed [Al Gore's movie] 'An Inconvenient Truth' and packed the place," he said. "Even nonmembers showed up."

This week, Archbishop Harry Flynn of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis and Bishop Craig Johnson of the Minneapolis synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America joined polar explorer Will Steger and Minnesota scientists at the Capitol, where they called for action against pollution that can cause global warming.

But can religious people really make a difference on this most complex of issues?

Just watch us, movement leaders say.

Voices rising

In recent years, many national religious leaders have decried global warming. Mainline Protestant and Jewish leaders and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have been on the record for a few years, and last year 86 evangelical leaders, including Leith Anderson, senior pastor at Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, issued an unprecedented call for congressional action. Conservative evangelicals' argument that global warming is unproven and unimportant has lost traction, as evidenced by President Bush's call for action in last week's State of the Union address.

It's not the first time religious Americans have embraced environmental stewardship. Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" inspired a wave of concern in the 1960s, said Derek Larson, an environmental historian and associate professor at St. John's University and the College of St. Benedict in Collegeville and St. Joseph, Minn., respectively.

"But the focus then was on air and water pollution," he said. "Now we're looking at planetary issues that are much harder to grasp. It's not surprising that it's taken a couple of decades to intensify."

Evangelicals' arrival at the table signals the movement's coming of age, many observers say. Daniel Struck, 18, a freshman at Bethel University in Arden Hills, is part of a new generation of evangelicals pulling up a chair.

"If I hear a Christian talk-radio station bashing the environmental movement, that has no credibility with me," he said. "People need to pay closer attention to Jesus' message, which was really quite radical. It's the poor who will be most affected by this. The Bible talks about how those who treat the poor with contempt are also treating God with contempt."

Jerry Bielby is a biology professor at Northwestern College in Roseville, which, like Bethel, has been a destination for many young evangelicals -- but is considered significantly more conservative. Bielby said he's hearing about the issue from his students and at his church, Salem Covenant in New Brighton. His own interest grew exponentially after he participated in a pioneering 2002 Oxford University forum at which evangelicals and scientists jointly called for action to slow global warming.

"God has given me a gift of personal salvation that I did not earn," he said. "Out of gratefulness, we Christians should take a significant role in caring for God's creation."

The spread of ecotheism

Congregations Caring for Creation (3C), a network of 40 congregations from 10 denominations, is Minnesota's major clearinghouse for religious environmentalists. It has drawn ideas and inspiration from national networks such as Interfaith Power & Light, a movement that began in California. A national Jewish group, the Council on the Environment and Jewish Life, has spearheaded synagogue activism.

Terry Gips, a founding board member of 3C and a leader of the Alliance for Sustainability, an environmental nonprofit that works out of the Hillel Center at the University of Minnesota, called the rush of interest in global warming among religious people "quite extraordinary." "People are getting engaged on so many levels," Gips said. "There's a lot of cross-fertilization going on."

Gips said the impact can be most dramatically seen in "green" buildings and grounds projects at major faith venues such as the Basilica of St. Mary and Temple Israel in Minneapolis and Mount Zion Temple in St. Paul.

"When an administrator goes from having doubts about the whole thing to suddenly seeing real bottom-line savings, that makes an impact that may spread outward to their businesses," he said.

In October, the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis launched a parish-based effort to find practical solutions to climate change. Speakers at the kickoff event included Steger, whose speeches about global warming have been packing churches and synagogues.

"We've been surprised and pleased at the level of interest," said Matt Rezac of the Office for Social Justice, a division of the archdiocese's Catholic Charities. "It ranges from parishes such as St. Joan of Arc that were already deeply involved to small ones where just a couple of people are working to educate a congregation."

Michael Stoner, 29, a mechanical engineer from Eden Prairie whose passion about the environment inspires him to bike to work every day, helped create the Environmental Challenge Ministry at Pax Christi in Eden Prairie.

"Our goal is to give people opportunities for action," he said. "On the parish level ... my personal goal is to get solar panels, a wind turbine and upgraded heating and cooling systems installed."

Faith's added fervor

How does a religious person's approach to climate change differ from that of a secular person?

For Rezac, "the experience of nature is spiritual, a profound connection to God." But mostly, he said, it's about serving others:

"Climate change will cause the most suffering among people on the margins of life and landscape. Look at what we saw during Hurricane Katrina."

Said Stoner: "As Catholics, we believe in social justice. Poor people in the developing world don't have the technology to adapt to climate change. For us not to do something when it's our pollution causing the problem would be wrong."

Movement gaining traction

Gips says religious people will lead the way in fighting global warming. "People of faith can be ahead of the curve," he said. "They can rise up and offer guidance in the same way [the Rev.] Martin Luther King Jr. did during the civil rights era."

There are other signs that the religious crusade against global warming is here to stay.

At St. John's, 80 students have embraced the environmental-studies major created just four years ago, Larson said. They include urban and suburban students with "a liberal world view" and "an increasing number from the rural rod-and-gun set, those from farm and hunting backgrounds who have seen what weather changes and habitat decline are doing to the land," he said.

At Bethel, Struck is active in a group called Creation Restoration that is urging students to recycle and pressing for a competition among dorms to reduce energy use.

"Ultimately, our care for creation is an act of worship," he said.

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February 8, 2007

“Global warming report: a call for all to care for God's creation”
Christian Science Monitor

Faith and science can complement each other to accomplish a common cause.
By Joel C. Hunter

LONGWOOD, FLA.

The earth is not heating up nearly as fast as the debate about its climate. We can blow up so irresponsibly that we lose the steam we need to act constructively. Or we can respond to this environmental challenge in a way that increases respect and effectiveness, while decreasing the hot error.

Every major religion has a moral mandate to take care of the Earth. For those who look to the Bible for instruction, it is the first responsibility given to man: "The Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep [protect] it" (Gen: 2:15, NASB). Our moral obligation, then, does not depend on the rate our planet is warming, or even whether the main cause is human activity. We are to refrain from harming God's creation – period. Few Christians or persons of other faiths (or no faith) would disagree with that statement.

But the latest reports indicate the need to move the care of creation up the priority scale. The great news is that individually we can help as much as we have harmed the physical environment, but we must watch out that we don't poison the environment of relationships in the process.

Defuse rather than accuse

We need the skeptics; they are a valuable part of the conversation. Skeptics see a speck of truth we need to consider. I have found that if I ignore them, all those specks can accumulate into a log in my own eye. Skeptics can keep us honest and steer our remedies away from some negative consequences with their warnings: "You're going to destroy the economy!" "You are trying to create a panic!" "This is more politics than science!" Truthfully, we do need to calmly and reasonably create market-based solutions that don't depend more on government policy than on grass- roots participation. What we don't need to do is yell back.

Jesus was really great at not being preoccupied with retaliation. Even when the attack was personally hurtful, his response was, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." Some think global warming is a hoax. But if we reduce pollution in a way that won't cause more harm than good, what's the problem? On the wild chance that the growing evidence has been misread,

we still end up with a better world. On the other hand, some of us think that the climate change skeptics are missing the overwhelming evidence and that their disbelief may delay much-needed reform. Forgiving those not ready to act while equipping those who are ready to act improves both the spiritual and physical environment.

Defer to credible authority

We don't need to try to personally argue people to our side. Few of us are scientists. Fewer of us are world-class climatologists whose research must be reviewed by peers hundreds of times over. Even fewer of us realize how quickly the tools for measuring climate change and atmospheric conditions have advanced in the past few years. Indeed, the earlier reports have passed their expiration date.

The most credible authority on climate change is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a panel of hundreds of the world's best scientists, evaluated by hundreds of other scientists, further evaluated by government officials of 154 countries and the major national academies of science around the world. Scientists, like cats, are difficult to coordinate. Therefore, this continually updated consensus report is a very conservative document. This year's report, released last Friday, says that there is more than a 90 percent likelihood that human activity is a significant contributor to climate change. I believe it because they are the experts (not politicians or some retired engineer who has "done his own research"). All the disagreements I have read have either been founded on old information or have very limited perspectives.

Dig in with what you can do

Though global warming sounds like such a huge problem, and it seems as though no one can possibly make a difference, the situation is quite the opposite. Individuals, let alone churches and temples and mosques, can make a huge difference. Just do the simple things:

- Replace incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescents. Though initially more expensive, an energy-efficient fluorescent bulb will save you \$28 to \$58 in your electric bill during its life and burn 500 pounds less coal to pollute the air!
- Recycle. C'mon: How hard can it be?
- Drive the speed limit with properly inflated tires and a tuned engine. Make your mom worry less.
- Ask for your energy company to do an energy audit on your house or church to tell you how you can lower your electric bills. You'll make money and be giving to others at the same time!
- Support businesses that are environmentally friendly.

- Vote and voice your concern about protecting the environment to government officials and those you are electing. I have no specific legislation to recommend, but you will know it when you see it!
- Pray that people and congregations and governments will do what is wise to care for the creation.

Diversify your interests

People can get so fixated on one issue that they become like a "noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." A fanatic has been defined as one who won't change his mind and won't let you change the subject. The environmental issue can become a substitute religion. Our faith has to do with obeying God and loving our neighbor. Hugging trees is not the point. Creation care is important to many Biblical themes we need to address, including sanctity of life, disease, poverty, and conflict.

Some conservative Christians have been reluctant to get involved with creation care because they think it belies some sort of failure of belief that God is going to take care of us. Of course those same Christians don't expect God to change their baby's dirty diaper (pray all you want, it's still your job). Caring for the Earth is not a lack of faith; it is an act of faith. Faith guides us to do what is good for others, knowing that the results are ultimately up to God.

Scientists and Evangelicals together

I and other evangelical Christians teamed up with some of the leading scientists in America last month to declare how faith and science can complement each other to accomplish a common cause. Evangelicals need the scientists' facts; scientists need the evangelical constituency to participate in a solution. Each addresses a different aspect of the same challenge: science addresses the "what" and faith addresses the "why." Before I act, I need to know the facts and possible solutions. The "why," though, is what compels me to action.

Government, business, and science bring unique assets to help with global problems, but nothing motivates like religion. Cooperative work on the environment may prove to be a gateway to resolving other important issues such as peace, poverty, and human rights. Perhaps faith communities will begin as a matter of course to work with governments and businesses and scientists. I am convinced that no global problem will be solved in the future without grass-roots participation motivated by values, and worshiping congregations provide the most effective leadership to shape values.

- Joel C. Hunter, a senior pastor of Northland, A Church Distributed (www.northlandchurch.net), is author of "Right Wing, Wrong Bird: Why the Tactics of the Religious Right Won't Fly With Most Conservative Christians."

“Texas Baptists turning green - but not all the way”

MATT CURRY
Associated Press

DALLAS - Texas Baptist leaders are working to block Republican Gov. Rick Perry's plan to speed the approval process for 18 new coal-fired power plants - an unusual move considering the largest national Baptist organization officially opposes environmental activism.

The Texans stress they're not jumping into full-blown activism, avoiding high-profile marches and demonstrations, but even a small move toward environmentalism is significant.

"This is cutting edge stuff for Baptists - even moderate Baptists," said Bruce T. Gourley, associate director of The Center for Baptist Studies at Mercer University in Macon, Ga.

Even though Christian evangelicals nationwide are making forays into environmentalism, using phrases like "creation care," an informal survey by the Georgia center didn't turn up a single Baptist pastor who acknowledged giving a sermon on the environment in recent months.

In Texas, the Christian Life Commission, the public policy agency of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, is mobilizing Baptists to oppose the coal-fired plants by urging members to contact legislators.

"A lot of people felt like our industries, our policy leaders, are going to take care of these big issues like air quality, it's not going to be something are local people are going to have to get up every day and worry about," said Suzii Paynter, director of the commission. "It can't be left to big interests to make these decisions in our behalf."

The Baptist General Convention of Texas, largest of the state conventions with more than 2.3 million members, approved a resolution in November affirming "that we advocate for sound environmental policies in the public square."

That runs counter to the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the country with more than 16 million members, which adopted a resolution last summer denouncing environmental activism and warning that it was "threatening to become a wedge issue to divide the evangelical community."

The moderate Texas group, which is autonomous but considers itself part of the Southern Baptist Convention, clashes frequently with the larger group's leadership.

Paynter said Texas Baptists' involvement stems from heightened concern over how dirty air is affecting the health of church members.

TXU Corp.'s coal proposal is on the fast track under an executive order Perry issued last year to expand the production of electricity and lower its cost. The company says the plants will meet growing demand for power, boost the economy of small towns and reduce toxic emissions by replacing older plants.

But critics - including environmental organizations, a coalition of Texas cities and counties and a group of influential Dallas business executives - contend the company is driven by profits and is rushing to beat more stringent federal restrictions on carbon dioxide emissions.

"I do not believe God wants us to continue to pollute and cause the world to degenerate the way it is," said Mary Darden, a Baptist deacon and president of Keep Waco Green.

Darden, whose congregation is affiliated with the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, said the coal issue is rarely discussed at her church because members include power company employees. Sometimes people offer support in hushed tones, when she wishes they would "come out of the closet and help."

Many opponents of the coal plants will be coming out for Sunday's "Stop the Coal Rush" rally and Monday's "Lobby Day" at the State Capitol. The two-day campaign is being organized by groups such as the Sierra Club - organizations many conservative-minded Baptists may not be eager to support.

But Paynter said the Texas Baptists, while not opposing the demonstrations, won't be involved.

"I know environmentalists, they want to see a bunch of Christians marching the Capitol," she said. "I don't really want to be seen as out there beating the drums to try to get people to the Capitol. We have a longer-term goal, which is about the stewardship of creation."

Gourley, of the Baptist center in Georgia, said Texas denominational leaders must also be careful not to alienate Baptists in the pews. He said it's difficult to determine whether environmentalism will gain steam among Baptists.

"I don't think it's an anomaly, but I really wonder if it's going to gain much traction any time soon," he said. "Baptists have been so focused on evangelism, conversion and baptism, and this has nothing to do with that ... It would take a reorientation of how we Baptists understand our place in this world, and enlarging our whole definition of what salvation is."

February 9, 2007

VIEWPOINT

Fazlun Khalid

People are failing to wake up to the fact that if the planet suffers, we all suffer, argues Fazlun Khalid. In this week's Green Room, he says we must respect the delicate nature of the Earth or risk leaving a toxic legacy for future generations.

It has not entered our consciousness that if the planet suffers we suffer, and that we have nowhere else to go

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has spoken, the politicians have uttered their platitudes, environmental activists call for action, the flat earthers remain in denial and the rest of us go shopping.

The IPCC has unequivocally confirmed for us what we have been feeling for years. Climate change is here to stay and will "continue for centuries", thus increasing the probability that the curse of future generations will hang forever on this marauding civilisation of ours.

It had been said that the human species is an "environmental abnormality". We rationalise the destruction of the planet as if we live somewhere else - the Moon, perhaps?

It has not entered our consciousness that if the planet suffers, we suffer, and that we have nowhere else to go. We have lost sight of ourselves as being a part of nature and that destroying the natural world means we destroy ourselves. We have reduced nature, and by extension ourselves, to an exploitable resource.

Our global civilisation looks artificial, resting on industrial and financial systems in the singular pursuit of profit.

Buy now, pay later

Despite what was outlined in the IPCC report, industry will continue to expand; banks will continue to lend the money they create out of nothing; "under-developed" countries will strive to emulate the rampant Chinese and Indian economies; developed nations, particularly in the West, will continue to covet the world's resources, even at the expense of going to war for them.

Politicians will continue to promise us higher and higher standards of living, talking all the time about sustainable development, and we will continue to give the best education to our children so that they can chase after the best jobs, which will, in turn, cause more pollution.

This state of affairs has ensured the collapse of our human ecology. The wisdom of the ages is spurned and is now replaced by an iconic modernity based on the slavehood of man to machine.

People who are unable to cope with changes in society, which are taking place at lightning speed, see a continuing decline of control in their own lives, the tendency towards gigantism, the remoteness of the ruled from those who rule.

'Soulless'

The outward signs of this are the growing cities and their anthill-like nature; rural depopulation that sucks the soul out of the land to feed the soulless cities with its human flotsam and jetsam; the destruction of cohesive communities; the emergence of the nuclear family as a poor substitute; the seductive tendencies of the cult of the individual and the increasing number of atomised people it appears to produce; alienation sedated by rampant consumerism.

Archaeologists excavating our present rampant civilisation are going to have wear radiation protection suits

In our eagerness to "progress" and "develop", we have lost sight of the finite and delicate nature of Earth and humanity's place in it.

Pursuit of progress and prosperity, it seems, are based on creating discontent; consumers seduced to vie with each other in the ownership of the latest gadgetry; television and advertising hoardings constantly making one feel inadequate; the media exploited as an instrument of manipulation.

Until quite recently, the human race functioned unconsciously within natural, unwritten boundaries. They had an intuitive disposition to live within the natural state (fitra), though this was achieved by a conscious recognition of the existence of a superior force, the divine. This was an existential reality, neither idyllic nor utopian.

Breaking the limits

We are clearly no longer functioning within these limits. Two events in the 16th and 17th Century Europe allowed the human species to break free of the natural patterning of which it had always been a part.

The first of these was the appearance of the Cartesian world view, from which point onwards the human began to worship itself. We now have reason to support us in our acts of predation.

The second event was when the early bankers developed a system whereby they can lend money to others which they have created out of nothing. In Islamic terms, this sabotaged the balance (mizan) of the natural world.

This explosion of artificial wealth provides the illusion of economic dynamism but, in reality, it is parasitic - endless credit devours the finite fitra. If kept up, this would eventually result in the Earth looking like the surface of the Moon, as it is already doing in some places.

People who lived in the pre-Cartesian dimension, before we were told that nature was there to be plundered, were basically no different from us. They had the same positive and negative human attributes, but the results of human profligacy were contained by the natural order of things, which transcended technological and political sophistication and even religious disposition.

Excess in the natural order was contained because it was biodegradable. When old civilizations, however opulent, profligate, greedy, or brutal, died, the forests just grew over them or the sands covered their traces. They left no pollutants, damaging poisons or nuclear waste.

By contrast, and assuming we survive as a species, archaeologists excavating our present rampant civilisation are going to have wear radiation protection suits.

The Koran says:

Corruption has appeared in both land and sea Because of what people's own hands have brought about So that they may taste something of what they have done So that hopefully they will turn back (30:40)

But will we?

Fazlun Khalid is the founder of the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences

The Green Room is a series of opinion pieces on environmental topics running weekly on the BBC News website

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“Worshippers again cry for cleanup of sacred Ganges: Holy men file suits against government”

By Tim Sullivan, Associated Press | February 22, 2007

ALLAHABAD, India -- Among believers, the river has many names: The Pure. Destroyer of Sin. Light Amid the Darkness of Ignorance. But mostly they call it "Ganga Ma" -- Mother Ganges -- and they worship it with a blinding intensity.

They worship it despite the islands of garbage that float down its path, and the tons of chemicals dumped in it. They worship it despite the quarter of a billion gallons of sewage poured into it every day that spread illness among the 350 million people -- about 5 percent of the world's population -- who live in its watershed.

For Hindus, the Ganges is a living goddess, capable of washing away sin. But its troubles are as epic as the river itself, and as millions of people filled a vast tent city on the floodplains outside this north Indian city, gathering for a Hindu festival that pays homage to the river, it was the goddess's troubles that grabbed attention.

"She is my mother," said Chandra Madash, a holy man squatting by a fire on a cold night. His beard was long and dirty, his clothing frayed, his voice gravelly. He has spent nearly his entire life in a remote Hindu monastery. "Even if she is dirty I love my mother."

Then he asked: "How can people do this to her?"

Predictably, perhaps, in a country that straddles the ancient and the modern, it was a group of Hindu holy men in the middle of the battle. They filed lawsuits, called news conferences, and organized protests. A handful threatened suicide.

"The government has promised us they would stop dirty water from flowing into Mother Ganges, but it's still being done," Narendranand Saraswati, a monastery leader, told thousands of cheering followers gathered by the Ganges. "We want the entire country to know we will not stop until the river is clean!"

These are not your typical environmental activists.

In India, they are known collectively as sadhus, a sweeping term that includes tens of thousands of Hindu holy men, from revered leaders to charlatans who prey on the lost and confused.

While a handful are famous for their profligacy -- luxury cars, fur coats, and rumors of mistresses -- most live poor and celibate.

Many spend their days wandering India's streets, begging for food and owning little beyond their clothes.

But among the loose coalition of sadhu leaders speaking out about the Ganges, some have potent political connections. In a country with 890 million Hindus, they are part of wide, informal power networks.

While their protests often spark headlines and short-term responses (this year, the government opened dams to increase the Ganges's flow during the festival, creating brief river surges), a serious cleanup would have to confront decades of official failure.

"The government listens to us during the Kumbh Mela," said Binduji Maharaj, a sadhu leader. "But unfortunately, when it is over they tend to forget us."

Every six years, millions of pilgrims gather for the Ardh Kumbh Mela, or Half Grand Pitcher Festival, held where the Ganges and Yamuna rivers -- along with the mythical Saraswati River -- come together.

Hindu mythology says gods and demons once fought a war over the nectar of immortality, spilling some at the rivers' confluence.

Up to 70 million people were expected for this year's 45-day festival, which began last month, and even relatively quiet days bring tens of thousands of pilgrims to the riverbanks.

They stand in the slow-moving grey-green water close to the shoreline, scooping water with cupped hands and pouring it over their heads.

As loudspeakers blare hymns, boys peddle religious knickknacks, from incense sticks to tiny clay lanterns.

"How can the Ganges be dirty?" asked Thiruvén Shankar, the joy obvious in his voice as he joined the throngs. "We drink it in, we bathe in it, and we worship its waters."

But it's more than just dirty. Scientists say sewage has devastated the 1,550-mile river, which spills from a Himalayan glacier and cuts through India's plains before flowing into the Bay of Bengal. Scientists have found fecal bacteria counts nearly 4,000 times the World Health Organization standard for bathing.

"We all have faith in our rivers, we all worship them. But at the end of the day there's a reality: India's cities are growing, its population is growing, and we don't have a proper sewage strategy," said Suresh Babu, a river specialist with the Center for Science and Environment, a prominent environmental group.

The medical effects are clear: millions of cases of disease, from amebic dysentery to hepatitis. By some estimates, one person dies every minute of waterborne disease in the Ganges river basin.

In the late 1980s, the Indian government vowed to clean it, launching its Ganges Action Plan and spending \$300 million since then. Its failures are famous. The federal environment minister noted recently the program had achieved very little -- but said \$1.5 billion more was needed.

"These officials have done nothing," said Veer Bhadra Mishra, sitting outside his home in the riverside city of Varanasi.

Mishra is the leader of an important Hindu temple, as well as a professor of engineering and a longtime environmental activist.

He doubts the recent attention will accomplish much. Too many holy men have ties to corrupt politicians, he believes, and too few understand the science.

But giving up isn't an option.

"These officials must be humiliated!" the normally soft-spoken Mishra said, his voice rising sharply. "They must be embarrassed that they are allowing the Ganges to be dirtied!"

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February 23, 2007

Brazil Bishops Rap Government on Damage in Amazon

RIO DE JANEIRO - Brazil's Catholic bishops have called on the government to stop stoking "predatory" development in the Amazon region, which they say causes destruction of the world's largest rain forest.

"Our main concern is that the government is absent and not acting where it should," Dom Orani Joao Tempesta, Archbishop of Belem and commission head of the influential Brazilian National Bishops' Council, or CNBB, told Reuters on Thursday.

"The church is not against development, but it opposes development that deprives populations of their future. We have to nurture respect for nature," he said.

The CNBB annual Fraternity Campaign began debates on Thursday near Belem in the Amazon on how better protect the region. A CNBB statement said the Fraternity Campaign for the Amazon was "a call for state and society to stop financing and tolerating a predatory model of development".

The bishops said the government, via its recently restored Sudam Amazon development agency, was giving tax and other incentives for farming, including soybean cultivation, in the region, without monitoring its expansion.

"The soy planting is causing the same devastating effect as did the spread of big commercial ranching in the 1960s and 1980s," the Council's head, Dom Odilo Scherer, was quoted as saying in O Globo newspaper.

He called on the government to strictly control the expansion of farmland "so that measures are no longer taken after the problem is already there, after the forest is felled and burned."

Land-clearing in the Amazon had surged after Lula took office in 2003 largely because booming world demand for Brazilian commodities led ranchers to graze more cattle, farmers to plant more soy and loggers to fell more trees.

Environmentalists have also blasted the government for funding a paved highway aimed at boosting soy shipments from the region. They fear the road will hasten the destruction of the forest by loggers, ranchers, soy farmers and squatters.

The government says Amazon deforestation dropped by about a third between August 2005 and July 2006 from a year earlier. In 2005, forests in an area the size of Israel or Wales were felled.

Separately on Thursday, a bishop from Bahia state, Dom Luiz Flavio Cappio, who staged an 11-day hunger strike in 2005 over government's controversial plans to change the course of the Sao Francisco river, handed a letter to presidency calling for a public debate on the subject.

He called the government's stance "authoritarian," saying it had not consulted the locals. The irrigation project, designed to bring water to arid lands in Brazil's northeast and reduce poverty there, has been stalled after several court injunctions, but remains on the government's agenda.

Story by Andrei Khalip

March 8, 2007

NY TIMES

March 8, 2007

“Living Day to Day by a Gospel of Green”

By Laurie Goodstein

VIENNA, Va.

THE Rev. Jim Ball is an evangelical Christian minister whose pulpit is parked in front of his townhouse. It’s a deep blue hybrid Toyota Prius, but it is not just any Toyota Prius. It is the original “What Would Jesus Drive?” car.

Four years ago Mr. Ball, the executive director of the nonprofit Evangelical Environmental Network, and his wife, Kara, drove the Prius from Texas east across the Bible Belt in a provocative stunt that, in keeping with the core mission of his organization, awakened evangelical churches to the threat of global warming. It also awakened Americans to the existence of the human hybrid known as a Green Evangelical.

It turns out that Jim and Kara Ball spend a lot of time thinking not just about what Jesus would drive, but also about how his people should wash their clothes, light their bathrooms, clean their windows, shop for groceries and furnish their living rooms — the day-to-day elements of what some Christian environmentalists call “creation care.”

“We like to buy used — we do that intentionally,” Mr. Ball said, surveying a desk, television cabinet, dining room table and end tables that the couple bought at their favorite thrift shop in rural Maryland, run by a Navy veteran named Bill. “Our stuff doesn’t necessarily match, but it goes enough.”

The end tables are made of mahogany. The Balls say they would never buy new mahogany furniture because the wood is often harvested from endangered rain forests, but they do not object to pre-owned mahogany.

“You’re not using up the resources again,” said Mr. Ball, a ruddy 45-year-old in a chamois shirt and Levis, who looks like he would be more at home with the Sierra Club than Pat Robertson’s “700 Club.” “It’s a form of recycling.”

While running a household on eco-friendly Christian principles requires a chain of small interlocking choices, Mr. Ball’s real gift is for large-scale strategizing. Raised in Texas as a Southern Baptist, he knew that conservative evangelicals had long been allergic to anything like environmentalism, associating it with hippies, communism, feminism, anti-corporatism, gun control and nature-worshipping paganism.

Mr. Ball spent the last seven years inviting evangelical pastors to sit down with climate scientists who shared the same born-again faith and corporate executives who were making an effort to reduce pollution. Progress was slow and he did not convince them all, but in the last year he has

led an effort that has persuaded more than 100 influential evangelical pastors, theologians and organizational leaders — many of them political conservatives — to sign an “Evangelical Call to Action” on climate change.

Since his leading role in the “What Would Jesus Drive?” campaign, Mr. Ball has preferred to stay out of the limelight while pushing his new converts forward as frontmen. He figured that the Rev. Rick Warren, the megachurch pastor and author of “The Purpose Driven Life,” could attract far more Christians to the climate-change cause by preaching about creation care than he could.

But after some hesitation, Mr. and Mrs. Ball decided to allow a reporter to snoop around their modest two-bedroom townhouse, take notes in the basement and inspect their bathrooms, in the hope of getting across the point that you don’t have to live in a straw bale house in New Mexico outfitted with \$150,000 in solar panels in order to play a role in reducing global warming.

“Do I really need all of this light?” said Mr. Ball, squinting at the bar of bare bulbs over the bathroom mirror. The bar was outfitted with curly compact fluorescent bulbs, like every light in the house except for two old-fashioned fixtures, for which the Balls could not find fluorescents that fit. It was an unconventional look, especially since there was a bulb only in every other socket. Mr. Ball said: “It’s a basic principle. Just use what you need. But it’s not do without.”

Mrs. Ball, who is 42, put it this way: “We have different habits, and once you have a habit it’s as easy as any other habit.”

They moved to this townhouse last August from a small town in Maryland, when Mrs. Ball got a job as the special assistant to the president of the National Wildlife Federation, a nonprofit organization focused on wildlife protection in Reston, Va. The house, in a development called Country Creek, has two bedrooms and 1,400 square feet, and cost them \$435,000; they chose it because it was within walking distance of the Washington Metro.

Mr. Ball can be in Washington, where he often meets with colleagues and visits Congressional offices, in about 45 minutes, although he works mainly at home, where the second bedroom is now a home office.

On a cold February afternoon, the thermostat was set at 65 degrees. Mr. Ball said that he often turns on his Presto Heat Dish space heater when he starts the day at his desk. If he migrates to another room, the heater is light enough to carry around. “If you’re cold, heat the place you are, instead of the whole place,” he said.

While Mrs. Ball prepared dinner, Mr. Ball gave a tour. The shower stall in the basement bathroom housed Iggy, a docile elderly iguana, five feet long from nose to tail. He was eating a salad of kale and bananas and sitting on a heat rock plugged into a timer. He is Mrs. Ball’s pet, rescued from an animal shelter, as are the three black cats, Emma, Spit and Midnight.

In the basement storage room, the hot water heater is swaddled in a blanket sealed with duct tape. There are shelves of Bi-O-Kleen laundry powder, Seventh Generation recycled paper

towels, Trader Joe's paper towels, Whole Foods dishwasher detergent, Oxi-Clean — a nonchlorine bleach — and cans of Coke.

“One thing about aluminum: it's very recyclable,” Mr. Ball said.

They clean bathroom and kitchen surfaces with a mixture of hydrogen peroxide, vinegar and baking soda. They wipe their windows with newsprint doused in vinegar.

Over dinner, which began with a prayer, Mr. and Mrs. Ball recounted what they called their “creation-care romance.” They met in 2000 at a loud Christian music festival in Pennsylvania, called “Creation Fest,” where she was the chaperone for her church youth group and he was manning the table for the Evangelical Environmental Network, which he took over that year.

At the time, she was living on 70 acres in central Pennsylvania with a flock of chickens and two rare six-horned Jacob sheep and organizing churches and farmers in a watershed conservancy program. On one of their first dates, the sheep escaped to the woods. The Balls were engaged in three months, married in a year.

One of the first things he told her when they met was that he was devoted to the global warming issue, and probably would be for the rest of his life. In the seminary, he had dismissed environmentalism as unimportant compared to poverty and oppression and war. But while studying for a Ph.D. in theological ethics at Drew University, he was challenged by another student to reread what the Bible had to say about care for God's creation.

“Colossians, chapter 1, verses 15 to 20 is the touchstone text for me,” he said. “ ‘All things have been created by Him and for Him. All things have been reconciled by His blood on the cross.’ The Apostle Paul tells us we are called to be ministers of reconciliation, and that means caring for all things.”

He read everything he could on energy policy, climate science and the history of environmentalism, but said one book in particular made him realize the connections between global warming and poverty. Asked what book, he said: “I'll cop to it. It was ‘Earth in the Balance,’ ” the 1992 bestseller by Al Gore. “That might get me in some trouble,” he said. “I'm a great admirer of the vice president, but some people in my community aren't.”

On their “What Would Jesus Drive?” tour, Mr. and Mrs. Ball returned to the Creation Fest in their Prius. “A few folks were hostile,” he recalled. “We got e-mails from people who thought we were being disrespectful to Jesus. They didn't understand we were taking the question seriously, that Christians should be concerned about this. They felt it was some cheap stunt by environmentalists.

“I said to them, I'm literally taking Jesus as Lord of my life, of everything — including how I get around,” he said. “There's nothing that falls outside that scope.”

SPERO NEWS

“Dealing with an inconvenient truth”

Al Gore and people of faith see global warming as a moral issue. US Roman Catholic bishops emphasize priority of the poor, prudence, and the common good.

Wednesday, March 07, 2007

By Reverend John Rausch

Al Gore won an Oscar for his film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, a documentary about global warming. In accepting the award for Best Documentary he said, “We need to solve the climate crisis. It’s not a political issue. It’s a moral issue.” He couched global warming for a billion viewers worldwide watching the Academy Awards not as a partisan issue, but as an ethical one.

The 2007 report issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—a body of distinguished scientists established by the UN and the World Meteorological Association—concluded that “the warming of the climate is unequivocal” and that climate change is “very likely” caused by humans. The use of “very likely” means a greater than 90 percent certainty that global warming results from our burning fossil fuels.

The consequences of global warming, according to the report, will likely include stronger storms, longer droughts and more frequent heat waves. Sea levels are projected to rise 7 to 23 inches by the end of the century flooding coastal areas and redrawing shoreline geography. To avoid the most catastrophic scenarios, climatologists are urging nations to cut greenhouse gas emissions 70 percent by 2050.

The Kyoto Protocol, an agreement ratified by over 160 countries, requires nations by 2012 to cut greenhouse gases by an average of 5 percent below their 1990 levels. While a 5 percent reduction sounds meager, it actually represents a 29 percent reduction in the level of emissions projected for 2010 given the rate of growth without the agreement.

Because the Bush Administration argues that the Kyoto agreement would hurt the U.S. economy, it has refused to ratify the agreement. Instead, the U.S. is spending \$3 billion a year on research and development of cleaner energy technology to combat climate change. Scientists counsel the issue looms so large and so critical that the world’s future depends on both reducing emissions and devising advanced technology.

Like Al Gore, people of faith see global warming as a moral issue. The U.S. bishops in their 2001 statement, “Global Climate Change,” state: “At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, not about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God’s creation and the one human family.” Their statement echoes the teaching of John Paul II who argued that humanity with its free will has “a grave responsibility to preserve this order for the well-being of future generations.”

Bishop Thomas Wenski, chairman of the USCCB's International Policy Committee, emphasizes three principles from Catholic social teachings in dealing with global warming: prudence, the poor and the common good. By prudence he does not mean caution, but "in this case (prudence) 'requires us to act with urgency' lest the problem gets worse and the remedies more costly." Enough evidence exists that prudence dictates taking mitigating or preventative action about global warming.

Another principle, "priority for the poor," demands we not forget the vulnerable who pay the greatest price during natural disasters. A report issued by over 15 charitable organizations including Oxfam and Christian Aid, predicts more flooding, declining food production, more disease, and deteriorating ecosystems on which the poorest depend because of global warming. Solidarity with the poor demands attention to climate change.

The third principle, "the pursuit of the common good," questions an unbridled free market solution. Social controls need to harness oil, coal and industrial interests so all can have enough while caring for the earth.

Undoubtedly, by recognizing our stewardship of the earth, people of faith can deal with this inconvenient truth.

March 14, 2007

NY TIMES

March 14, 2007

"Evangelical Group Rebuffs Critics on Right"

By Laurie Goodstein

The board of the National Association of Evangelicals has rebuffed leaders of the Christian right who had called for the association to silence or dismiss its Washington policy director because of his involvement in the campaign against global warming.

Prominent Christian conservatives like James C. Dobson, chairman of Focus on the Family, and Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, had sent a letter to the association's leaders this month accusing the policy director, the Rev. Richard Cizik, of "using the global warming controversy to shift the emphasis away from the great moral issues of our time," which they defined as abortion, homosexuality and teaching children sexual morality and abstinence.

Board members say that the notion of censoring Mr. Cizik never arose last week at their meeting in Minnesota, and that he had delivered the keynote address at their banquet.

In addition, the board voted 38 to 1 to endorse a declaration, which Mr. Cizik helped to write, that denounces the American government's treatment of detainees in the fight against terrorism.

The board also voted unanimously to reaffirm the platform adopted three years ago, which enumerates seven policy priorities, including the environment, human rights and poverty. In doing so, board members said they intended to convey that the evangelical movement had a broader agenda than the one pushed by Christian conservatives and segments of the Republican Party.

“There’s one Lord, but not just one issue,” said one board member, the Rev. Paul de Vries, president of the New York Divinity School. “I am as much against abortion as Jim Dobson and the others, but I want that baby to live in a healthful environment, inside the womb as well as outside of the womb.”

The Rev. Leith Anderson, president of the association, said: “By being able to speak to multiple issues that are impacting our country and culture, we actually increase the credibility of our voice on each of those issues.”

The National Association of Evangelicals is an umbrella group for Christian evangelicals, representing 30 million people in hundreds of denominations, organizations and academic institutions.

The only board member who has voiced public criticism of Mr. Cizik is Jerald Walz, who represents the Institute on Religion and Democracy, a resource group for conservatives in mainline Protestant denominations.

Mr. Walz said many board members were angry about the letter concerning Mr. Cizik because it was sent to the news media before the board received it. His was the sole vote against endorsing the document on torture; he said he thought it needed more time for consideration.

Jeffery L. Sheler, author of “Believers: A Journey Into Evangelical America,” said the underlying cause of the conflict over Mr. Cizik was not only about global warming, but also about “who gets to speak to and for evangelicals.”

“We’re talking about at least 60 million people,” Mr. Sheler said, “and they don’t all march in lockstep to the religious right.”

The association’s declaration on detainees will probably lead to controversy. It says that in the treatment of detainees and prisoners of war, the American government has crossed “boundaries of what is legally and morally permissible.”

March 18, 2007

BOSTON GLOBE 18-2-07

“A choir of voices joins to preach saving the earth”

By Janice O’Leary, Globe Correspondent

God is great. God is good. God is green?

Next weekend, believers will gather in Copley Square, believers in God who also believe that environmental issues, particularly climate change, have become moral issues.

Local congregations have recently felt the urgency of saving not only souls, but also the planet. They have been watching "An Inconvenient Truth " at the Cambridge Friends Meeting, screwing in compact fluorescent light bulbs at Congregation Eitz Chayim in Cambridgeport, asking for energy audits at Old South Church in Back Bay, and buying all-green energy at All Saints Church in Brookline.

Now more than 50 congregations statewide are taking part in the Interfaith Walk for Climate Rescue, which was to start Friday in Northampton in Western Massachusetts and will end next weekend in Copley Square with a rally Saturday that organizers expect to draw more than 1,000 people.

Speaking at the rally will be the Rev. Robert W. Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, which represents denominations with 45 million members in the United States.

Drawing from many faiths

While much has been going on at the congregational level, the walk's organizers say they see the rally as the beginning of much more visible environmental activism by faith organizations.

The walk "is our debut as a whole church into these issues," said the Rev. Quinn G. Caldwell, associate minister of Old South Church, a United Church of Christ congregation in Copley Square.

Saturday's rally was planned by the Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, a priest associate of Grace Episcopal Church in Amherst.

"I think the environmental issue is going to unite the world's religions," she said. "We'll have a glimpse of that at the rally, with local speakers from the Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, Anglican, and pagan traditions."

Worcester's Temple Emanuel is hosting about 40 walkers overnight. Margot Barnet, chairwoman of the synagogue's Social Action Committee, has been organizing an interfaith prayer event and forum.

"It's not new to have a Jewish involvement in environmental issues," Barnet said. "For us, it's a tradition that has come out of Tu B'Shevat," a Jewish holiday similar to Arbor Day.

At the Eitz Chayim synagogue in Cambridge, Governor Deval Patrick's newly appointed assistant secretary for environmental policy, David Cash, talked to the congregation last month on Tu B'Shevat about the intersection of faith and environmentalism.

"It's the environmentalists' Jewish holiday," he said. "We're so detached now from the Earth... It's no surprise that people are looking to religion to get back to that."

Two years ago, the Massachusetts Council of Churches, which includes 17 Orthodox and Protestant denominations with 1,700 congregations in the state, formally decided to increase its commitment to the environment, according to the council's associate director, Laura E. Everett.

The council issued a consensus document that pointed out that unhealthy environments have the largest impact in poor communities. Member churches started building playgrounds with wood untreated by chemicals and teaching adults about environmentalism. This year, the council has been lobbying for the Safer Alternatives bill, which would require industries to replace toxic chemicals and pesticides.

In January, the National Association of Evangelicals and scientists at the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School held a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on threats to the environment, including global warming.

Finding a basis in the Bible

For some local churches, the union of the moral and the ecological has been slower to come. At Park Street Church on Tremont Street, an evangelical congregation, some members are involved personally, said the Rev. Gordon Hagenberger, "but unfortunately there has not been a local response" by the church to the national effort publicized in Washington.

Hagenberger has preached on the topic, however. "It's a matter of moral suasion to help people become more thoughtful," he said. "A lot of environmentalism is just that. And the Bible does say a lot about the environment."

He points to Proverbs 12:10 as saying it matters to God how we care for animals. Other verses, he said, speak to the issues of preservation and sustainable use.

"This isn't sentimentalism," Hagenberger said, "but it is wisely reminding us to be thoughtful, not to savage the environment."

The roster of faith groups joining in the Walk for Climate Rescue does not include any Boston-area Roman Catholic parishes.

Terrence C. Donilon, spokesman for the Boston Archdiocese, said he wasn't aware of the walk until a reporter mentioned it to him two weeks ago. Local Catholic parishes, he said, are beginning to address environmental efficiency issues by individually and collectively working with gas and electric companies.

John L. Allen, a columnist for the National Catholic Reporter, recently wrote that environmental activism is a growing trend for the Catholic Church, but he doesn't "yet see evidence of systematic Catholic activism or official leadership on the environment on a scale that bears comparison with the energies coursing today around Islam or bioethics."

Roots in Friends' traditions

Denominations such as the Quakers say environmentalism has long been part of their faith.

"It's part of our stewardship principle, of living simply and peacefully," said Gwen Noyes, clerk of the Earthcare Witness Committee at the Cambridge Friends Meeting. "There is a growing sense that all these things are related. A country that's gluttonous for oil leads us to war.

"For me, the environment has been a moral issue all along," she said. "Anything defiling the Earth has an immorality to it."

Friends will take part in the walk, and the group has been greening its facilities. "We had an energy audit," Noyes said. "We're working on our building. We need a new, more efficient furnace. We've changed our cleaning products and now have carpeting that doesn't give off gases.

"The world is in jeopardy now," she said. "It's not just lives being lost; it's becoming bad business. I hate to say it, but fear is a powerful motivator. I would rather see this coming out of a love for being in concert with the Earth."

Philip Clayton, a professor at Claremont School of Theology in California and visiting professor of science and religion at Harvard Divinity School, says environmental consciousness grew first in reaction to nuclear weapons. After the bomb was dropped, he said, "there was a sense that value-free science was destroying the world, was dangerous."

Now, with news about climate change, Clayton believes that evangelical churches may make the biggest difference. "If evangelicals really get behind it," he said, "a lot will get done."

March 23, 2007

“Catholic Bishops Slam Brazil Ethanol Growth Plan”

BRASILIA - Roman Catholic bishops warned on Thursday that a rapid increase in cane ethanol production in Brazil could have a devastating social and environmental impact in the countryside.

Brazil is a pioneer in using ethanol as an automotive fuel and is the world's largest exporter of ethanol and second largest producer after the United States.

It is expected to attract at least 17.4 billion reais (\$8.18 billion) in investment over the next four years, increasing production by 40 percent from the current 17 billion liters (4.4 billion gallons). Some analysts say production could double in over five years.

The Brazilian National Bishops' Council, or CNBB, said at a news conference that such expansion could exacerbate income inequality in the countryside.

"Cane cultivation leads to land concentration because it requires large plantations and this has traditionally triggered a rural exodus," said Bishop Odilo Scherer, who was appointed archbishop of Sao Paulo by Pope Benedict on Wednesday. "I can already see a new exodus (in Brazil)."

The bishops in the world's largest Roman Catholic country also criticized the poor working conditions on sugar cane plantations.

"It's a situation of tremendous misery," said Cardinal Geraldo Majella Agnelo, president of the CNBB, citing the long working hours, poor pay and physical strain that cane cutters face.

Government and industry officials say cane cutters in the main growing regions are paid above-average wages for manual labor in the agricultural sector. Mills say they often face difficulties trying to mechanize the harvest because workers protest the potential loss of work.

The industry is responsible for millions of rural jobs and is expected to be one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in coming years.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva earlier this month likened ethanol producers to national heroes for their planned investments and contributions to economic development.

Majella warned that expanding cane cultivation could encroach on primary forests, increasing deforestation rates. "We are going to turn the country into a huge cane (plantation)," he said.

Story Date: 23/3/2007 Planet Arc

March 26, 2007

"Norwegian Bishops Urge Global Warming Action"

OSLO - Bishops from Norway's Lutheran state church urged the government on Monday to do more to fight global warming in a new sign that religious leaders are getting worried by climate change.

"We are causing terror in creation and we must see that the way we are living today means ruthless exploitation," Bishop Finn Wagle said in a statement.

All 11 Lutheran bishops in Norway, the world's third largest oil exporter, signed up for an appeal drafted by the charity Norwegian Church Aid saying "Norway must start reducing greenhouse gas emissions now."

It said that more than half the cuts should be made in Norway, rather than by buying rights to emit greenhouse gases on a European market or by investing in renewable energy projects in developing nations.

Norway's centre-left government has merely said that a "considerable" share of the cuts in emissions, largely from burning fossil fuels, has to be taken at home.

The appeal also said Norway's aid policies should focus on avoiding damaging climate change in poor countries and that Norway should work for international cuts in emissions. The bishops' plea will be handed to the government.

Norway's emissions of greenhouse gases, mainly from burning fossil fuels, were 8.5 percent above 1990 levels in 2005 -- far above a goal under the UN's Kyoto Protocol of a maximum one percent rise over 1990 by 2008-12.

More and more religious leaders, including those from the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities, are urging action on global warming.

Story Date: 27/3/2007

April 1, 2007

April 1, 2007

“U.S. Churches Go ‘Green’ for Palm Sunday”

By MARC LACEY

SIERRA MORENA, Mexico, March 29 — Clutching a tiny knife in his big calloused hands, Laizon Corzo wound his way through the thick foliage in one of southern Mexico’s forested areas in search of living treasures.

When he found them — big, leafy palm fronds — he did not cut right away. Instead, he inspected the leaves, back and front, for stains and other imperfections. “This one, no,” he said, pushing aside one and grabbing another. “This one — see how perfect it is?”

Mr. Corzo is one of the indigenous farmers who puts palms in the hands of North American churchgoers on Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter. He is also on the cutting edge of a new movement to harvest what are being called “eco-palms.”

Slightly more expensive than the average palm, eco-palms are the rage in churches across the United States because of the social and environmental benefits they represent. They are collected in a way that helps preserve the forest, and more of the sale price ends up in the pockets of the people who cut them.

“We want to be a green congregation,” said the Rev. David C. Parsons, pastor of St. John-St. Matthew-Emanuel Lutheran Church in Brooklyn, which purchased eco-palms for the second straight year. “We are conscious of our footprint on the earth. There is a biblical mandate to do that.”

Now operating in a handful of palm-producing areas in southern Mexico and northern Guatemala, the eco-palm project is similar to programs for certified coffee, chocolate or diamonds. But the consumers in this case are churches, and many say that the religious significance of the plant compels them to buy the most wholesome palm possible.

“Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem was accented by the jubilant waving of palm branches,” Lutheran World Relief, one of the groups endorsing the project, says on its Web site.

“Unfortunately, for the communities where these palms are harvested, palm fronds do not always represent the same jubilation they do for us.”

Mr. Corzo, 37, a father of three who has been harvesting palm leaves since he was 5 or 6, used to be paid by how many he delivered, no matter the quality. He would hack away at any old palm and allow the middle man to worry about quality.

No more. Under the eco-palm program, Mr. Corzo is paid only for the quality fronds that he delivers — but at a much higher return, so his trifling pay has nearly doubled. The palms are now bundled in his village by women who had no jobs before.

The percentage of palms that must be discarded has plummeted from roughly half to a tenth. And the forest that Mr. Corzo uses to make a living is slowly becoming greener, environmentalists say.

The program began in 2005 with 20 American churches that bought about 5,000 palms. It grew last year, with 281 congregations placing orders for 80,000 palms. On this Palm Sunday, 1,436 churches will distribute 364,000 eco-palm stems.

That still represents just about 1 percent of the palms that are purchased for Palm Sunday, the day when the most palms are used; American churches use 25 million to 35 million palms, say officials involved in the project.

Lutheran churches are the biggest buyers, followed by Presbyterians. Smaller numbers of Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, Church of Christ and Mennonite congregations also ordered eco-palms this year.

The palms harvested in southern Mexico have shorter leaves than the ones many churches have used, resulting in some consternation in the pews. “Parishioners can’t fold these leaves into crosses, and that’s been a tradition,” Pastor Parsons said. “It’s something parents have passed on to their children, and it’s an adjustment to have these new palms.”

The project grew out of the North American Free Trade Agreement, which has come under far more criticism than praise for its effect on the environment. One of the pact’s side agreements set up the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation to promote environmentally friendly trade policies. As it sifted through the products that are sent from Mexico to the north, the commission discovered palms.

Dean A. Current, a professor of natural resources management at the University of Minnesota, was called in to study the economics of the palm industry. He discovered that about 10 percent of the palms sent to the United States were bought by churches. The rest go to florists, who often use them in arrangements for weddings and funerals.

In surveying churches, Mr. Current found that most were willing to pay up to double the going price to be sure their palms were responsibly harvested. A big church might spend as much as \$1,500 on palms for Palm Sunday.

Sometimes, they are burned for the next year's Ash Wednesday, although that practice is being cast aside by some congregations because of concerns that it pollutes the air.

"Churches want to help," Mr. Current said. "Before this, they really didn't know where their palms came from."

Now many of them do. Mr. Current has brought small groups of church leaders here to Sierra Morena, a village of about 50 families in the southern highlands of Chiapas State, to see for themselves.

Environmental groups in Mexico and Guatemala have trained palm cutters to cut good fronds while allowing the palm plants to survive. That keeps the income flowing and maintains the habitats of birds and other species.

Those who harvest the palms are also coffee and corn farmers. Palms help make ends meet.

But exactly what they are used for up north is not always clear.

"I know it's used for decoration," said Moses Macal Maroukin, 69, a veteran palm chopper, who seemed somewhat mystified. He said he had no palm fronds in his home.

But then he revealed what the people here had long believed to be the real use of the exported palms. The juices in the stems and leaves are extracted, he explained in a conspiratorial whisper, and then turned into a special mixture that is used to stain greenbacks green.

"This is how you color your dollars," he said, waving a palm.

April 6, 2007

RALEIGH (NC) NEWS OBSERVER 6-4-07

"Energy-savers for 40 days -- Lent spurs efforts to give up wasteful habits"

Yonat Shimron, Staff Writer

For most Christians, giving up something for Lent means abstaining from temptations: chocolate, soft drinks or TV.

But this Lent, half a dozen North Carolina churches, including three in Chapel Hill, took the concept of doing without and tied it to their religious beliefs about the environment. These churches vowed to fast from carbon -- the kind that contributes to global warming.

While most of the participants still turned on the lights at home, the 40-day experience encouraged them to think twice before jacking up the thermostat or driving around town on an errand.

"So often people think Christians don't care for the environment," said Becky Ceartas, a member of the United Church of Chapel Hill who participated in the carbon fast. "It was great to talk to other people and tell them this is something Christians do."

Ceartas, 29, was one of 30 people who attended a weekly Wednesday-night class at her church intended to offer tips and encouragement on ways to cut down the amount of carbon dioxide released into the environment. The colorless gas is released into the atmosphere when carbon-containing fossil fuels such as oil, natural gas and coal are burned, contributing to the warming of the earth.

On Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent, members of the United Church, distributed 50 low-flow shower heads and 100 compact fluorescent light bulbs to anyone who would take them. At Chapel of the Cross, an Episcopal Church in Chapel Hill, bus schedules and pedestrian maps were given out, too.

People participating in the fast were asked to go to one of several Web sites that calculates the amount of carbon dioxide their household emits. After Easter, the churches will try to measure the reduction in carbon emissions based on the savings people recorded.

The idea for the carbon fast came to members of the environmental stewardship committee at Chapel of the Cross. Committee members felt frustrated about their ability to change people's behavior and wondered how they could grab people's attention.

"It just popped up -- hey, we can give up carbon for Lent," said Linda Rimer, the committee chairwoman.

When she shared the idea with the North Carolina Council of Churches, a study guide was quickly written and distributed, taking care to incorporate the key elements of Lent, a time of repentance and reflection modeled after Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness. The guide included a weekly Bible reading, a prayer and an action people could take to limit their carbon output.

Andrea Vizoso, one of the organizers of the carbon fast at the United Church, said she made two changes during Lent and committed to two others. She replaced 15 incandescent light bulbs with fluorescents and lowered her home's thermostat from 71 degrees to 69 degrees. She also decided to start buying fruits and vegetables from a local farm, and hire someone to tape the duct system that delivers heat to her home.

Vizoso said the Lent participants at her church were greatly buoyed by the state Utilities Commission ruling Feb. 28 allowing Duke Energy to build only one of the two coal-fired power plants the utility had wanted. She and three other members of her church were among the 15 faith-based activists who testified against Duke Energy's proposal at a public hearing in January.

"That was a big boost," she said. "It got us thinking we need to take our role as stewards of the Earth more seriously."

At United Church, the Lenten carbon fast will be followed by a "Sustainable Household Challenge." Beginning April 15, the church will encourage members to sign up for a six-month program intended to help them commit to reducing their use of carbon, waste and water. Members who sign up will be asked to monitor utility bills and keep a journal of their accomplishments.

Already, several church members said the heightened awareness of global warming during Lent made them appreciate their church that much more. Raleigh Mann, a member of the United Church who attended each of the Wednesday-night carbon fast meetings, said he picked up all kinds of tips. More important, he shared his passion for the environment.

"The very act of participating in this made me feel good about my church, said Mann, a retired UNC- Chapel Hill journalism professor. "The way I see it, we're here for a finite number of years, and we need to be good stewards."

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April 7, 2007

WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL

“THE THIRSTY: Relief groups are beginning to focus on places desperate for accessible and safe-to-drink water”

RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

Saturday, April 7, 2007

A fledgling coalition of religious groups is trying to show Americans that for many people getting clean drinking water isn't as easy as turning on the kitchen tap.

More than 1 billion people in developing countries lack readily available safe drinking water and 2.6 billion are without access to sanitation. Faith communities in the United States are stepping up efforts to push for clean and accessible water.

“There is a growing realization in most of the mainline churches and faith-based groups that the environment is part of God's creation, and humans have a responsibility to sustain it,” said Dennis Warner, a water specialist at Catholic Relief Services in Baltimore.

“In a sense, there has to be a partnership between the creator and human beings to sustain the environment. ... It’s a moral pact, it’s a moral responsibility.”

Statistics collected by Water Advocates, a Washington advocacy group, are sobering:

-UNICEF says that 4,500 children die each day because of diarrhea (from dirty water) or dehydration (from no water).

-The average child in Guatemala gets diarrhea 12 times a year.

-The average woman in Africa walks 6 kilometers each day, and African women spend 40 billion hours each year, collecting water - time not spent working or caring for children.

-Unsanitary water is a leading cause of fatal illnesses in developing countries, contributing to cholera, typhoid, guinea worm, trachoma (blindness) and diarrhea. Thirty percent of the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals hinge in some way on access to clean water.

“The global health toll is just huge,” said David Douglas, the president of Water Advocates.

Groups say that the water conservation and sanitation crisis resonates with the religious community.

“Water is significant in the Biblical tradition; it’s significant in our theological traditions,” said Marty Shupack, an associate director for public policy at Church World Service, a New York relief agency affiliated with the National Council of Churches.

Shupack heads the Water Working Group, a loose coalition that was created last year to bring faith-based communities together to attack the water crisis. Along with Water Advocates, the group is pressuring Congress to increase spending on sustainable water and sanitation efforts by \$500 million.

Conservationists are increasing the pressure on Capitol Hill, but they must tackle a more basic problem. Americans seem unable to grasp the idea that water is limited.

“The tendency of most Americans (is) not to know what it’s like not to be able to have access to clean drinking water,” Douglas said.

Added Warner, “We tend to view water as almost an inexhaustible resource, but it’s not.”

Catholic Relief Services is currently manning drinking-water projects in 30 countries. In the arid sub-Saharan Africa region, the agency has created diesel- and hand-powered bore holes to retrieve groundwater. Mountainous areas such as Ethiopia and Kenya can harness gravity to pipe water down from the heights into communities. In Latin America, Catholic Relief Services is organizing rainwater-harvesting projects. Rain is gathered from metal and clay rooftops and used as drinking water rather than runoff. Rainwater also can be collected into manmade ponds to serve as a longer-term source of drinking water and protein if fish are added.

Water conservationists at Church World Service emphasize incorporating the community in planning and implementing the water projects. That way, the help will last long after aid workers leave the area. "All human beings are made in the image of God," Shupack said, "and have the capacity and the right to make decisions that change their lives."

April 8, 2007

Churches put faith in action for environment

Spiritual leaders say Easter is perfect time, while reflecting on rebirth and renewal, to put focus on all of creation -- Earth

By Rebecca Rosen Lum

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Contra Costa Times

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The global environmental crisis has filled spiritual leaders with a bitter awe this Easter, a time for repentance and rebirth, to consider the broken body and the transcendent miracle. As the sun rose on Good Friday, a stark study spelling out the disastrous repercussions of global warning hit the news wires.

"Certainly, we have a lot to repent for in our treatment of the Earth over the centuries," said the Rev. Larry Hunter of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Orinda.

"Lent is a time of introspection," said the Rev. Greg Ledbetter of Shell Ridge Community Church, a Baptist congregation in Walnut Creek. "It asks us to make a rigorous assessment. Easter brings the huge implication to be aware of the big picture."

The Rev. Sally Bingham of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco made that rigorous assessment, and she gave up heating her house for Lent.

"It was a symbol of not polluting the air for people who live around the dirty, filthy power plants," said Bingham, who founded California Interfaith Power and Light. The ecumenical organization promotes sustainable energy practices and sounds the alarm on global warming.

"The celebration of Easter and the Resurrection ... is a very appropriate time to relook at our relationship with the sacred, which includes creation," she said.

This is also a time to measure how much "the religious center of gravity has shifted," wrote Jim Rice, editor of Sojourners Magazine.

Last year, more than 100 mainstream evangelical leaders from across the nation signed an "Evangelical Climate Initiative," declaring they had "seen and heard enough" to convince them that real perils threaten the Earth.

"Human-induced climate change is real," the statement says.

The second in a series of four reports by the International Panel on Climate Change, released in Brussels, Belgium, on Thursday, predicts widespread suffering and starvation as the result of global warming -- a steady increase in the Earth's average temperature triggered by fossil fuels and industrial pollution.

The changes seem to be motivating churches. In the past six months, 70 congregations have joined Interfaith Power and Light, which now has 460 members.

"We may damage the world, but with a renewed attentiveness we can heal it," said Ledbetter.

That message dates to biblical times, said the Rev. Peter Whitelock, spiritual leader of Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church. The Apostle Paul lamented the burden of human selfishness weighing down creation, and he spoke of the glory of the Resurrection as a power to be turned loose in people, Whitelock said.

"There is a sense in this that the Resurrection is more than a one-time event but is rather a reality to shape and transform our lives so that we can truly live as God's children," he said. "This will be good news to the creation, too."

The link between the Lenten period and stewardship of the environment can be quite literal, said the Rev. Faye Orton Matthews of Lafayette Christian Church.

Repentance is not complete without making a change, she said, and nature often inspires spiritual and emotional healing that change compels.

"There's a great connection between resurrection and what we learn from nature," she said. "When we destroy those images of God and they pass away from us, it's tragic."

Her church leaders acted on that faith after they began to clear two wooded acres for a building expansion. Moved by the peaceful dignity of the grove, they backed off. Instead, Lafayette Christian will have an outdoor gathering place, Orton Matthews said.

"It is no stretch to see that being environmentally concerned is about repentance and rebirth," said the Rev. Sylvia Vasquez of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Walnut Creek.

Her congregation has made a \$250,000 commitment to install solar panels on the parish hall.

"The rubber meets the road when we start talking about financing," said Vasquez.

California Interfaith sees an identical commitment to put faith in action in other congregations.

"Churches with a working group on family, or instilling faith in teens, now have 'the Climate Action Team,' and they are asking what they can do other than showing films," said outreach coordinator Jessica Brown.

The action teams study the politics of oil and water, advise congregants on how to conserve energy and recycle. They educate themselves on global dimming and water contamination.

Repentance may give way to a miracle, said Ledbetter, whose church offers a four-part series on natural resources and sustainability.

"What we do is a tiny bit of water in a mighty ocean," Ledbetter said. "I also believe the Earth has the power to heal. If we get out of the way, it could heal itself."

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April 9, 2007

“Save our holy lands: UN to preserve sacred sites”

World's religions join attempt to keep development at bay and preserve wildlife.

By Geoffrey Lean and Jude Townend

Published: 08 April 2007

Hundreds of thousands of sacred places around the globe are to be linked together in a new UN-backed network to try to preserve the world's fast-disappearing wild species.

They range from Jerusalem's Garden Tomb - where more than 3,000 people gathered today to celebrate Easter - to "skull caves" in Kenya, from a Mongolian mountain revered as a living God to a "spiritual park" in the Peruvian Andes.

Last week the United Nations Development Programme joined the world's main religions and leading conservation organisations in an effort to protect them from development or destruction. They plan to set up a new internationally recognised designation along the lines of Unesco's World Heritage sites.

The world's religions are among the planet's biggest landowners. "Between them," a new Atlas of Religion concludes, "they own over 7 per cent of the habitable land of the planet." And their specially sacred sites are usually havens of wildlife because they have been safeguarded by spiritual traditions or taboos.

But now, as the power of religions fades and economic pressures increase, many of the sites are in danger. The new campaign - spearheaded by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), set up by Prince Philip in 1995 - aims to beat off the threats, preserve new sites and even to revive sacred places that have already been despoiled. Prominent supporters include the Eastern Orthodox patriarch Bartholomew I and Nambaryn Enkhbayar, the President of Mongolia.

Martin Palmer, who heads ARC and is one of the authors of the atlas, just published by Earthscan, cites the Garden Tomb as one model of what can be done. The site owes its origin to a visit to Jerusalem by General Gordon, later killed in Khartoum. Unlike most scholars, the

Victorian general refused to believe that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre stands on the site where Christ was buried, on the grounds that it was in Jerusalem, instead of outside - doubtless not realising that the city would have grown in the intervening 18 centuries.

Instead he found a first-century tomb near a rocky crag which looked to him as if it could be "the place of the skull" identified in the New Testament as the site of the crucifixion, and decided that it must be the right place. Believers planted the land around it with flowers and trees mentioned in the Bible and it is now a valued wildlife site.

Similarly, Mr Palmer says, the Baha'i faith has created an extraordinary series of hanging gardens on Mount Carmel, most famous for Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal in the Old Testament.

The oak forests of Mount Tabor have been preserved because it is owned by the Catholic Church, and in Lebanon Hizbollah has joined a Christian drive to preserve the "Valley of the Saints", where the persecuted have sought sanctuary for 1,500 years. Mr Palmer even believes that the campaign could help to revive the River Jordan whose "deep and wide" waters have now been so diverted for agriculture and housing that they are now little more than a trickle of sewage.

But the campaign will stretch far wider than the Holy Land and involve a total of 11 major faiths and 300 different traditions within them. In Cambodia, for example, thousands of trees have been ordained as Buddhist monks - and wrapped in saffron monastic robes - to try to protect them from loggers.

In Mongolia, Bogd Khan - revered as a living deity - is the world's oldest protected mountain, and holy scripts are being translated to try to identify other sacred sites. Taboos surrounding Kenyan caves, where the Taita tribe places the skulls of important ancestors, have preserved the country's last major stand of tropical rainforest, famous for its 350 species of birds. But it is now threatened by logging and charcoal burning.

Conservationists hope that the forest might be saved by ecotourism, but in Peru, less sensitive visitors - flocking from Machu Picchu - are endangering the Andean Vilcanota Spiritual Park.

In Britain, contaminated land has been reclaimed for Birmingham's Sri Venkateswara Balaji Temple, the first Hindu shrine of its kind in Europe. And 6,000 churches have agreed to turn graveyards into wildlife refuges by banning pesticides.

Martin Palmer calls the world's sacred sites "the largest as yet unprotected network of pristine areas on the planet". He believes that by giving them an official designation he will make it much harder for them to be damaged.

The campaign is starting pilot schemes in Lebanon, Ethiopia and elsewhere, and hopes to have official designations in place within five years.

April 10, 2007

UNEP-WMO PRESS RELEASE

IPCC outlines strategies for responding to the accelerating impacts of human-caused climate change; Emissions cuts, sustainable development and early measures to adapt could reduce humanity's vulnerability

Brussels, 6 April 2007 – The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has finalized a new report that assesses the current and future impacts of global warming and explores opportunities for proactively adapting to them.

The report concludes that the world's rivers, lakes, wildlife, glaciers, permafrost, coastal zones, disease carriers and many other elements of the natural and physical environment are already responding to the effects of humanity's greenhouse gas emissions.

Rising temperatures are accelerating the hydrological cycle and causing rivers and lakes to freeze later in the autumn and birds to migrate and nest earlier in the spring.

Scientists are increasingly confident that, as global warming continues, certain weather events and extremes will become more frequent, widespread or intense.

Over the coming decades, the Arctic, sub-Saharan Africa, small island states, low-lying coasts, natural ecosystems and water resources and agricultural production in certain regions will be at particular risk.

Dramatic sea-level rises and some other events have the potential to cause very large impacts, especially after the 21st century.

However, the IPCC also finds that early action to improve seasonal climate forecasts, food security, freshwater supplies, disaster and emergency response, famine early-warning systems and insurance coverage can minimize the damage from future climate change while generating many immediate practical benefits.

“Scientists owe much of their new understanding of how climate change will affect the planet to the greater number of field studies and data sets now available to them, as well as to improved consistency between observations and climate model results,” said Michel Jarraud, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

“We need to strengthen our research and monitoring even further and gain more practical experience in how best to adapt to our new climate,” he said.

Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), said, “The invoice for the future impact costs of climate change has been put on the table today by the IPCC. It is not a bill that we would have to pay in full if the world decides now to make deep and decisive cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.”

“The report also emphasizes that adaptation – in developed but especially vulnerable developing countries – is also needed to cope with the climate change already underway. ‘Climate proofing’ infrastructure and agriculture to health care services and communities will require investment but equally intelligent planning so that it is central to decision-making rather than on the periphery,” he added.

The IPCC illustrates the potential for adaptation by describing activities being undertaken in various parts of the world to adapt to current climate change.

Examples include partial drainage of the Tsho Rolpa glacial lake in Nepal, changes in livelihood strategies in response to permafrost melt by the Inuit in Nunavut, Canada, and the increased use of artificial snow-making by the ski industry in Europe, Australia and North America.

Measures being taken in anticipation of future climate change include the consideration of sea-level rise in the design of infrastructure such as the Confederation Bridge in Canada and in coastal zone management in the USA and The Netherlands.

The Summary for Policymakers for IPCC Working Group II has now been posted in English at www.ipcc.ch. The chapters in the full underlying report, “Climate Change 2007: Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability”, will be posted as PDFs in the next several days and will then be published by Cambridge University Press.

Note to journalists: For more information, please see www.ipcc.ch, www.wmo.int or www.unep.org, or contact:

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NOTE: This is one in a series of regional releases based on IPCC Working Group II's report.

UNEP PRESS RELEASE

“Adaptation to Climate Change Key Challenge for Arctic Peoples and Arctic Economy”

Thawing Permafrost, Melting Sea Ice and Significant Changes in Natural Resources Demands Comprehensive Sustainable Development Plan

GENEVA/NAIROBI, 10 April 2007 - Dramatic changes to the lives and livelihoods of Arctic-living communities are being forecast unless urgent action is taken to reduce greenhouse gases, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Its Working Group II predicts wide-ranging thawing of the Arctic permafrost which is likely to have significant implications for infrastructure including houses, buildings, roads, railways and pipelines.

A combination of reduced sea ice, thawing permafrost and storm surges also threatens erosion of Arctic coastlines with impacts on coastal communities, culturally important sites and industrial facilities.

One study suggests that a 3 degree C increase in average summer air temperatures could increase erosion rates in the eastern Siberia Arctic by 3-5 metres a year.

In some part of the Arctic, toxic and radioactive materials are stored and contained in frozen ground. Thawing may release these substances in the local and wider environment with risks to humans and wildlife alongside significant clean-up costs.

Warmer temperatures also represent new economic opportunities but also challenges in the Arctic. Declines in sea ice are likely to open up the Arctic to more shipping, oil and gas exploration and fisheries.

A comprehensive sustainable development plan is urgently needed for the region to maximize the opportunities and minimize potentially damaging impacts.

The future health and well-being of Arctic peoples is a major question. The report, part of the IPCC's Fourth Assessment, recognizes that Arctic communities and indigenous peoples lives and livelihoods are intimately linked with their environment but that this is already changing.

Inuit hunters are now navigating new travel routes in order to try to avoid areas of decreasing ice stability that is making them less safe. In the future, increased rainfall may trigger additional hazards such as avalanches and rock falls.

Inuit hunters are also changing their hunting times to coincide with shifts in the migration times and migration routes of caribou and geese, as well as new species moving northwards. Some impacts of climate change may improve human well-being. Opportunities for agriculture and forestry may increase. There is evidence that Arctic warming could reduce the level of winter mortality as a result of falls in cardiovascular and respiratory deaths.

But this will have to be set against possible increases in drought in some areas, the emergence and survival of new pests and diseases, likely contamination of freshwaters and health and psychological impacts of the loss of traditional social and "kinship" structures.

However, it is likely that in order for Arctic communities and cultures to survive and conserve their centuries-old ways of life decisive emissions reductions will be needed alongside adaptation to the climate change already underway.

Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) which co-founded the IPCC in 1988, said: “The costs of climate change are already being paid by the peoples and communities of the Arctic. The report underlines how this bill is set to rise unless action is taken to cut greenhouse gas emissions.”

“The communities and indigenous peoples of this region are skilled in adapting to harsh and often dramatic changing conditions including sharp fluctuations in the scarcity and in the abundance of land and marine resources. However, the rapid changes likely in the future may overwhelm traditional coping strategies. It is thus also vital that communities are assisted in climate-proofing centuries-old lifestyles in order to survive and to thrive through the 21st century”, he added.

Permafrost

By the mid-21st century, the area of permafrost in the northern hemisphere is expected to decline by around 20 per cent to 35 per cent.

The depth of thawing is likely to increase by 30 per cent to a half of its current depth by 2080.

Permafrost thawing is already having impacts. It is the likely cause behind the draining away and disappearance of Arctic lakes in Siberia during the past three decades over an area of 500,000 square km.

The costs of relocating subsiding towns and villages could be high. The price tag for relocating a village like Kivalina in Alaska has been estimated to be \$54 million.

Marine Resources

Changes in river flows, ice regimes and the mobilization of sediments as a result of permafrost thawing are likely to have impacts on freshwater, estuary-living and marine biodiversity upon which local and indigenous people depend.

Lake trout, a cold water fish, is likely to be affected as will be the spawning grounds of fish and bottom-living life forms as a result of increased sediments.

Important northern fish species, like broad whitefish, Arctic char, Arctic grayling and Arctic cisco, are likely to decline as a result of changes in habitats and predatory species, perhaps carrying new diseases, moving into the warming Arctic waters.

Thinning and reduced coverage of sea ice is likely to have important knock on effects. Crustaceans, adapted for life at the sea-ice edge, are an important food for seals and polar cod. Narwhal also depend on sea-ice organisms.

“Early melting of sea ice may lead to an increasing mismatch in the timing of these sea-ice organisms and secondary production that severely affects populations of the sea mammals”, says the IPCC report.

However, more open water and other climate-related factors are likely to benefit fish stocks like cod, herring, walleye and pollock.

Forests

Ten per cent and possibly as much as 50 per cent of the Arctic tundra could be replaced by forests by 2100. The narrow, remaining coastal tundra strips in Russia’s European Arctic are likely to disappear.

Meanwhile, climate change is likely to favour pests, parasites and diseases such as musk ox lung worm and nematodes in reindeer. Forest fires and tree-killing insects such as spruce bark beetle are likely to increase.

Notes to Editors

The Working Group II report of the Fourth Assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change can be found at www.ipcc.ch or www.unep.org

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April 11, 2007

From the Baltimore Sun

“Time for new Marshall Plan to rebuild, heal world”

By Mark Klempner

April 11, 2007

In the Bible, we read that God created the world in six days but took 40 days to partially destroy it in the flood. I wish the human race could operate more like that. Instead, we've developed weapons of mass destruction that can obliterate us in a flash, but we seem to lack the capacity to rebuild, repair and heal ourselves with any kind of speed.

For instance, more than five years after the attack on the twin towers, we have yet to complete a monument at Ground Zero - but have managed to drop an estimated 50,000 bombs on Iraq. Isn't it time we realized that the future depends on our ability to create, not to destroy?

The Network of Spiritual Progressives, an interfaith organization that recently emerged from the religious left, has joined with other groups and prominent individuals in proposing what they call

a Global Marshall Plan. In their model, the United States, followed by other major industrialized nations, would dedicate at least 1 percent of gross domestic product each year for the next 20 years to substantially reduce or eliminate global and domestic poverty, homelessness, hunger, inadequate education and inadequate health care, and to ameliorate the physical damage we've done to our planet. During that time, economic, industrial, environmental and political strategies could be developed and implemented to help make the gains permanent.

"Dream on," you say. "That's never going to happen." Which is why the first step in making this and other crucial ideas a reality is for us to shift our thinking. The original Marshall Plan to rebuild postwar Europe - signed into law 59 years ago last week - was also a bold concept with a big price tag. Yet it was backed by the pragmatic President Harry Truman, who recognized not only that the richest country in the world had a moral obligation to help countries devastated by World War II but also that the misery and chaos in those countries would make their citizens vulnerable to Communist indoctrination.

Similar conditions exist today in Iraq, Lebanon and elsewhere, and are proving fertile ground for terrorist recruiters. Thus the Global Marshall Plan, though idealistic, is also realpolitik. Granted, the current U.S. administration lacks the moral imagination and pragmatic farsightedness to embrace such a plan. But what if millions of ordinary people with common sense and common decency rose up to affirm a different vision?

To help facilitate this, the Network of Spiritual Progressives has designated Sunday as a day to reflect on the unique power of generosity to promote global peace and security, and the tremendous good that could be done with our trillions of tax dollars - if only the government would listen to our voices. Programs are being planned involving speakers, music and prayer, as well as letter-writing campaigns and petition drives.

Participation in such activities helps to cut through our sense of powerlessness at seeing government officials endorse torture, bullying and secrecy, and rely on violence and dishonesty to ostensibly promote freedom and democracy. At the same time, these actions can energize us to express our deepest values, and to act on them.

For nearly a decade, I researched and interviewed people who had the generosity of spirit to risk their lives to save their Jewish neighbors in Nazi-occupied Europe. They often echoed the words of Miep Gies, the woman who tried to save Anne Frank and her family: "We can't wait for our leaders to make this world a better place." Rather, as another Holocaust rescuer put it, we must "do what we can, where we are, with what we've got."

Such deeds, however small, set in motion the tiny ripples of hope that Robert F. Kennedy once spoke of, ripples that can generate a giant swell of positive aspiration when millions of people act together. This is the power to create, to heal and to help. Through such bottom-up democracy, we will show what America and Americans are really about, and offer the world not a flood of militarism but a rainbow sign.

Mark Klempner, author of "The Heart Has Reasons: Holocaust Rescuers and Their Stories of Courage," has recently joined the Network of Spiritual Progressives. His e-mail is klempner@hearthasreasons.com.

April 14, 2007

“Christian Aid Groups Explore Climate Change Effects on Development”

American and European Christian groups have been meeting over the past several days to discuss how natural disasters caused by climate change will impact the groups development work.

Sat, Apr. 14, 2007 Posted: 10:03:12 AM EST

American and European Christian groups have been meeting over the past several days to discuss how natural disasters caused by climate change will impact the groups? development work.

Some 25 representatives of church-related relief and development agencies are currently gathered in London to reflect on how, for instance, a single hurricane or flood can destroy years of development work. In response to these real potential disasters, the groups at the consultation planned to discuss how Northern societies can help Southern societies continue to achieve their development goals despite threats of natural disaster.

During the Apr. 12-15 gathering, representatives were also expected to renew and update their ecumenical advocacy policies on how to negotiate with government bodies on climate change issues after the year 2012, when the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol expires.

The Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is an agreement where countries that ratify the protocol promise to reduce their emission of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. There are more than 160 countries that have signed the agreement.

The gathering is to also consider ways for faith communities to participate in a global civil society campaign on climate change as well as setting emission reduction targets and timetables.

The consultation is hosted by U.K.-based Christian Aid and sponsored by the World Council of Churches (WCC) Working Group on Climate Change.

Participating organizations of the climate change consultation include Bread for the World/Church Development Service (Germany), Church of Sweden Aid, Church World Service (USA), Evangelical Environment Network (USA), Norwegian Church Aid, and Tearfund (U.K.).

Ethan Cole
Christian Post Reporter

April 19, 2007

UNEP PRESS RELEASE

“2007 UNEP Champions of the Earth Awards Make Big ‘Splash’ at Gala Ceremony in Singapore”

Inspirational Winners from Algeria, Brazil and Jordan to the Philippines, Sweden and the United States Lauded for ‘Extraordinary’ Leadership In Environment and Sustainable Development

SINGAPORE, 19 April 2007—Hollywood star and environmental campaigner Daryl Hannah was among the high and the humble in Singapore last night to honour the 2007 Champions of the Earth.

Ms Hannah, famous for films like “Splash” and her support for renewable energies, received the trophy on behalf of Al Gore—the former US Vice-President and climate change campaigner was awarded the regional North America Champions prize.

The awards, presented at a gala ceremony in Singapore, recognize individuals whose extraordinary action and personal commitment to the environment are deemed outstanding and exceptional by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The other winners are His Excellency Mr. Cherif Rahmani of Algeria; Elisea ‘Bebet’ Gillera Gozun of the Philippines; Viveka Bohn of Sweden; Her Excellency Ms. Marina Silva of Brazil; His Royal Highness Prince Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan; and Jacques Rogge and the International Olympic Committee.

The seven trophies, made by the Kenyan artist Kiko from recycled metal, were presented to the winners and their representatives by Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director. He was assisted by Ms Shn Juay Shi Yan, the current Miss Earth Singapore.

Mr. Steiner said: “If we are to shape a new partnership between human-kind and the natural environment upon which all life ultimately depends then we need leaders, we need champions—champions in public life, champions in business and champions in our communities.”

“The seven winners honoured this evening are from different corners of the planet and drawn from different backgrounds and experiences. But they share a common sense of purpose and of values: namely, to reject the status quo, to persist when others may have failed and faltered and to deliberately seize the opportunities to promote more intelligent ways of managing development that balances the economic, social and environmental realities of the 21st century”, he said.

The gala event was hosted by UNEP; Ms Hil Hernandez Escobar of Chile, the international Miss Earth 2006; the Singapore Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources (MEWR) and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) with the support of various sponsors and partners including Asia Pacific Resources International Holdings (APRIL).

Mr. Rahmani of Algeria was honoured for advancing environmental law and for addressing the issues of deserts and desertification.

“Dotted with wisdom and grandeur, deserts embody solitude—a solitude upon which silence sows the seeds of culture. It is indeed the solitude and silence of the desert that fostered the cultures that make up much of our universal heritage”, he said.

“But today the Earth is subject to abuse in multiple and ever expanding ways—and that abuse even reaches the deserts. I hope I have contributed in my own modest way to building a society in harmony with nature—‘this visible part of God’s garden’”, said Mr. Rahmani.

Elisea Bebet Gillera Gozun was honoured for pushing forward the environmental agenda by winning trust across all sectors of Philippine society.

“Air quality in most of our urban areas now exceeds health guidelines. Fifteen of our rivers are considered biologically dead during the dry months. Solid waste continues to accumulate and 30 per cent of our people live below the poverty line”, she said.

“Societies resemble ecosystems. I thus believe that localized, community-based, multi-sectoral action is the response needed to save and rehabilitate the environment”, said Ms Gozun.

Viveka Bohn of Sweden was honoured for playing her leadership in global efforts to ensure chemical safety, especially through the successful Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) process.

In a statement read by her daughter Maria, Mrs Bohn said: “I am deeply honoured and truly grateful for this award. It is an appreciation of my contribution to green multilateral diplomacy.”

She defined three lessons for successful green diplomacy: “Do your homework!; Do your housework and above all Never Give Up!”

Her Excellency Ms. Marina Silva of Brazil was honoured for her tireless fight to protect the Amazon rainforest while balancing the needs of people. Official deforestation rates have been cut by around 50 per cent in the past three years.

In her video statement, she said: “It is the thought of one day being able to substitute predatory development models for sustainable ones; deforestation for conservation and competition for solidarity that I join in along this path with UNEP and my awarded colleagues.”

His Royal Highness Prince Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan was honoured for his belief in transboundary collaboration to protect the environment.

In a video statement he recalled working with farmers in the region following the six-day war: “I remember spending a night in 1977 with an older boy and when he saw electricity and clean water he said to me ‘this is the night of destiny’. Thus it is the need of human dignity that

motivates me. We, as Arabs or as Muslims, are no different to anyone else. Given a chance we can excel.”

Mr. Gore, whose trophy was collected by Ms Hannah, said in a statement: “Let me thank UNEP for their years of global leadership. My continuing efforts to communicate to audiences about the climate crisis have prevented me from joining you here today—but do not think it lessens the honour that I feel upon accepting the Champions of the Earth award.”

“I have every confidence that when the nations of the world come together to the common good, we will regain our moral authority to tackle the climate crisis and the environmental threats we face today”, he added.

Jacques Rogge and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) were honoured for introducing stringent environmental requirements for cities bidding to host Olympic Games.

The trophy was received by senior IOC officials Pal Schmitt and Ser Miang Ng.

In a video statement Mr Rogge, the IOC President, said: “The IOC started to be environmentally-conscious at the Olympic Games in Lillehammer in 1994. They were called the Green Games. And this is something not only for the 14 days of the Games but will leave a legacy for the future of a city and a region.”

“We have the mentality of athletes: we are ambitious people. So for the environment and sustainability we want to use the IOC motto of ‘higher, stronger, faster!’, he added.

Notes to Editors

The full achievements of the 2007 Champions of the Earth and their citations can be found at <http://www.unep.org/champions/>

The event was hosted in conjunction with the Business for the Environment (B4E) Summit details of which can also be found at the same web site.

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“Climate Justice' Demanded in Washington”
Jeffrey Allen--OneWorld US

WASHINGTON, Apr 17 (OneWorld) - Dubbing the battle against climate change a moral test for the United States, global anti-poverty and religious leaders called on U.S. politicians Monday to take drastic and immediate action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to minimize the country's contributions to global warming.

The activists, academics, and international charities echoed the charges leveled in a recent major scientific report that the hazardous consequences of a changing global climate will take a particularly powerful toll on people living in the world's poorest countries.

Meanwhile, the climatic changes already occurring stem disproportionately from the activities of individuals and corporations based in the world's wealthier nations, they said.

"Africa accounts for just 3 percent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions, but drought and disruptions of water access could put 840 million people at risk," said former White House chief of staff John Podesta, who is now director of the Washington, DC-based independent think tank Center for American Progress, one of the sponsors of Monday's event in the nation's capital.

Organizers, who represented a wide range of interests and included non-profit organizations including ActionAid, Friends of the Earth, Jubilee USA, and Oxfam America, said more than 300 climate activists and concerned individuals attended the meeting, and scores more participated through a live Web simulcast.

They heard speaker after speaker demand that officials in the United States join their colleagues from Europe, Asia, and other regions in encouraging citizens and requiring corporations to change their climate changing ways.

'Africa accounts for just 3 percent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions, but drought and disruptions of water access could put 840 million people at risk'
With only 5 percent of the global population, the United States is responsible for over 25 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions that are driving climate change, said Archbishop Desmond Tutu, addressing the conference by video from South Africa.

Speaking during the opening session, Tutu stressed that climate changes are impeding anti-poverty efforts worldwide.

Noting the droughts, famines, and floods that have caused millions of deaths across his continent and others in recent decades, the Nobel Peace Prize winner warned that climate change is already causing increases in the severity of these events as well as increases in human health problems and decreases in farmland and other requirements for economic progress.

"The climate crisis stalls our collective efforts to produce a sustainable and just future," Tutu said, adding that, while many African countries are already taking action to adapt to climate change and mitigate their own impacts on the problem, the United States and other wealthier nations must do more too.

The United States gives more money to international aid efforts than any other nation, noted former UN Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery Eric Schwartz, but, he added, it is also exacerbating poverty by contributing more to climate change than any other country.

Schwartz, who currently heads the Washington, DC-based group Connect US, a network of organizations that promote what they call "responsible" U.S. global engagement, joined in the call for a change in U.S. policies to help the country take the moral and political -- not just technological -- lead in addressing the issue worldwide.

Though Archbishop Tutu did not address the United States by name, the Bush administration was clearly the target of his message that affluent nations must stop providing economic incentives to companies that produce and consume oil and other fossil fuels, which are a leading contributor of greenhouse gases. He also called for the use of alternatives to oil, singling out wind and solar energy technologies for their capability to bring energy to both rich and poor people around the world without contributing to global climate change and its damaging consequences.

Meena Raman, a Malaysian activist and chairperson of the global environmental coalition Friends of the Earth, stressed the impact climate change is already having on her country and others working feverishly to grow their economies while coping with increasing health risks like malaria, malnutrition, and extreme weather events.

Raman implored U.S. officials to promote technologies that could supply U.S. energy needs in a more energy-efficient and climate-friendly way. She also called for a "drastic reduction of per capita emissions" in the world's wealthier nations and "fundamental changes in the way we produce and consume -- among the rich of the North and the South."

The message was not lost on one key U.S. lawmaker.

Representative Ed Markey (D-MA), who chairs a Congressional committee on global warming, pledged to help promote those changes at the highest political levels in the United States. Markey called for the U.S. Congress to send legislation to President Bush that would cap the greenhouse gas emissions of U.S. corporations, adding that companies would have the option to buy additional allowances from others that manage to reduce emissions below their allotted limit.

In environmental circles, that approach is called "cap and trade."

Passing a cap-and-trade bill would force the U.S. president to approve the plan, which is opposed by many industry representatives, or face an angry electorate in 2008, said Markey. It is a political corner Markey said he hoped the president would be backed in to -- for the sake of the planet.

The legislator also called for an increase in fuel-economy standards of U.S. vehicles by 10 miles per gallon within 10 years, and said electronic appliances from lightbulbs to flat-screen televisions sold in the United States should be required to be more energy efficient. The technology exists, Markey said, but it's up to government officials to help promote their use.

Markey also drew on his faith, saying that his own Catholic religion, like Jewish scripture and almost all other religious traditions, calls for a stewardship of the Earth and all its people.

Joel Hunter, an evangelical Christian leader in the United States, agreed.

"I see this as a pro-life issue," said Hunter, who is a pastor in Longwood, Florida and serves on the board of directors of both the National Association of Evangelicals and the World Evangelical Alliance.

"The whole life of our founder was concerned with poor people, was concerned with the vulnerable," said Hunter, referring to Jesus Christ.

Asked why many Christians -- and particularly evangelicals -- are split on how the United States government should react to the issue of climate change, Hunter said "the biggest challenge is to recognize that we don't know about the rest of the world, because we haven't identified with them as people.

"These aren't 'the poor' -- they are people," he added tearfully. "They love the same way we do, they grieve the same way we do. These are people."

April 20, 2007

“Kindness to the Earth Focus of Dalai Lama's Australia Tour”

SYDNEY, Australia, April 19, 2007 (ENS) - When His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, travels Australia in June as part of his ongoing world tour, many of his talks will have an environmental focus, and for the first time, a portion of the tour will be carbon neutral.

The spiritual and political leader of the Tibetan people and 1989 Nobel Peace Prize winner says, "This planet is our own home. Taking care of our world, our planet, is just like taking care of our own home. Our very lives depend upon this Earth, our environment."

Both the Australian Conservation Foundation and Greening Australia, specialists in native vegetation management, will be involved in the tour events scheduled to take place in the Domain, Sydney.

Greening Australia will be conducting a carbon audit for the Domain segment of the tour, providing the organizers with a neutral carbon output result for the events. Included in the calculations will be the details for the Dalai Lama's flights, as well as those of his entourage.

Trees will be planted to neutralize the greenhouse gas emissions, making this the first carbon neutral tour ever undertaken by the Dalai Lama.

At a time when Australia is tackling issues such as water shortages and the challenges of climate change, the Dalai Lama brings teachings of kindness, compassion and tolerance.

The Dalai Lama has long considered environmental issues to be among the key challenges currently facing humanity.

"There is suffering on this planet and there is a need to strengthen our love for our planet and our service to the living Earth," says His Holiness. "We think we can control nature, which is a false perception."

During the 11 days from the opening of the Open Arms – Embracing Kindness tour in Perth June 6 to the final events in Sydney June 16, free public events will be held across the country, allowing all Australians an opportunity to hear the Dalai Lama's messages.

With concern for the environment at an all time high across Australia, the Dalai Lama will address issues of environmental consciousness and the challenges of climate change.

Organized by the Australian Conservation Foundation, ACF, in collaboration with the Dalai Lama, a free Sustainability and Spirituality Forum will take place from on the morning of June 6 at the Burswood Dome in Perth.

His Holiness and ACF president Professor Ian Lowe, joined by other community and business leaders, will discuss the moral imperative to act on climate change.

The forum will conclude with a GreenHome workshop helping participants take the first steps towards reducing their own eco-footprints.

On June 13, the Dalai Lama launches Kindness Week at the Australia Zoo near Brisbane, Queensland with a talk on "Kindness To Animals and The Environment."

In Sydney on June 15, ACF will participate in the One Earth Forum tribute concert featuring some of Australia's finest acoustic talent.

This free concert will be held in Sydney's Domain in celebration of the Dalai Lama as a living example of the power of compassion and non-violence, the ACF said.

The Dalai Lama will speak at the event on the subject of "Peace through Inner Peace."

The ACF said, "His Holiness sees the planet and its peoples as interconnected, a view that is increasingly compelling in the 21st century, and resonates deeply with millions of people worldwide."

The Dalai Lama has been concerned about environmental protection for decades. To mark World Environment Day on June 5, 1986, he said, "Peace and the survival of life on earth as we know it are threatened by human activities which lack a commitment to humanitarian values. Destruction of nature and nature resources results from ignorance, greed and lack of respect for the earth's living things."

"This lack of respect extends even to Earth's human descendants, the future generations who will inherit a vastly degraded planet if world peace does not become a reality, and destruction of the natural environment continues at the present rate."

For more information on the Dalai Lama's tour in Australia, visit: www.dalailama.org.au.

April 21, 2007

BOSTON GLOBE
SPIRITUAL LIFE

“Pairing environmentalism, economic justice”

By Rich Barlow, April 21, 2007

It's not easy being green, unless, that is, you're a spiritual person who lives on Cape Cod. A sturdy environmentalism can be born from the marriage of religion, with its reverence for creation, and a seacoast dweller's appreciation of nature's might.

John Schlee belongs to the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Falmouth, and his denomination's foundational principles include "respect for the interdependent web of all existence."

He is also a scientist who retired from the US Geological Survey, and he has a long memory. Falmouth is barely 10 feet above sea level, he says, and often loses power during hurricanes and strong northeasters.

Just a generation ago, few religious leaders worried about the state of the environment, said the Rev. Robert F. Murphy, the minister of the Falmouth Fellowship, who calls himself a longtime environmentalist.

But the eve of the 38th annual Earth Day tomorrow marks a time of alliance between secular environmentalists and pious fellow Greens. It isn't just churches such as the famously liberal Unitarian Universalists, some of whom don't believe in a supernatural deity; conservative evangelicals have caught the eco bug, too.

In a nation where most profess religious belief, secular environmentalists are tapping the power of that majority.

The venerable Sierra Club employs a liaison to faith communities, for example. According to the club's website, one survey found that two-thirds of Americans care about the environment because "nature is God's Creation." The club says that almost half of its members attend religious services at least monthly.

It hasn't always been a harmonious marriage, and nowhere is that more the case than on the Cape, Murphy said. Mainstream environmentalism was typically dominated by white, middle-class activists who cared about issues such as wildlife and wilderness preservation, he says. But religious believers who joined the movement insisted on attention to "who suffers because of pollution," and all too often the answer was poor people. A pivotal moment came in 1987, when the United Church of Christ published a report showing that polluting facilities were disproportionately and deliberately placed in nonwhite communities.

Within the last decade or so, the phrase "environmental justice" crept into the green vocabulary, marrying the goal of protecting nature with that of promoting human rights for vulnerable people, said Bill Geise, another member of Murphy's congregation. Geise retired as a Superfund branch manager for the US Environmental Protection Agency.

More recently, Hurricane Katrina and the government's failures in helping impoverished victims of the storm demonstrated how an environmental cataclysm could pulverize low-income neighborhoods.

"The faith community is paramount to what we do here," said Brenda Swain, head of the Falmouth Service Center. The center, which offers assistance to poor residents, was begun two decades ago with a push from local clergy, and area congregations continue to funnel volunteers and donations to the center. The Falmouth Unitarian Fellowship and other churches distributed hundreds of fliers about fuel assistance and home weatherization programs for low-income households.

As a volunteer at the center, Murphy discovered that many applicants for fuel subsidies were the working poor, holding down jobs, but struggling to avoid the "heat or eat" choice.

Energy is a particular concern for Murphy's congregation.

"When other people talk about energy, the first question they may raise is, how do you stop global warming or how do you build a better windmill or how do you get American energy independence?" the minister said. ". . . But the first question for environmental justice on the Cape is, how do you provide all people with adequate sources of energy that are safe, affordable, and sustainable?"

A second priority is to feed the hungry and make the food organic and locally grown. The Fellowship runs two plots at the service center's community garden, and 95 percent of the tomatoes, cucumbers, green beans, peas, and squash, about two bushels' worth, goes to the center's food pantry, according to Geise.

Operating on the theory that ecology, like charity, begins at home, the Falmouth Fellowship tries to keep its own meeting house green, monitoring its energy use and indoor air quality and keeping its grounds pesticide-free and planted only with native flora, says Phil Zimmerman, a member of the governing board.

The Boston-based Unitarian Universalist Association says its history compels environmental responsibility. Its president, the Rev. William G. Sinkford, posted an Earth Day letter on the denomination's website. "Since the days of Emerson and Thoreau," he writes, "our faith has claimed nature as a primary source of religious inspiration."

Questions, comments or story ideas can be sent to spiritual@globe.

April 24, 2007

WASHINGTON POST

“Environmental Justice Stalled, Report Finds”

By Cindy Skrzycki

Tuesday, April 24, 2007; D02

Federal regulations have an impact on the development of technologies, the finances of companies, the competitive playing field and how many lawyers are on a company's staff to interpret the rules. These are the practical, known effects of regulations on business.

The rules also have an effect on communities when it comes to important decisions about where to locate a hazardous-waste facility, an industrial plant or a refinery, especially if race is involved.

A recent report by the United Church of Christ in Cleveland suggests that decisions made by federal, state and local governments, as well as by companies, have penalized minority groups. The evidence: There are a disproportionate number of hazardous-waste facilities near where they live.

The report, a reprise of a 1987 examination of the problem, found that over the past 20 years, minorities have been subjected to excessive levels of toxic pollutants from sites that have negatively affected their health and, often, property values.

The report, "Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty," cites "clear evidence of racism where toxic waste sites are located and the way government responds to toxic contamination emergencies" in minority communities. Many communities also face new threats "because of government cutbacks in enforcement, weakening health protection, and dismantling the environmental justice regulatory apparatus," the study said.

Using updated research and new methods, the study found that 56 percent of the people who live within three kilometers (1.86 miles) of one of the nation's 413 hazardous-waste facilities are Hispanics, blacks, Asians, Pacific Islanders or American Indians.

The number jumps to 69 percent in areas with multiple facilities.

The study shows that the 1987 report, which relied on cruder measures such as Zip codes, underestimated the number of people of color living near hazardous-waste sites.

Robin Saha, a professor at the University of Montana's Environmental Studies Program who worked on the report, said minority communities became "the path of least resistance" as industry's entry to white neighborhoods was blocked by not-in-my-backyard opposition.

In 1994, President Bill Clinton addressed the issue of race in the placement of facilities when he ordered 11 federal agencies to identify and address the effects of their policies on minority and low-income populations in the United States.

Since then, there have been legal battles, the flowering of a grass-roots advocacy movement and differences over how to approach the problem, depending upon who has been in the White House.

Even the concept of "environmental justice" itself is the source of disagreement: The term originally meant paying attention to underprivileged populations who might be overexposed to pollution and toxics. The Bush administration has reinterpreted it as an effort to protect all people.

Business groups such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce lobbied to have funds cut off to the Environmental Protection Agency in the 1990s so it couldn't issue guidance to industry on environmental justice.

"We saw EPA setting up this structure to impose environmental-justice guidelines over all environmental laws," said William Kovacs, the chamber's vice president for environment, technology and regulatory affairs.

Kovacs said the guidance would have fueled concern over how the agency handled permits, enforcement and cleanups, with many businesses being unable to locate in areas that have a preponderance of waste or industrial facilities.

A Supreme Court case in 2001 put the brakes on litigation filed under civil rights laws because communities now have to prove that companies were intentionally discriminating against them. The earlier standard allowed groups to allege "disparate impact" on their communities.

Since 2000, the EPA has been chastised by nonprofit groups and other government entities such as the agency's own inspector general and the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights for not having a plan to incorporate environmental justice into day-to-day operations. When the agency did propose a plan in 2005, it wasn't specifically directed at helping communities of color.

Instead, it focused on protecting all people, including minority and low-income populations, and incorporating environmental-justice considerations into the agency's planning and budgeting processes.

EPA officials said the focus is on collaboration and grants to communities, the development of a computer program to identify areas with problems, and staff training.

Charles Lee, acting director of the agency's Office of Environmental Justice, said, "Environmental justice is more complicated than those two factors" -- meaning race and income. Lee was involved in the first United Church of Christ report.

Robert Bullard, director of the Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University and one of the authors of the report, said the agency is doing "nothing more than pushing paper and putting up Web sites."

Carol Browner, EPA administrator in the Clinton administration, said the issue has languished and lacks leadership at the top.

The agency said in 2006 it investigated 34 environmental-justice-related cases, but it didn't offer specifics. Its Web site says that 148 administrative environmental-justice complaints were closed as of March 14 and that 40 were pending.

There were no details about the complaints or when they were filed.

Waste Management of Houston, the largest waste-services company in North America, said more work is being done on informing communities of the impact of facilities.

Sue Briggum, Waste Management's vice president for federal public affairs, said the company offers free sanitary services, gets involved in schools and pays "host" fees to communities with disposal facilities.

"We are very much aware we have to be good neighbors," she said.

Advocacy groups aren't persuaded. They are lobbying for legislation, which was introduced in Congress on Feb. 15, to make the Clinton order a law.

Cindy Skrzycki is a regulatory columnist for Bloomberg News. She can be reached atcskrzycki@bloomberg.net.

April 27, 2007

“Pope Should Talk Climate Change With Bush – Cardinal”

VATICAN CITY - A senior adviser to Pope Benedict said on Thursday he believes the Pontiff should raise the dangers of climate change and global warming with US President George W. Bush when the two meet in June.

Cardinal Renato Martino told reporters on the sidelines of a Vatican-sponsored scientific conference on climate change that religious leaders around the world should remind members of their flocks that wilfully damaging the environment is sinful.

Bush is due to meet Benedict at the Vatican in June while the US president is in Europe for a Group of Eight (G8) summit when Germany, the current G8 president, wants to forge an international agreement on combating climate change.

"It's not for me to say what the Pope and President Bush should discuss but certainly they will discuss current issues and therefore I imagine and I hope they will (discuss climate change)," Martino said.

"It certainly merits it," said Martino, who, as head of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, is the Pope's point man for social issues such as the environment.

The Bush administration, which did not sign up to the Kyoto Protocol on Climate change, has long been reluctant to curb the greenhouse gases blamed for swelling sea levels and causing droughts as well as floods.

Bush pulled out of the treaty, which Washington had signed under the previous, Democratic, administration, saying it would damage the economy and was unfair as it did not require rapidly developing nations like China and India to stem emissions.

In a message to conference participants, including British Environment Secretary David Miliband, the Pope said he hoped studies could lead to "lifestyles and production and consumer methods that aim to respect creation and (aim for) sustainable progress".

In recent years, the world's major religions have gone green in the race to save the planet.

Asked if wilful damage of the environment is a sin, Martino said: "Yes, because not using the environment correctly is an offence not only against yourself but against all others who make use of the environment."

He said all religious groups should be involved in environmental causes and raise awareness about global warming.

"We have to start at the level of elementary schools, to make sure children are taught to respect nature and be aware of the problems of the world. We can't wait until they are older. This has to be done naturally in religion classes, in religious groups everywhere," Martino said.

Story by Philip Pullella

Reuters: Story Date: 27/4/2007

“Protect God's creation: Vatican issues new green message for world's Catholics”

- Pope addresses climate change conference
- US church leaders lobby Bush on global warming

John Vidal and Tom Kington in Rome

Friday April 27, 2007

Guardian

The Vatican yesterday added its voice to a rising chorus of warnings from churches around the world that climate change and abuse of the environment is against God's will, and that the one billion-strong Catholic church must become far greener.

At a Vatican conference on climate change, Pope Benedict urged bishops, scientists and politicians - including UK environment secretary David Miliband - to "respect creation" while "focusing on the needs of sustainable development".

The Pope's message follows a series of increasingly strong statements about climate change and the environment, including a warning earlier this year that "disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence, and vice versa".

Observers said yesterday that the Catholic church is no longer split between those who advocate development and those who say the environment is the priority. Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, head of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, said: "For environment ... read Creation. The mastery of man over Creation must not be despotic or senseless. Man must cultivate and safeguard God's Creation."

According to Vatican sources, the present Pope is far more engaged in the green debate than John Paul. In the past year Benedict has spoken strongly on the need to preserve rainforests. In the next few weeks he visits Brazil.

"There is no longer a schism. The new interest in climate change and the environment is not surprising really. Benedict comes out of 1960s Germany, where environment and disarmament were major issues. It's conceivable that his ministry could even culminate in a papal encyclical on the environment," said one analyst. This would be the most powerful signal to the world's Catholics about the need for environmental awareness at every level.

The Catholic church is just one major faith group now rapidly moving environment to the fore of its social teachings. "Climate change, biotechnology, trade justice and pollution are all now being debated at a far higher level by the world's major religions," said Martin Palmer, secretary general of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (Arc).

In some cases the debate is dividing traditionalists from younger congregations. In the US the diverse 50m-strong conservative evangelical churches are increasingly at war about the human contribution to global warming.

Many evangelical leaders say they are still not convinced that global warming is human-induced and have argued that the collapse of the world is inevitable and will herald the second coming of Christ.

But most younger leaders have broken ranks. About four years ago the progressives began to argue strongly that man had a responsibility to steward the earth. Redefining environmentalism as "creation care", they are now lobbying President Bush and the US administration to take global warming far more seriously.

"They are the most effective lobby," said one observer yesterday. "They represent the conservative vote so Bush has to listen to them."

Although the World Council of Churches in Geneva has had a department to investigate climate change since 1990, churches have come late to the debate. "The [environment and religion] is a no-brainer, but we are all only now realising it", said Claire Foster, environmental policy adviser to the Church of England.

Many faiths also realise their potential to influence politicians and financiers. A survey by US bank Citigroup found that the 11 major faiths now embrace 85% of the world's population and are the world's third largest group of financial investors. In the US the United Methodist Church pension fund alone is worth \$12bn-\$15bn (£6bn-£7bn). Total investment of US churches is nearly \$70bn. Switching to ethical investments would be hugely significant.

One Catholic priest impatient for change is Seán McDonagh, a Columban missionary and author of books on ecology and religion. "The Catholic Church's social teaching on human rights and justice has been good, but there has been little concern about the impact on the planet. The church has been caught up on its emphasis on development and on resisting population control, but if we are pro-life we should be banging the drum now about climate change."

Backstory

Most of the world's mainstream faiths have at their core a deep respect for nature, but over hundreds of years many have developed an ambivalent attitude towards ecology and the pressures put on the earth by humans. Church leaders have largely stayed silent on the extinction of species and natural capital and have concentrated their ethical teachings on the need to relieve human poverty. But the reality of impending climate change and the effects it will have on the poor is concentrating minds and causing many to fundamentally reassess their understanding of man's place in the world.

April 28, 2007

CINCINNATI CATHOLIC TELEGRAPH

"Ohio Catholic Conference faces global warming issues"

Vatican ambassador encourages voluntary simplicity to reverse climate change

COLUMBUS, Ohio - Every Catholic can do something about climate change by adopting a life of voluntary simplicity, believes the Vatican's ambassador to the United Nations.

It comes down to "working less, wanting less, spending less," thus reducing the impact each person has on the environment, Archbishop Celestino Migliore told the second in a series of regional Catholic conversations on climate change Saturday.

Citing Genesis' call to humanity to oversee creation and protect it and the church's social doctrine, the Vatican diplomat outlined the Holy See's position on the need for Catholics to heed the environmental dangers facing the planet.

"The denigration of the environment has become an inescapable reality," the archbishop said.

"There is no doubt that the latest assessment has established a strong connection between human activity and climate change," he said, referring to the February statement by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Archbishop Migliore acknowledged that although not all scientists agree that climate change is occurring, other environmental threats, such as indiscriminate deforestation, water pollution, the lack of potable water in parts of the world and depletion of fish stocks, demand action from the world community and individual Catholics alike.

"We need to drink deep from this frustrating foundation of knowledge and wisdom, known as the aggressive and progressive degradation of the environment, that has become an inescapable reality," he said.

Archbishop Migliore called God's placing of humans in the Garden of Eden with the instruction of not only taming nature, but keeping, or preserving, it as well. God's instruction was not so much a commandment but a blessing "to perfect, not destroy, the cosmos," he said.

Any steps to protect the environment must depend on more than the use of technology and traditional economics but also on "ethical, social and religious values as well," he said.

Likewise, any corrective steps require turning to people in the developing world, especially those living in dire poverty, and making decisions with their advice and consent, the papal nuncio said.

"With humans open to love, creation becomes the place for the mutual exchange of gifts among people," he said.

The Ohio conference was the second of three gatherings across the country to address the Catholic response to climate change. The first was in Florida last month and the third will be June 2 in Anchorage, Alaska.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is convening representatives from across a broad swatch of society for a sustained and thoughtful discussion on climate change. Saturday's 14 conference reflected that desire, with representatives from utility companies, a consumer group, environmental organizations, agriculture, higher education, state government, local parishes and diocesan social action offices on hand.

Daniel Misleh, executive director of the 10-month-old Catholic Coalition on Climate Change and a conference planner, said the bishops are looking to take steps that "make sense" and that are consistent with Catholic values.

The USCCB is a major supporter of the coalition along with the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities USA, National Council of Catholic Women, National Catholic Rural Life Conference and Catholic Health Association of the United States.

"The public policy remedies are very complicated," Misleh said. "We're more in a mode of learning and listening instead of a mode of prescribing solutions."

He expects it will be at least six months before the bishops back any of the climate change bills pending in Congress.

Gov. Ted Strickland, a Democrat and a United Methodist minister, was on hand and briefly discussed his goals to reduce energy consumption throughout state government.

In an interview, Strickland said he has ordered energy audits of all state buildings with the goal of being an example for local governments, agencies, school districts and individual homeowners across the state.

"We can educate and inform people (about what needs to be done). It will take many small steps by many individuals," Strickland said.

"They're small steps, but if taken in a collective way, they can lead to significant results," he added. "No one person can take steps that are going to have a dramatic impact (climate change), but a lot of raindrops create an ocean."

As the third largest contributor of greenhouse gases in the United States, Ohio can take a leading role in reducing airborne pollutants that are said to be the primary cause of climate change, according to conference planners.

Jim Tobin, associate director of the Catholic Conference of Ohio, is hoping the information that conference delegates obtained will be spread to parishes throughout the state.

At the same time, Tobin and others stressed the importance of addressing climate change because of its impact - which is already being felt - on the world's poor and other vulnerable people. That concern, repeated throughout Saturday, is rooted in the church's social teaching.

Marianist Sister Leanne Jablonski, director of the Marianist Environmental Education Center in Dayton, outlined a broad base of statistical information, ala Al Gore's Academy Award-winning documentary "An Inconvenient Truth," on sources of greenhouse gases and the implications of climate change. She painted a grim picture of Ohio's role in the climate change scenario.

Facts she offered include:

Since 1750, the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased by 37 percent, corresponding to the industrial age.

The United States has less than 4 percent of the world's population but contributes 25 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

As the country's 11th largest state, Ohio has 4 percent of the U.S. population but produces 1 percent of the world's greenhouse gases annually.

Ohio is sixth in the U.S. in energy consumption; third in coal consumption and fourth in electricity usage.

Despite the grim realities, Sister Jablonski challenged the delegates to be hopeful while answering the call to care for God's creation.

Hope, she said, can be found in the sacred places of life, places where God can be found - a favorite garden, a park, a favorite childhood gathering place. In the same way, she tied sacramental life to the beauty of the environment - the clear waters of baptism, the grain and the fields that produces the bread of Eucharist and the dignity of farmworkers who harvest the grapes for wine.

"We have to live in solidarity, and we have a responsibility to future generations," she said.

April 29, 2007

Religion Must Help Protect Planet, Conference Says
VATICAN CITY, 28 April (Reuters) - God wants believers to be green.

That's the message emerging from a Vatican conference on climate change which was the latest sign of growing concern by religious groups around the world over the fate of the planet.

Scientists, environment ministers and leaders of various religions from 20 countries sat down for two days to discuss the implications of global warming and development.

While the scientists spoke of the dynamics of greenhouse gasses, temperature patterns, rain forests and exhaust emissions, the men and women of religion discussed the moral and theological aspects of protecting the environment.

The conference, organised by the Vatican's Council for Justice and Peace, marked the most significant plunge to date by the Roman Catholic Church -- the world's largest Christian grouping -- into one of the hottest contemporary topics.

"Climate change is one of the signs of the times affecting the Catholic Church as a global organisation. The Catholic Church must take a stand on this present-day and urgent question," said Bishop Bernd Uhl of Freiburg, Germany.

In recent years, the world's major religions have gone more green in the race to save the planet, which they teach mankind has in stewardship and must protect for future generations.

Over the past year, some evangelical Protestant churches in the United States -- strong conservative backers of President George W. Bush -- have broken ranks with the White House to call for urgent measures to protect the environment.

National Catholic bishops conferences in some countries, including the United States and Australia, have issued statements or pastoral letters on climate change and the need to protect what most religions see as "the gift of creation".

PAPAL ENCYCLICAL ON GLOBAL WARMING?

Uhl said the time had come for an encyclical, the highest form of papal writing, on what he called "the future of creation". He said it would "energize" Catholics, other believers and world opinion on climate change.

Bishop Christopher Toohy of Australia said believers should "have the courage and motivation under God's grace to do what we need to do to safeguard this garden planet".

Elias Abramides, a Greek Orthodox member of the World Council of Churches (WCC), told the gathering climate change was a "deeply spiritual issue" rooted in the scriptures.

"We believe that the solutions to the problem will not only be of a political, technological and economic nature. We believe that ethics and religion will necessarily become essential components on which the solutions will be based," he said.

"As Christians ... we need to recognise and accept the intimate ethical and deeply religious implications of climate change. It is a matter of justice, it is a matter of equity, and it is a matter of love: love for God the Almighty, love for the neighbour, love for creation," Abramides said.

The WCC groups some 550 million Christians from 340 non-Catholic Christian churches, denominations and fellowships.

Story by Philip Pullella

Story Date: 30/4/2007

May 3, 2007

“Religious leaders tour US coal mining sites, praying for end to mountaintop removal”

The Associated Press
Thursday, May 3, 2007

VICCO, Kentucky: Amid a backdrop of bulldozers, warning sirens and mine blasts, demonstrators bowed their heads and prayed for the land, the water and mostly for an end to the practice of removing mountaintops to extract coal.

"Let's pray for a time when we can stop defiling the land," said Allen Johnson, co-founder of Christians for the Mountains in West Virginia and one of about two dozen religious leaders who signed a statement Wednesday against mountaintop removal.

The outdoor prayer ceremony wrapped up a two-day tour of eastern Kentucky's mountains where mountaintop removal brings difficult tradeoffs: it damages the environment, but provides jobs for thousands of people in a region heavily reliant on coal as its economic engine.

The Rev. John Rausch, a Catholic priest from Stanton who organized the non-denominational tour, said the coal industry has created a "false dichotomy" between jobs and the environment.

When asked what he would tell miners who depend on mountaintop removal for their livelihood, Rausch said, "What's good for you may not be good for the community. I certainly appreciate workers being in that position, but they need to begin transitioning out of that."

The religious opposition reflects a trend of more people of faith taking stands on environmental issues. In some cases it has united traditionally conservative evangelists with liberal conservationists.

In February, 86 evangelical pastors, college presidents and theologians signed a letter calling on Christians and the government to fight global warming.

The Southern Baptist Convention, the largest U.S. Protestant denomination, adopted a resolution in June denouncing environmental activism and warning that it could "become a wedge issue to divide the evangelical community."

The religious leaders, who included people from as far away as California and Washington state, said they signed the statement opposing mountaintop removal out of an obligation to protect God's work.

"People of faith are motivated by their belief in God, and God tells us to take care of creation," said Chris Elisara, executive director of the Creation Care Study Program in Julian, California.

Bill Caylor, president of the Kentucky Coal Association, said the religious leaders were drawing on emotions more than fact.

"They're wanting to do nothing and offer no jobs in return," Caylor said. "I find it frustrating when people use religion to justify their position."

He added that mountaintop removal affects less than 7 percent of Appalachia.

Brian Patton, president of James River Coal Co., which runs several surface mines and a mountaintop removal operation, said the demonstrators were taking a "narrow view of things."

"As a Christian, I've been taught to worry about saving souls as opposed to environmental issues," said Patton, a deacon at the Calvary Baptist Church in Lexington.

He added that it's "hypocritical to single out mining" because other industries and commercial development also affect the environment.

The leaders learned about the effects of mountaintop removal through fly-overs of surface mines and testimonials from local residents concerned about dirty drinking water and the loss of wildlife and vegetation.

On Wednesday, the group heard from McKinley Sumner, who has tried to fend off a Hazard-based mining company for years. International Coal Group has already blasted away roughly 25 feet (7 1/2 meters) of Sumner's 63 acres (25 hectares), according to a recent property survey.

The prayer ceremony was held along the scarred edge of Sumner's property, which overlooks bulldozers carrying coal and the daily explosions.

A loud blast stirred the predominantly Christian delegation as they opened their ceremony with the first few verses of "Amazing Grace."

They meditated over small containers of water and soil before reciting and signing their statement which read in part, "Our voices will retell the testimony we have heard and the destruction we have seen through our sermons, writings, and conversations."

Sumner said he appreciated the group's visit and efforts to bring attention to the issue.

"Sometimes prayers are answered, sometimes they're not," he said. "I think it will make an impact."

May 4, 2007

UNEP PRESS RELEASE

“IPCC Confirms That Cost-Effective Policies and Technologies Could Greatly Reduce Global Warming”

BANGKOK, 4 May 2007 -- A new assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concludes that the world community could slow and then reduce global emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) over the next several decades by exploiting cost-effective policies and current and emerging technologies.

Based on the most up-to-date, peer-reviewed literature on emissions modelling, economics, policies and technologies, today's report reveals how Governments, industry and the general public could together reduce the energy and carbon intensity of the global economy despite growing incomes and population levels.

"Climate change will touch every corner and every community on this planet but equally, overcoming climate change can touch on every facet of the global economy in a wealth of positive ways. Measures to reduce emissions can, in the main, be achieved at starkly low costs especially when compared with the costs of inaction. Indeed some, such as reducing emissions by 30 per cent from buildings by 2020, actually contribute positively to GDP", said Executive

Director Achim Steiner of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) which, together with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), established the IPCC.

"It is now up to Governments to introduce the mechanisms and incentives to unleash the ingenuity and creativity of the financial and technological markets in order to realize these economic, social and environmental gains", he said.

According to "Climate Change 2007: Mitigation of Climate Change", without additional action by Governments the emissions from the basket of six greenhouse gases (GHGs) covered by the Kyoto Protocol will rise by 25 to 90% by 2030 compared to 2000. (The six gases are carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane, nitrous oxide, sulphur hexafluoride, PFCs and HFCs.)

By adopting stronger climate change policies, however, Governments could slow and reverse these emissions trends and ultimately stabilize the level of greenhouse gases remaining in the atmosphere. For example, stabilizing GHG levels at 445-490ppm (parts per million) - the most ambitious target that was assessed - would require global CO₂ emissions to peak by 2015 and to fall to 50-85% of 2000 levels by 2050. This could limit global mean temperature increases to 2-2.4°C above pre-industrial levels.

Stabilizing GHG levels at 535-590ppm would require global CO₂ emissions to peak by 2010-2030 and return to -30% to +5% of 2000 levels by around 2050. This could limit the temperature increase to 2.8-3.2°C. If emissions peak later, more warming can be expected. By way of comparison, the current (2005) level of GHGs is about 379ppm.

The report's Summary for Policymakers (SPM) was finalized and adopted this week by representatives from 105 countries. The full set of underlying chapters, written by 168 authors (some 40% of whom are from developing and transition countries) and reviewed by hundreds of other experts, will be available shortly.

The report addresses ways of reducing emissions from key sectors:

The energy supply sector - The IPCC concludes that no single economically and technologically feasible solution would on its own suffice for reducing GHG emissions from the energy sector. Instead, Governments would need to promote a range of options.

For example, they could encourage natural gas over more carbon-intensive fossil fuels as well as mature renewable energy technologies such as large hydro, biomass combustion and geothermal. Other renewable sources include solar-assisted air conditioning, wave power and nanotechnology solar cells, although they all still require more technological or commercial development. Yet another option could be carbon capture and storage technology (CCS), which involves capturing carbon dioxide before it can be emitted into the atmosphere, transporting it to a secure location, and isolating it from the atmosphere, for example by storing it in a geological formation.

Irrespective of climate change, over \$20 trillion is expected to be invested in upgrading global energy infrastructure from now until 2030. The additional cost for altering these investments in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions would range from negligible to an increase of 5-10%.

Buildings - Approximately 30% of the projected baseline emissions in the residential and commercial sectors - the highest rate amongst all sectors studied by the IPCC - could be reduced by 2030 with a net economic benefit. Energy consumption and embodied energy in buildings can be cut through greater use of existing technologies such as passive solar design, high-efficiency lighting and appliances, highly efficient ventilation and cooling systems, solar water heaters, insulation materials and techniques, high-reflectivity building materials and multiple glazing. Government policies such as continuously updated appliance standards and building energy codes could further contribute.

By producing co-benefits and lower life-cycle costs, emissions cuts in the buildings sector could even have net economic benefits rather than costs. However, particular attention would have to be paid to removing the market barriers (such as lack of proper incentives and access to information) that have prevented many of the available technologies from being widely adopted.

Transport - Because the demand for vehicles, vehicle travel, and fuel use is significantly price inelastic, efficiency improvements risk being overwhelmed by the rapid growth in transport until revolutionary new technologies are introduced. New and emerging technologies that could help reduce emissions range from directed-injection turbocharged (TDI) diesels and improved batteries for road vehicles to regenerative braking and higher efficiency propulsion systems for trains to blended wing bodies and unducted turbofan propulsion systems for airplanes. Biofuels also have the potential to replace a substantial part of the petroleum now used by transport.

Providing public transport systems and their related infrastructure and promoting non-motorised transport can further reduce emissions. Transportation demand management (TDM) strategies for reducing traffic congestion and air pollution can also be effective in reducing private-vehicle travel if rigorously implemented and supported.

Industry - The greatest potential for reducing industrial emissions is located in the energy-intensive steel, cement, and pulp and paper industries and in the control of non-CO₂ gases such as HFC-23 from the manufacturing of HCFC-22, PFCs from aluminium smelting and semiconductor processing, sulphur hexafluoride from use in electrical switchgear and magnesium processing, and methane and nitrous oxide from the chemical and food industries.

While existing technologies can significantly reduce industrial GHG emissions, new and lower-cost technologies will be needed to meet long-term emissions objectives. Technology transfer is essential to accelerating the transition to clean technologies in developing countries. More broadly, by revising their policies Governments could motivate companies to invest in low-emissions plants and technologies.

Agriculture - Options for reducing agricultural GHG emissions are cost competitive with non-agricultural options (such as energy and transportation) in achieving long-term climate objectives. Sequestering carbon in the soil represents about 89% of the mitigation potential. The most prominent options are improved management of crop and grazing lands (e.g. improved agronomic practices, nutrient use, and tillage and residue management), restoration of organic soils that are drained for crop production, and restoration of degraded lands. Lower but still

significant reductions are possible with improved water and rice management; set-asides, land use change (e.g. conversion of cropland to grassland) and agro-forestry; and improved livestock and manure management.

Forests - Arresting today's high levels of deforestation and promoting afforestation could reduce or reverse greenhouse gas emissions from the forestry sector. In the longer term, the best way to maintain or increase the ability of forests to sequester carbon is through sustainable forest management, which also has many social and environmental benefits. Its contribution to minimizing climate change justifies further investments in improving the conservation and sustainable use of forests. A comprehensive approach to forest management can ensure an annual sustained yield of timber, fibre or energy that is compatible with adapting to climate change, maintaining biodiversity and promoting sustainable development.

Wastes - Post-consumer waste contributes less than 5% of global GHG emissions. A wide range of mature, environmentally effective technologies are available to reduce emissions and provide co-benefits involving public health, environmental protection and sustainable development. Collectively, these technologies can directly reduce GHG emissions (in particular, by recovering gases emitted from landfills but also through improved landfill practices and engineered wastewater management) or avoid generating GHGs (through controlled composting of organic waste, state-of-the-art incineration and expanded sanitation coverage). Fortunately, 20-30% of projected wastes emissions for 2030 can be reduced at negative cost and 30-50% at low costs.

How can public policy ensure lower emissions?

Governments can play a major role in motivating the private sector to invest in innovative technologies by providing companies with incentives that are clear, predictable, long term and robust.

Government policies can be counterproductive. Direct and indirect subsidies for fossil fuel use and agriculture remain common practice, although those for coal have declined over the past decade in many Organisation for Economic Cooperation for Development (OECD) countries and in some developing countries. In addition, government funding for many energy research programmes declined after the 1970s oil shocks and have remained at these lower levels.

Fortunately, there are many ways that public policy can promote the development, deployment and diffusion of new technologies. The IPCC finds that Governments are successfully using a wide range of policies and measures that address climate change, including regulations and standards, taxes and charges, tradable permits, voluntary agreements, subsidies, financial incentives, research and development programs, and information instruments. The most effective policy mix will vary from country to country. If integrated with other government policies, climate change policies can contribute to sustainable development practices in both developed and developing countries.

For their policies to be effective, however, Governments would need to pay special attention to identifying and removing barriers to innovation. These can include market prices that do not

incorporate externalities such as pollution, misplaced incentives, vested interests, lack of effective regulatory agencies and imperfect information.

Because no one sector or technology can address the entire mitigation challenge, the best approach is to adopt a diversified portfolio of policies and to address all major sectors. Some of the cheapest options for reducing emissions involve electricity savings in buildings, fuel savings in vehicles and increased soil carbon content in agriculture. Because energy supply is the largest contributor to emissions, policies to promote a shift to less carbon-intensive energy sources are particularly effective.

How much will it cost?

Economists use models to estimate the economic impacts of efforts to reduce emissions. Economic modelling relies on a wide range of assumptions, which are critical to a model's conclusions about the cost of stabilizing GHG levels. Key assumptions involve the discount rate; the emissions baseline, related technological change and resulting emissions; the stabilization target and level; and the portfolio of available technologies.

Economic models produce lower cost estimates when they use baselines with slowly rising emissions and when they allow technological change to accelerate as carbon prices rise. Costs are also reduced when the Kyoto Protocol's flexibility mechanisms are more fully implemented. If revenues are raised from carbon taxes or emission schemes, costs may be lowered if the new revenues open the door to tax reforms or are used to promote low-carbon technologies and remove barriers to mitigation. Some models even give positive GDP gains because they assume that economies are not functioning optimally and that climate change mitigation policies can help to reduce imperfections in the economy.

Many economic models report the costs of reducing emissions in terms of "GDP losses". For example, by the year 2030 the global average macro-economic cost of ensuring that GHG levels eventually stabilize at 445-710ppm ranges from less than 3% to a gain of 0.6%. This translates into an annual reduction in the GDP growth rate of less than 0.12% to less than 0.06%. This small loss should be compared to projections that the global economy will likely expand dramatically over the next several decades.

(By 2030 the global average macro-economic cost of ensuring that GHG emissions will eventually stabilize at between 445 and 710ppm is estimated to be between a 3% decrease in global GDP and a small increase compared to the baseline. This should be compared to projections that the global economy will likely expand dramatically during this period of two-and-a-half decades.)

Economists use cost-benefit analysis to compare the costs of action to the costs of inaction (that is, of climate change damages). They quantify climate change damages in monetary terms as the social cost of carbon (SCC) or time-discounted damages. Due to large uncertainties in quantifying non-market damages, however, it is difficult to estimate SCC with confidence. As a result, SCC estimates in the literature vary a great deal and are likely to be understated.

Comparing SCC estimates with the carbon prices for different levels of mitigation (see below) shows that SCC is at least comparable to, and possibly higher than, carbon prices for even the most stringent scenarios assessed by the IPCC. In other words, the cost of stabilizing GHG concentrations at low levels tends to be comparable to, or lower than, costs of inaction.

It is also important to remember that climate policies can bring many win-win benefits that may not be factored into cost estimates. These include technological innovation, tax reform, increased employment, improved energy security and health benefits from reduced pollution. As a result, climate policies offering significant co-benefits can offer a true no-regrets GHG reduction policy in which substantial advantages accrue even if the impact of human-induced climate change itself would turn out to be less than current projections suggest.

The price of carbon

A carbon price reflecting the true cost of GHG emissions will provide signals to individual firms and households to cut emissions and stimulate the research and development of low-carbon technologies.

Emissions trading (or cap-and-trade) systems have been a subject of particular interest to researchers and policymakers alike. The volume of allowed emissions - the "cap" - determines the carbon price and the environmental effectiveness of this instrument, while the distribution of trade allowances or permits can affect its cost effectiveness and competitiveness.

Uncertainty about the actual price of carbon makes it difficult to estimate the total cost of meeting emission reduction targets in this manner (the reverse holds true for carbon taxes: the costs are clearer but the reductions less so). Carbon prices can also be created implicitly by regulations, taxes and charges.

While a positive carbon price would by itself create signals for producers and consumers to significantly invest in lower carbon products, technologies and processes, additional incentives related to direct government funding and regulations are also important.

Cap-and-trade systems, then, may offer an attractive, market-based approach to limiting greenhouse gas emissions. But because the operational details are vital to the success or failure of such systems, governments would need to experiment and gain experience in order to build the most effective systems possible.

Note to journalists: For a copy of Working Group III's Summary for Policymakers, please see www.ipcc.ch, www.wmo.int or www.unep.org.

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May 7, 2007

UNEP NEWS RELEASE

“Barrow, Alaska— Host of 2007 North American Celebrations – Rallies Behind World Environment Day Theme”

BARROW, Alaska, 7 May 2007— While Tromsø, Norway is gearing up to host this year’s international World Environment Day (WED) celebrations, a continent away, the Alaskan community of Barrow is preparing to host the North American WED festivities.

This year’s WED theme, *Melting Ice A Hot Topic?*, resonates in the every-day lives of the citizens of the northernmost community of the United States, which until recently, had a daily minimum temperature below freezing 324 days of the year. Representing 65% of Barrow’s population, the native Inupiat continue to preserve their whaling, hunting and fishing culture, affording them a unique vantage point from which to corroborate the latest scientific findings with regard to thawing permafrost, retreating sea ice and warming temperatures over the past few decades.

On 5 June, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) will bring together around the same table the holders of both community-based and science-based knowledge to explore the impacts of climate change and how Arctic communities are adapting to this phenomenon.

The Town Hall meeting will offer a unique opportunity to various members of the Inupiat community, including an elder, a hunter and a fisherman, to share their observations on how climate change has affected their daily lives. Community members in the audience will also share their own observations.

From the scientific community, speakers will include Hajo Eicken, Associate Professor at the Department of Geology and Geophysics, University of Alaska-Fairbanks; John Crump, Coordinator of Polar Issues at the UNEP GRID-Arendal Office based in Ottawa, Canada; and Richard Glenn, President of the Barrow Arctic Science Consortium (BASC).

Glenn Sheehan, BASC Executive Director, noted: “Barrow’s people have worked with visiting scientific researchers for over 125 years, since the original International Polar Year (IPY). As 2007 marks another IPY, we are pleased to be participating in UNEP’s event, which will bring the Barrow community and scientists together to address adaptation to climate change.”

“We appreciate the opportunity World Environment Day has given us to focus attention on the environmental changes occurring in Barrow and its surrounding communities”, says City Mayor Nathaniel Olemaun Jr. “We are trying to get everyone in the North Slope to participate in this important event”, he added.

The North Slope encompasses the most northern reaches of Alaska, including eight villages with a total population of 7,500 spread out over 89,000 square miles, roughly the size of the state of Oregon.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, said: “What happens in the Arctic and Antarctica is of direct interest to us all. UNEP’s WED event in Barrow will give the people in this part of the world a voice. They have a story to tell, and we hope that the global community will be listening.”

Another highlight of the Day will be the presentation of an award to the 9-year-old winner, among the 81 entries from Alaska, of the 2007 UNEP International Children’s Painting Competition. The winner from Anchorage depicted the theme of climate change by showing a native Alaskan standing in a boat, holding out a life preserver to three polar bears whose heads are peeking out of a sea of melted ice.

In keeping with the tradition of being a people’s event, World Environment Day in Barrow will also include a colorful demonstration of native Inupiat dances and the annual Eskimo blanket toss, which marks the beginning of the Nalukataq Spring Festival.

Mr. Steiner added: “The primary focus of the international community should and must be to reduce greenhouse gas emissions eventually to the up to 80 per cent deemed necessary by scientists to stabilize the atmosphere. But adaptation to climate change already underway is equally important, especially for vulnerable communities.”

“Native and indigenous peoples in the Arctic and in places like Barrow have, over millennia, coped and indeed thrived in conditions of extreme temperatures. They are learning now to cope with the realities of human-induced climate change. This evolving knowledge, these traditions and skills will be ever more crucial in a climate constrained world for not only the Inupiat people in Barrow but as an adaptation resource for communities across northerly latitudes”, he said.

Notes to Editors

Details concerning UNEP’s World Environment Day celebrations around the world can be found at www.unep.org/wed/2007.

For more information, please contact: Elisabeth Guilbaud-Cox, Regional Office for North America on tel: (202) 974-1307 or (202) 812-2100; Nick Nuttall, UNEP Spokesperson, on Tel: 254 20 762-3084, Mobile : 254 733 632755, E-mail: nick.nuttall@unep.org.

May 10, 2007

Secretary-General
SG/SM/10990
GA/10590
Department of Public Information
News and Media Division
New York

“Diversity driver of human progress, not threat, Secretary-General says in remarks to General Assembly informal debate”

Following are UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s remarks at the General Assembly informal thematic debate on “Civilizations and the Challenges for Peace: Obstacles and Opportunities” on 10 May:

Let me thank the President of the General Assembly, Her Excellency, Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, for proposing this timely and topical debate.

This meeting comes at a time of rising intolerance and growing cross-cultural tensions. Events of recent years -- from terrorism and the means used to fight it, to offending words or publications -- have only accelerated these trends. They have exposed a widening gulf between communities and nations. If unaddressed, this divide has the potential to undermine broader peace and stability in our world.

Today, there is an urgent need to rebuild bridges and to enter into a sustained and constructive intercultural dialogue, one that stresses common values and shared aspirations. As a start, all of us need to better understand the issues affecting intercultural relations.

This Assembly provides a unique platform to do so. By bringing together representatives of all countries in one chamber, it is perhaps the highest possible forum for a dialogue among nations and civilizations. Your discussions -- which also involve prominent thinkers and civil society representatives from the world over -- can not only clarify a way forward, they can also serve as an example of what can be achieved through constructive debate.

Over these two days, I hope you will explore ways in which Governments, international bodies, foundations, civil society and religious groups can come together on this issue. I am already encouraged by the specific subjects you have identified for closer examination. The panels on respect for cultural diversity, the role of religion in contemporary society, and the responsibilities of the media each highlight some of the most pressing challenges confronting every society.

Unfortunately, in our age of satellite television and jet travel, distances have collapsed but divisions have not. Instead, our proximity has heightened longstanding suspicions of “the other” -- the other religion, the other ethnicity, the other nationality. It has led increasing numbers of people to reject diversity in favour of the familiar.

In response, we need to reassert the truth that diversity is a virtue, not a threat. Indeed, it is the very essence of human condition, and a driver of human progress.

The media can play a crucial role in promoting this perspective. It can shape people’s views and influence their actions. It can educate, inform and demystify even while it entertains. It can promote the message that what unites humanity is much stronger than what superficially separates us.

Similarly, religion can have a tremendous positive influence as well. For instance, people of faith can stress the core beliefs and ideals found in all the great religious traditions: compassion, solidarity, respect for life, and kindness towards others. They can urge their fellow believers to treat others as they themselves would wish to be treated.

I know that the outcome of your discussions will be widely studied. But it can also benefit the UN's own initiative for an Alliance of Civilizations. Launched in 2005 with the support of the Governments of Turkey and Spain, this project responds to the clearer need for action by the international community to bridge divides and promote understanding. Based on the recommendations of a panel of eminent persons, the Alliance has established several priority areas for action, including the role of the media in promoting dialogue, the pressures on youth and immigrant communities, and the political factors that can promote extremism.

I recently appointed His Excellency, Jorge Sampaio, the former President of Portugal, to lead the work of the Alliance. I am delighted that he will also participate in your discussions tomorrow afternoon.

For my part, I eagerly await the outcome of your meetings. I am confident that it will inform my own thinking and help guide the work of the United Nations.

In that spirit, let me wish all of you a most productive and informative session.

May 11, 2007

Global warming threatens world's security, existence, Vatican tells U.N.
5/11/2007

Catholic Online

UNITED NATIONS (Catholic Online) – The world community must address the threat posed by global warming and build more sustainable economies or face the continued drift toward tensions, conflicts and a crisis in the very existence of peoples, the Vatican told the member countries of the United Nations.

In an May 10 statement to the U.N. Economic and Social Council's Commission on Sustainable Development on "Turning Political Commitments into Action, Working together in Partnership," Archbishop Celestino Migliore, apostolic nuncio of the Holy See's permanent mission to the U.N., stressed that the scientific evidence for global warming and mankind's role in the increase of greenhouse gasses "becomes ever more unimpeachable" and its effects already impacting the world community.

"The consequences of climate change are being felt not only in the environment, but in the entire socio-economic system, Archbishop Migliore said, noting that "such activity has a profound relevance, not just for the environment, but in ethical, economic, social and political terms as well."

Global warming, he said, “will impact first and foremost the poorest and weakest who, even if they are among the least responsible for global warming, are the most vulnerable because they have limited resources or live in areas at greater risk.”

The issues surrounding climate change are far-reaching, the Vatican nuncio said, pointing to the connection between it and the drive to acquire and consume energy and water resources and protecting human health and the environment.

“The earth is our common heritage and we have a grave and far-reaching responsibility to ourselves and to future generations,” he said.

The international community, Archbishop Migliore said, must come to terms to establish a “common, global, long-term energy strategy, capable of satisfying legitimate short- and medium-term energy requirements, ensuring energy security, protecting human health and the environment and establishing precise commitments to address the question of climate change.”

The nuncio spoke with some urgency, noting that the U.N. Security Council recently dealt with the relationship of energy, security and climate change.

“We are already witnessing struggles for the control of strategic resources such as oil and fresh water, both of which are becoming ever scarcer,” he said.

“If we refuse to build sustainable economies now, we will continue to drift towards more tensions and conflicts over resources,” Archbishop Migliore warned, pointing to “many of the most vulnerable societies already facing energy problems” “and to the threatened “very existence of coastal peoples and small island states.”

To meet the “double challenge” of climate change and the need for “ever greater energy resources, the nuncio called for the world community to embrace more sustainable development in which there is a much closer link between “natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology.”

“We will have to change our present model from one of the heedless pursuit of economic growth in the name of development, towards a model which heeds the consequences of its actions and is more respectful towards the creation we hold in common, coupled with an integral human development for present and future generations,” he said.

“Experience shows that disregard for the environment harms human coexistence,” the archbishop said, adding that the international community must make the connection between making “peace with creation and peace among nations.”

He stressed the importance of technology and education to build a more sustainable economy.

“Economic growth does not have to mean greater consumption,” Archbishop Migliore said. “It does however mean that we will need technology, ingenuity, determined political will and common sense.”

He added that it will also mean the transference of technology to developing countries “to the benefit of the entire global community.”

But beyond the development of technology and the “political will” to collaborate internationally, education at the level of each nation is required to ensure that the mankind “approach our daily patterns of consumption and production in a very different way.”

“Through such education, states can help their citizens grasp the urgency of what must be done, teaching them in turn to expect and demand a very different approach to their own consumption and that around them,” he said.

He noted that “we cannot simply uninvent the modern world,” but that there is the chance to remedy the “worldwide, unprecedented ecological changes” already taking place.

“None of us can foresee fully the consequences of man’s industrial activity over the recent centuries,” he noted. “But there is still time to use technology and education to promote universally sustainable development before it is too late.

Archbishop Migliore addressed the issue of sustainable development and global climate change before the U.N. General Assembly last fall, noting that the world needs to undergo an “ecological conversion” or face the consequences of the global life support systems being irreparably destroyed.

He stressed that the international economy is directly connected to global environmental health and that time is running out to make the systemic changes needed.

“The environmental consequences of our economic activity are now among the world’s highest priorities,” Archbishop Migliore said.

The world’s “economy continues to rest basically upon its relation to nature,” and in particular to its impact on the earth’s soil, water and climate, the archbishop said.

“It is becoming rapidly ever clearer that if these, the world’s life support systems, are spoiled or destroyed irreparably, there will be no viable economy for any of us,” the apostolic nuncio said.

He criticized the tendency of national policy makers to view ecological issues as “external or marginal” to economic considerations.

“Environmental concerns have to be understood,” the archbishop said, “as the basis upon which all economic – and even human – activity rests.”

“The environmental question is not only an important ethical and scientific problem,” he said, but one that impacts political, economic, security strategy, developmental and humanitarian issues at regional, national and international levels.

“In a word, the world needs an ecological conversion so as to examine critically current models of thought, as well as those of production and consumption,” Archbishop Migliore said.

While acknowledging that the international community has placed greater emphasis on developing renewable energy sources, clean technologies and sustainable development strategies into policy-making, the nuncio stressed that all nations “must do much more to stop and reverse current trends in consumption and pollution.”

Pope Benedict XVI addressed the issue two months later in his World Peace Day 2007 message.

In the wide-ranging "The Human Person, the Heart of Peace," dated Jan. 1 and released Dec. 8, Benedict tied “the ecology of nature” with “human ecology” and “social ecology,” noting the “inseparable link between peace with creation and peace among men.”

“Disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence,” the pope said. “There is an inseparable link between peace with creation and peace among men.”

Concerning the environment, he pointed specifically to “the increasingly serious problem of energy supplies” and to the “unprecedented race for available resources” by some nations and blockage to resources impacting the development of other nations.

“The destruction of the environment, its improper or selfish use, and the violent hoarding of the earth's resources cause grievances, conflicts and wars, precisely because they are the consequences of an inhumane concept of development,” the pope said.

“Indeed, if development were limited to the technical-economic aspect, obscuring the moral-religious dimension, it would not be an integral human development, but a one-sided distortion which would end up by unleashing man's destructive capacities,” he said.

May 14, 2007

Evangelicals split on global warming

BBC Washington correspondent Matt Frei goes to Virginia to take a look at how the issue of climate change is dividing America's evangelical movement.

Liberty University, in Lynchburg, Virginia, is one of the biggest evangelical colleges in the world.

With more than 20,000 students on and off campus, it is the creation of the Reverend Jerry Falwell, one of America's most influential Christian leaders who died on Tuesday.

The technology used here is modern - it uses the latest internet gimmicks and sermons are podcast - but the message is less so.

"The jury is still out on global warming," said the Rev Falwell, in a sermon broadcast on the internet in February this year.

"Despite all the hype by liberal politicians, the media, Hollywood and so forth, it is not yet proven by any means that greenhouse gas emissions are the cause of global warming."

His word is taken as gospel by the university's students.

One, Sharon Langat, says she thinks the attention paid to climate change is out of proportion.

"We should pay more attention to other global issues apart from global warming. I know there's money put there, I just don't think we should put that much money in there."

Fellow student Bliss Spillar, agrees. "There are many evangelical leaders that have made the statement that there are other things we should be focusing on.

"As a Christian, we believe that God created the Earth, that all things are in his control."

Left-wing conspiracy?

A lesson taught by Dr Thomas Ice, Liberty University's senior theologian, focuses on headaches like Armageddon, salvation and the Second Coming.

"I think global warming is being used like many political issues to try to move the world from nationalism to internationalism or global governance," Dr Thomas Ice.

Compared to these concerns, global warming is considered a mere sideshow at best, or a left-wing conspiracy at worst.

Asked his opinion on whether global warming is a reality or conspiracy, Dr Ice answers forcefully.

"It's a hoax, certainly," he says. "I think global warming is being used like many political issues to try to move the world from nationalism to internationalism or global governance."

And his class? Asked how many of them are worried about global warming, not one raises a hand.

'Body of evidence'

But just as America is bitterly divided on the issue of climate change, so is the evangelical movement.

At Eastern Mennonite University, in Harrisonburg, Virginia, concern about the environment is so high that the college has employed a full-time recycling officer and assistant.

Jonathan Lantz-Trisse, who travels around campus by bicycle with a trailer of recycling in tow, has been monitoring the efforts of staff and students to recycle their waste.

"The students are actually really good recyclers," he says. "Sometimes I think the challenge is getting the faculty and staff to recycle - I think the younger generations have grown up with it and it comes more naturally."

An address by the university's president, Loren Swartzendruber, gives a clue that here, too, it is the voice at the top that sets the tone for the university.

"There is a massive and mounting body of scientific evidence that global warming is a reality," he tells the gathered congregation.

"Hone your God-given talents, grow your entrepreneurial skills and stretch your scientific minds to co-create with God a better world. As disciples of Jesus, we can do no less."

Here, when asked if they are worried about global warming, almost everyone puts up their hand.

Opposing souls

Mr Swartzendruber is one of 86 Christian leaders to have signed an open letter calling on all Christians to battle global warming.

"We understand that the Earth is important. We view it as a gift and it's just been part of who we are for many, many years," he tells me.

He rejects out of hand the suggestion that global warming is a hoax. "It's primarily, first of all, a scientific issue and secondly, it's a theological issue," he says.

And the students at his university sing from the same hymn sheet.

"I look around and I see beautiful trees and birds singing and I see the wind blowing, and I really don't want to see this messed up," says Timothy Shank.

"I would like to sit outside on the lawn with somebody who disagrees with me and talk about what we appreciate about nature and creation - and then figure out ways we can live that doesn't hurt that."

In this way, two evangelical universities use the same quotes from the same Bible to make exactly opposite points of view about global warming.

What could give a clearer insight into the opposing souls of America?

In other parts of the world, the boundaries between left and right, conservative and liberal, have been transcended by concerns about climate change.

But not here in the US - and especially not here in the conservative south, where science is still political.

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/americas/6648265.stm>

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May 20, 2007

“Reflections on poverty and climate change”

Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori

Sunday, May 20, 2007

Before I became a priest, I was a professor of oceanography. One of the things I learned was that oceanographers couldn't just study squid or fish in isolation. We had to study interconnected systems. We had to understand not only the animals' environment, such as the water, but its chemistry and circulation, the atmosphere above the ocean and the geology below it. And that, I believe, is how we must understand our world: We must see everything, and everyone, as interconnected and intended by God to live in relationship.

Two of the most significant crises facing our world -- climate change and deadly poverty -- offer an example of such interconnectedness. By understanding how the two crises, and the people they affect, are connected, we can begin to understand how humanity can triumph over both. Extreme poverty -- that is, poverty that kills -- afflicts more than a billion of God's people around the world. Nearly 30,000 of these people will die today. That's 1 every 3 seconds. The factors that propel this kind of deadly poverty include hunger, diseases like AIDS and malaria, conflict, lack of access to education and basic inequality. Climate change threatens to make the picture even more deadly. As temperature changes increase the frequency and intensity of severe-weather events around the world, poor countries -- which often lack infrastructural needs like storm walls and water-storage facilities -- will divert previous resources away from fighting poverty in order to respond to disaster. Warmer climates will also increase the spread of diseases like malaria and tax the ability of poor countries to respond adequately. Perhaps most severely, changed rain patterns will increase the prevalence of drought in places like Africa, where only 4 percent of cropped land is irrigated, leaving populations without food and hamstrung in their ability to trade internationally to generate income.

Conversely, just as climate change will exacerbate poverty, poverty also is hastening climate change. Most poor people around the world lack access to a reliable-energy source, an imbalance that must be addressed in any attempt to lift a community out of poverty. Unfortunately, financial necessity often forces the choice of energy sources such as oil and coal that threaten to expand significantly the world's greenhouse emissions and thus accelerate the effects of climate change. This cycle -- poverty that begets climate change, and vice versa -- threatens the future of all people, rich and poor alike, and of all things in the world that God so loves.

This relationship between deadly poverty and the health of creation was not lost on the world's leaders when, at the turn of the 21st century, they committed to an ambitious yet attainable plan to cut global poverty in half by 2015. This plan, which established the eight Millennium Development Goals, included a specific pledge to create environmental sustainability. 2007

marks the halfway point in the world's effort to achieve these goals, and while progress has been impressive in some places, we're nowhere close to halfway there. President Bush and other world leaders have made bold commitments, but many of them have yet to be realized. How can the United States help put the world back on track?

First, our nation should make good on the promises it has made to expand foreign aid targeted at fighting poverty, cancel the debts of poor countries and seek fairer international-trade rules that allow people living in poverty to empower themselves in the fight against poverty.

Second, our nation's leaders should recognize the emerging consensus that we can no longer ignore our role in safeguarding the health and balance of God's creation. We must take seriously our share in the global responsibility for reducing carbon emissions, and work with other nations to provide the resources and technology transfers that will allow poor countries to address their energy needs through clean-energy sources that will not hasten the rate of climate change.

Of course, it is not the United States alone that needs to deliver. When the leaders of the G8 meet in early June in Germany, climate change will be at the top of their agenda. The health and well-being of Africa is also on the agenda, but much further down. Now is an ideal time for Americans to write, call, or e-mail President Bush and urge him to work with other leaders in the G8 to consider climate change and deadly poverty side-by-side as facets of the same problem. The good news is that Americans are getting involved like never before. Faith communities such as the Episcopal Church, from which I come, are organizing in communities all over the country, as are citizens from many other walks of life. Millions of Americans have joined the call for comprehensive solutions to poverty through efforts like ONE: The Campaign to Make Poverty History, and groups like the U.N. Millennium Campaign are working with citizens in all parts of the world. To be successful, though, the effort needs even more voices. It needs all of us.

At the very beginning of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, we hear of God's creation of the universe and his proclamation that the whole of it is very good. Ultimately, this story is an account of relationships: the bond of love between God and the world, and the interconnectivity of all people and all things in that world. It is only when we take seriously those relationships -- when we realize that all people have a stake in the health and well-being of all others and of the Earth itself -- that creation can truly begin to realize the abundant life that God intends for every one of us.

Katharine Jefferts Schori is presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church.

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/chronicle/archive/2007/05/20/EDGHQP1IR11.DTL>

May 22, 2007

UNEP NEWS RELEASE

“Global Tree Planting Campaign Puts Down a Billion Roots on International Biological Diversity Day”

Groundswell of Support from Communities, Citizens and Kindergartens to Governments and Corporations Makes Climate Change Pledge a Reality

NAIROBI, 22 May 2007—A promise to plant a billion trees as one unique response to the global climate change challenge has been met, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) announced today.

Following a pledge of 20 million trees by Senegal, the five month-old Billion Tree Campaign has surpassed its initial goal some seven months ahead of its original target.

Organizers, which also include the Green Belt Movement and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), have been astonished at the international enthusiasm for the campaign with people aged 5 years-old to 80, drawn from developing and developed countries, joining forces with communities, kindergartens, scouts groups, schools, universities, artists, city councils, companies and countries to achieve the initial goal.

The Campaign, announced at last November's UN Climate Change Convention Conference held in Nairobi, Kenya, now switches to turning the pledges into one billion plantings by the end of the year.

Achim Steiner, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, said: "2007 will go down as the year of full stops in respect to the climate change debate. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has put a full stop behind the science — climate change is happening; a full stop behind the impacts — they are underway and will impact on every corner of the planet, and a full stop behind the economics — tackling climate change will cost just 0.1 of annual GDP, perhaps less."

"The other big question has been whether the public is ready, whether it is politically possible to mobilize individuals, communities and nations en masse to counter the rise in greenhouse gases. The Billion Tree Campaign gives us the final full stop on this debate too", he said.

"Countries and communities as well as corporations and individual citizens across the developed and developing world have responded to the challenge with grassroots enthusiasm and commitment. It should empower Governments everywhere in the sure and certain knowledge that addressing climate change is not a political risk but perhaps the most popular move of our time, with their electorate and the public right behind them", added Mr. Steiner.

He was speaking on the International Day for Biological Diversity coordinated by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

Mr. Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, made the following comment: "Reversing the unprecedented loss of biodiversity of our planet requires unprecedented efforts at all levels. Achieving the target of the Billion Tree Campaign on the occasion of the International Day on Biodiversity is a remarkable success. It is living testimony of the resolve of the international community to redouble efforts to address the intertwined planetary environmental threats of biodiversity loss and climate change. Planting a tree is a

celebration of our connection with Mother Nature. It is also an act of hope. Each citizen of our planet must nurture and cherish nature for an ever better quality of life on Earth. I applaud this one billion milestone and express the hope that the planting of six billion trees could be achieved at next year's celebration of the International Day on Biodiversity, as a contribution to the Johannesburg target of significantly reducing the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010."

This year's theme is "Biodiversity and Climate Change" and comes just weeks after the release of a series of reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which also highlight the challenges facing biodiversity -- and by inference livelihoods and human well-being -- as a result of the build up of greenhouse gases.

The IPCC states, for example, that tourism in Africa, much of which is based on nature, is likely to be hard hit, with 25 per cent to 40 per cent of animal species such as zebra in the national parks of sub-Saharan Africa set to become endangered.

Over a third of turtle breeding sites in the Caribbean may be lost if sea levels rise by 0.5 meters. Islands with moist cloud forests, like Hawaii, can expect to suffer a loss of endemic bird species.

In the Arctic thinning and reduced coverage of sea ice is likely to have important knock-on effects. Crustaceans, adapted for life at the sea ice edge, are an important food for seals and polar cod. Narwhal also depend on sea-ice organisms. (For more climate and biodiversity impacts on Africa and other regions see notes to editors below.)

Wangari Maathai—the Inspiration The original inspiration for the Billion Tree Campaign came from its co-patron, 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Professor Wangari Maathai.

Indeed, the first pledge of 2 million trees was put forward by the Green Belt Movement environmentalist who has been tireless in supporting the Billion Tree Campaign.

Today, she recalled a recent conference of African and Spanish women held in Madrid: "I challenged participants to advocate for the creation of a green belt across the Sahara Desert from Dakar to Djibouti, as part of the Billion Tree Campaign. Such an effort would contribute towards slowing down the desertification processes that are hastening the southern expansion of the Sahara desert."

"I am quite sure that, with the support of the African Heads of States whose countries border the Sahara Desert, we could achieve this goal. We need to empower communities along the route and persuade them to both plant and be the caretakers of the trees to ensure that they survive. This is our dream, come be part of the dream and the Billion Tree Campaign", added Professor Maathai, also founder of the Green Belt Movement.

"The Campaign was among the positive outcomes of the last Climate Change Conference held here in Nairobi at the end of 2006. The first phase has been met, now we need these pledges translated into one billion trees on the ground. In doing so, the campaign will not only contribute to addressing climate change by utilizing the ability of trees to sequester carbon from the

atmosphere but a range of other pressing issues from soil stabilization and watershed management to improved prospects for wildlife, agriculture and tourism”, she added.

Prince Albert II of Monaco — Co-Patron and committed environmentalist The other patron is HSH Albert II, Sovereign Prince of Monaco. He advocated for the campaign and planted trees in January 2007 in Cap-d’Ail and La Turbie (France), in areas devastated by summer forest fires. “As a Head of State, when accepting to become a patron for the campaign, I wanted to lead the way and catalyze mobilization for tree planting in all regions of the world”, he said.

The World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) — Indispensable Scientific Partner Dennis Garrity, ICRAF’s Director, added: “It is with profound pride, and some amazement, that the World Agroforestry Centre joins with the Billion Tree Campaign partners to celebrate the early attainment of successful pledges to plant one billion trees for the planet.

“It is simply thrilling that so many individuals, organizations and Governments from around the world have responded with such vigorous commitment. Humans have evolved through the Stone Age, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. I do believe that perhaps we are now entering the Tree Age!” he added.

“It will take nearly 15 years to add another one billion to the human population. But the Billion Tree Campaign has established an extra one billion trees to benefit that billion people in a little over 15 weeks. Describing this achievement as remarkable is an understatement”, said Mr. Garrity.

“UNEP and all involved should be heartily congratulated on how they have helped the world realize that trees on small-holder farms are an increasingly critical solution to climate change, biodiversity loss and vulnerable livelihoods. To put it simply, agroforestry is saving the world one tree at a time”, he added.

The Billion Tree Campaign was announced on 8 November 2006 at the United Nations Convention on Climate Change Conference and initiated in January 2007.

Along with Senegal, the pledging target of one billion has also been surpassed with the promise of 30 million trees from Uganda communicated to UNEP by His Excellency Hon. Professor Semakula Kiwanuka, Uganda’s Minister of State for Finance, Planning and Economic Development. It brings the total pledges to one billion and 12 million trees, of which over 13.5 million have been planted.

Notes to Editors

The Billion Tree Campaign, which operates through a unique and dedicated interactive web site, demonstrates that a concrete people-centred initiative can be an incentive for positive and immediate environmental action.

There was an unprecedented movement and mobilization for tree planting at the community level and in cities, from Belo Horizonte in Brazil to Tokyo in Japan.

Photographs, letters and a welter of emails were received by UNEP from thousands of participants — aged 5 years-old to 80 years-old – who demonstrated commitment to take action to regenerate the environment and address climate change.

Artists and creators from around the world displayed their creativity to support the campaign. Billboards on the campaign appeared alongside roads, in airports and in the Paris metro.

Tree-planting pledges have been made by Governments in countries such as Cameroon, China, Cuba, Ethiopia, Haiti, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Maldives, Mauritania, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Myanmar, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Turkey, Uganda and Venezuela. They were facilitated by the Permanent Representatives to UNEP, many of whom went to also plant trees around Nairobi.

Several private sector companies, United Nations agencies and the World Bank teamed up with UNEP to catalyze further involvement in the campaign. Foundations, the scouts movement, and thousands of NGOs started advertising the campaign, through their own means, thus catalyzing further interest. Thousands of blogs have featured the campaign, which also assisted in spreading the word.

An exchange forum has been put on line today to enable participants to volunteer time, expertise, funding, or provide land and seedlings under the Billion Tree Campaign project.

IPCC Facts and Figures on Climate Change and Biodiversity if Greenhouse Gas Emissions are not Curbed-Working Group II 4th Assessment 2007

* Pacific Islands are likely to be a greater risk of invasion by the invasive sim weed. American Samoa could see a 50 per cent loss of mangroves with an anticipated 12 per cent reduction in 15 other Pacific islands.

* In Latin America and the Caribbean, there is a risk of significant species extinctions in many tropical areas including in sites facing mangrove losses. In the Mesoamerican reef there are as many as 25 times more fish of some species on reefs close to mangrove areas than in areas where mangroves have been lost.

* Ecological corridors between protected areas have been planned for the maintenance of biodiversity in natural ecosystems. Some of these, such as the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor, have been implemented serving also as adaptation measures.

* Ten per cent and possibly as much as 50 per cent of the Arctic tundra could be replaced by forests by 2100. The narrow, remaining coastal tundra strips in Russia's European Arctic are likely to disappear.

* Meanwhile climate change is likely to favour pests, parasites and diseases such as musk ox lung worm and nematodes in reindeer. Forest fires and tree-killing insects such as spruce bark beetle are likely to increase.

* In North America, between 15 per cent and close to 40 per cent of plant and animal species will be "committed to extinction" by 2050. North American producers of wood and timber could suffer losses of between \$1 billion and \$2 billion a year during the 21st century if climate change also sparks changes in diseases, insect attacks and forest fires.

* A European-wide assessment of numerous plant species under various warming scenarios found that more than half could become vulnerable, endangered, critically endangered, or committed to extinction by 2080 if they are unable to disperse. Other studies find that species would generally shift their natural ranges from the southwestern to the northeastern parts of the continent in response to climate change.

* Nearly half of Asia's biodiversity is at risk because of climate change. "Climate change is likely to affect forest expansion and migration, and exacerbate threats to biodiversity resulting from land use/cover change and population pressure in most of Asia. Marine and coastal ecosystems in Asia are likely to be affected by sea level rise and temperature increases."

For more information:

International Day for Biological Diversity, 22 May

<http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/outreach/awareness/biodiv-day-2007-ctrs.shtml>

Billion Tree Campaign in seven languages:

<http://www.unep.org/billiontreecampaign>

The Green Belt Movement: <http://www.greenbeltmovement.org>

Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation:

<http://www.fondationprincealbertiide Monaco.net>

World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF): <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/>

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UNEP News Release 2007/15

"Religious leaders urge action on warming"

Mon May 21, 2007 5:26PM EDT

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders are urging President George W. Bush and Congress to take action against global warming, declaring that the changing climate is a "moral and spiritual issue."

In an open letter to be published on Tuesday, more than 20 religious groups urged U.S. leaders to limit greenhouse gas emissions and invest in renewable energy sources.

"Global warming is real, it is human-induced and we have the responsibility to act," says the letter, which will run in Roll Call and the Politico, two Capitol Hill newspapers.

"We are mobilizing a religious force that will persuade our legislators to take immediate action to curb greenhouse gases," it says.

The letter is signed by top officials of the National Council of Churches, the Islamic Society of North America and the political arm of the Reform branch of Judaism.

Top officials from several mainline Christian denominations, including the Episcopal Church, United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church, African Methodist Episcopal Church and Alliance of Baptists also signed the letter, along with leaders of regional organizations and individual churches.

Rev. Joel Hunter, a board member of the National Association of Evangelicals, also signed the letter, though that group has not officially taken a stance on global warming due to opposition from some of its more conservative members.

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May 23, 2007

"Temples of the whale"

By Richard Black, Environment correspondent, BBC News website, Japan

How does hunting whales with explosive harpoons square with Buddhism, a belief system perhaps best known for discouraging the killing of animals and encouraging vegetarianism? And how does hunting square with another image of whales, which is also alive and well in Japan - a more western-style vision of friendly creatures to be admired with affection?

These were a couple of the questions I took with me as I embarked on a series about whaling for the BBC's One Planet.

I came face to face with the second contradiction in Ayukawa.

Once a thriving and profitable whaling port, it now carries the faded, rusting air of a town in terminal decline.

At the east end of the strip is Whale Land. When I arrive in fading evening light, the place is deserted.

The most striking feature is an old whaling ship hauled up on dry land, an exhibit for children to clamber over and learn a little of Japan's past, the highlight perhaps being the now defunct harpoon gun on the prow.

But alongside is a series of stone sculptures showing whales as cute, smiley creatures which one might want to cuddle - not kill.

The same apparent contradiction would show up in Tokyo's giant Tsukiji fish market, which claims to be the biggest in the world.

Whilst we chat to staff cutting up red slabs of flesh on a whalemeat stall, my eyes alight on a poster above the stall, where again a cute smiling whale is pictured next to cuts of its meat.

How to make sense of it all? Perhaps, I thought, the past might be a guide.

Spears from the sky

In Nagato, at the southern end of Japan's longest island, Honshu, whaling began in the 1600s. That makes it a newcomer compared with other sites where whale and dolphin remains testify to a history going back about 8,000 years.

Inside the museum, curator Fuminori Fuji shows me a painting depicting boats surrounding a whale.

The hunting method seems amazingly basic, using hand-thrown harpoons. "These you had to throw to the sky," Mr Fuji explains, "so they came down on the whale."

Next to the picture is a collection of ancient harpoons; further along are knives that were used to process the carcass on shore. Blubber was rendered for oil, bones were ground up for fertiliser, and every part of the meat was cooked and eaten, even the testicles - a marked contrast with profligate westerners who took the oil and threw most of the whales' bodies over the side.

There has been no hunting in Nagato now for a century. Foreign fleets came with more efficient hunting methods; the whales disappeared, and people turned to fishing.

But every year, citizens don traditional clothes and take to the water in traditional boats, ceremonially using traditional harpoons to hunt a "whale" which is made of metal and powered by an outboard motor.

The past evidently dies harder here than in some other places.

Early grave

Japan has had an unusually close relationship with the sea, a relationship reinforced by Buddhism; and perhaps this is the underpinning of the apparently dichotomous view of whales and whaling.

For long periods of its history, rulers banned on religious grounds the eating of land animals. The sea provided instead, with no distinction made between marine mammals and fish. In Nagato, there is a highly unusual grave. Inside are whale foetuses, interred in the 17th Century.

"These are the babies of the pregnant mother whales," explains Fuminori Fuji.

"When you process the whales, the babies will still be connected to their mothers; and since the babies could not live on their own even if they were put back in the sea, local people built a tomb for them.

"This grave is facing the ocean, and it's built this way because the babies had never seen the ocean in their lives; maybe after they died they could see it every day."

At the Koganji temple, I am welcomed by the resident monk, Kensai Matsumura.

He shows me plaques recording the names of people who died in the village, complete with the Buddhist names which they were given on their death, providing a way for Buddha to help guide their spirits in their twilight existence.

The plaques also record the names of whales killed, also with Buddhist names.

"This is a whaling town; we've always lived with the sea," he tells me. "We should not forget to thank the whales; that's why we have the tombs, the plaques and the death records."

Koganji belongs to the Jodo sect, one of the four main branches of Buddhism in modern-day Japan.

Jodo monks are allowed to marry, and followers to eat flesh - with restrictions.

As I ask monk Matsumura more about Jodo philosophy, he pulls out a scroll covered in characters which, I gather from my translator, are an archaic and specialised form of Japanese.

"This tells a story concerning Shonin (the founder of the sect)," he relates.

"He was in a fishing village in 1207. A fisherman and his wife approached him and told of their worries, saying 'we live on catching fish and eating them and selling them - would we go to hell after we die?'

"And monk Shonin said, 'if you thank them and give proper service to them, praying for the resting in peace of those fish, then there will be no problem at all'. The husband and wife listened and cried with relief on hearing this."

Modern Japan may have lost the visible trappings of Buddhism which are so obvious in other east Asian countries.

Shrines do not sit colourfully at every street corner, no legions of orange-robed trainees roam the byways as they do in Thailand. That does not mean teachings and customs have been suppressed or supplanted.

Western observers might not agree with modern Japan's tolerance of whaling, which does not allow the image of iconic, friendly creatures to expel the concept of whales as food.

But Nagato's history and Kensai Matsumura's scrolls perhaps make it a little more comprehensible.

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Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/science/nature/6667797.stm>

May 29, 2007

“Church of Norway on crusade to save the planet”

by Pierre-Henry Deshayes

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"Thou shalt not contribute to global warming": from the local pastor to the highest ranking bishop, the Lutheran Church of Norway has pulled out all the stops in a modern-day crusade to save the planet.

In a bid to help reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, the Church has installed bicycle racks outside its churches, turned down the thermostat indoors and is even holding special prayers for the environment.

The measures are part of the Church's efforts to help Norway achieve its goal to become the world's first "carbon-neutral" country by 2050, meaning it will have to reduce its own emissions and offset any leftovers by investing in Kyoto Protocol-style projects that reduce pollution in other countries.

"The Church has always been involved in social and ethical causes," Norwegian Environment Minister Helen Bjoernoey, herself a pastor by profession, told AFP.

"It was very involved in the fight against apartheid and in the fight against poverty. So it's natural for it to be involved in the most important issue of the moment: the climate," she said.

As part of the United Nations' World Environment Day on June 5, which will be hosted by the Norwegian Arctic city of Tromsø, the Church of Norway has instituted a "Creation Day" mass to be celebrated around the country.

Each parish has been asked to present a special liturgy for the occasion.

"We acknowledge that we, who are created in your image, have been blinded by greed, and have disturbed the fine threads of interdependence, which keep in balance the currents of the oceans, the systems of the weather, the sunshine and the rain," the contrition reads.

Also as part of World Environment Day festivities, South Africa's retired Anglican archbishop Desmond Tutu will criss-cross the planet to give a ecumenical mass for the climate on June 3 in Tromsøe.

"We all have to share the same cause, whether we are Protestant, lay, Muslim or Buddhist. It's everyone's responsibility to leave acceptable living conditions for future generations," Bjoernoey said.

The Church is trying to raise awareness daily among its parishioners about the risks of climate change, all the while trying to reduce its own CO2 emissions.

It attributes a "green parish" label to congregations that meet certain requirements, including using paper on both sides, recycling waste, thrifty purchasing of supplies, offering open-air religious services or holding a sermon on the environment at least once a year.

"In the Bible, man is not the master of nature but its protector. He must use it respectfully," says Hans-Juergen Schorre, in charge of social issues for the Church of Norway.

Proving their commitment to the cause, four pastors biked the 480 kilometers (300 miles) of hilly roads linking the southwestern town of Bergen to Oslo in 2005, in a bid to get employers to subsidise bicycle trips to and from work the same way they pay for car trips.

"Pastors are key people because their role is to change behaviour. That's a hard thing to do but we need to prove that everybody can contribute by setting attainable goals," says Ingeborg Midttoemme, head of the Federation of Pastors.

Despite its good intentions, the Church of Norway is not always consistent: part of its funds, managed by a separate body, are invested in oil companies and the airlines, two sectors known for the damage they cause to the climate.

But then Norway itself is a bit of a paradox: on the one hand it wants to become "carbon neutral" by 2050, and on the other hand it is one of the world's biggest oil exporters.

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“Stone on a Roll: Warren G. Stone, green religious leader, answers questions”

28 May 2007

Grill an activist! Warren G. Stone, green religious leader, answered our questions, below; later this week, he'll answer yours. Hit him with the best you got. Send in your burningest questions by 2 p.m. PDT on Wednesday, May 30, 2007. We'll publish selected questions and responses on Friday, June 1.

Questions from Grist editors

Q: What work do you do?

A: I'm a rabbi in the Washington, D.C., area; I've been privileged to serve as the rabbi of Temple Emanuel for the past 18 years.

I also serve as the national environmental chair for the Central Conference of American Rabbis and am on a variety of boards, including as co-chair of the Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation and the Religious Coalition on Creation Care. I'm on the board of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life and the advisory board of Carbonfund.org. A professional highlight was attending the climate-change talks in Kyoto in 1997 as the representative of many Jewish organizations.

Q: How does it relate to the environment?

A: I've come to see my environmental work as a core expression of my religious faith and central to my goals as a spiritual and community leader. Many -- from a variety of faith traditions -- share this view. We work together on climate-change, forest, and wilderness issues. Being in Washington, D.C., we have an unparalleled opportunity to partner our religious perspectives with other environmental activists and scientists and to work for political change. After years of feeling like voices in the wilderness, we are now finding that our views are actively solicited in the halls of power. I've had the privilege of leading interfaith delegations to the House and Senate, White House, and World Bank. Right now, I'm particularly interested in the greening of institutions. I'd love to see our federal government adopt a greening policy for all government offices. How wonderful to hear Speaker Nancy Pelosi call for the greening of the U.S. Capitol!

Q: What long and winding road led you to your current position?

A: Aren't the most interesting roads long and winding? I grew up along the south shore of Boston. My home backed a forested landscape, and I would spend hours with my brother finding creatures, discovering plants, caves, and natural wonders. We had cherry, pear, and apple trees in my backyard, which I helped pick every year. Come to think of it, I also loved "cherry fighting" with my brother from one tree to another. You know, I haven't thought of that in decades.

I suppose that my first (albeit brief) taste of activism on behalf of the environment came on the first Earth Day, in 1970, when I was still a college student. And my love for wilderness areas continued to grow during the 1980s, when -- by then a young rabbi -- I served a congregation along the Gulf of Mexico. I remember wonderful hours at the Padre Island National Wildlife

Refuge, watching the whooping cranes on their migration, the sand cranes and the gulf birds, with our then-young daughters. When we moved to the D.C. area in 1988, I found places of refuge here as well, regularly hiking with my dogs and, later, our young son, to Great Falls, around the Chesapeake Bay, and in Rock Creek Park.

Then in 1990, as a rabbi, I organized a religious presence in front of the U.S. Capitol with members of our new Green Shalom Committee. I suppose this was something of a turning point for me, when I moved beyond a personal love and appreciation for the environment into activism on its behalf as a religious and community leader. We led a prayer service on spirituality and the earth. Since that point, I've become ever more involved in the convergence of religion and the environment, and have been active as a spiritual voice on the environment with diverse interfaith organizations.

In my life travels, I have always sought out places of natural beauty, from the Sahara Desert of Tunisia to hiking the seaside fishing villages of Italy and living in the hills of Jerusalem overlooking the Judean desert. I'd say that I found my God and my spirituality in the wildness and beauty of nature.

I've been truly fortunate. My early love of both the outdoors and the values and traditions I learned in my observant Jewish home came together seamlessly in my life's work as an environmentalist rabbi!

Q: What has been the worst moment in your professional life to date?

A: Well, focusing on the environmental piece, that would be the profound letdown that I experienced after returning from Kyoto as a delegate in 1997. I had been profoundly moved, feeling a depth of connection with Jesuit priests, Buddhist monks, Muslim imams, and Hindi and Sikh spiritual leaders. Each speaking from the voice of his or her authentic spiritual tradition, we affirmed our religious responsibility to act. Amidst Buddhist chanting, I blew the Shofar, a ram's horn, the blast of sound that has been Judaism's ancient call to action since the days we wandered, searching for our way, in the desert. We set up a daily prayer vigil of chants and prayers for all delegates to hear. And I felt great optimism, seeing Japanese auto factories that had already retrofitted vehicles with hybrid engines at low cost. I expected that our own country would see both the urgency and the opportunity for action and vision.

Instead, I returned home with others similarly inspired, only to face a potent corporate lobby of auto and oil companies and a real dearth of effective leadership willing or able to counter it. I am enormously heartened by what appears to be a recent will to act. But I continue to shake my head in wonder and frustration at a decade of time lost, when we have not a moment to waste.

Q: What's been the best?

Working with my synagogue leadership, religious school, and Green Shalom Committee to green our congregation over the past 18 years.

I am tremendously proud of the work that my congregation has done. To describe only some of what has been accomplished: Temple Emanuel has had many years of energy audits, we developed environmental policies passed by our board, added solar panels for our "Eternal Light," use wind power, and recycle. We have built with sustainable building materials, created energy-efficient zones, added a biblical garden, and built a symbolic and beautiful sanctuary based on the banyan tree. We have developed interfaith programs in the D.C. community, taken our students on trips to the Chesapeake, and involved them in numerous cleanups and other environmental projects. We have become a "zero carbon footprint" community as well.

These initiatives have taken us beyond our own congregation. I and others from our temple community serve on the Washington, D.C., Green Advisory Board, which works to green D.C.-area congregations. We have encouraged greening through COEJL as well as through the Central Conference of American Rabbis and our local ministerium.

To acknowledge my 18th year at Temple Emanuel, the congregation published a Green Shalom Action Guide [PDF] on our website. In Hebrew, the number 18 corresponds to "life." I can imagine no better "l'chaim" -- "to life" -- toast.

Q: What environmental offense has infuriated you the most?

A: The failure of Congress to pass CAFE [Corporate Average Fuel Economy] standards 10 years ago! Japan was retrofitting vehicles while our leadership was consigning the issue to further "scientific" review. The idiocy can be hard to endure.

Q: Who are your environmental heroes?

A: I start with Amos, Isaiah, Zechariah, and Micah, who spoke boldly, warning that injustice would wreak its own havoc upon the earth. My modern spiritual mentor is Abraham Joshua Heschel, who with eloquent words and deeds brought spirituality and social justice together in activism. When Heschel walked arm in arm with Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma, Ala., he said: "I felt that my feet were praying!" Whether on issues of the environment -- in my view, the great social-justice issue of the day -- or on other pressing matters of social concern, I often recall his words: "In a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible." And I deeply respect the activism of the Rev. William Sloane Coffin.

I am continually inspired by the work of John Muir, and, more recently, by Edward O. Wilson's *The Future of Life and The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*. I also appreciate the symbolic stance of Julia Butterfly Hill, who provocatively lived in an ancient redwood tree in Humboldt County, Calif., for two years to prevent loggers from cutting it down. Her words: "I suddenly realized that what I was feeling was the love of the earth, the love of creation. Every day we, as a species, do so much to destroy creation's ability to give us life. But that creation continues to do everything in its power to give us life anyway. And that's true love."

Q: What's your environmental vice?

A: I am not completely vegetarian. I try, but not hard enough.

Q: Read any good books lately?

A: I really enjoyed George Leonard's *Walking on the Edge of the World: A Memoir of the Sixties and Beyond*. Leonard is a visionary who wrote of the need to transform education and consciousness to help us develop new ways of seeing ourselves and the world. His ideas focus on how to tap our deepest selves, our deepest human potential through a unity of the physical and the spiritual. And a perennial favorite is Hal Borland's *Twelve Moons of the Year*. Borland, an extraordinary writer, captured the subtleties of daily organic change. I'm currently reading Bill McKibben's *Deep Economy*, a wonderful blueprint for activism.

Q: What's your favorite meal?

A: Sharing a three-hour traditional Moroccan meal with my family and friends -- including vegetables, chickpeas, and raisins atop a mountain of couscous, and ending with hot mint tea, Moroccan pastries, and an inability to rise from the cushions.

Q: Which stereotype about environmentalists most fits you?

A: I have always been somewhat out of the mainstream, I suppose. I've always gone off the beaten path. But I'm thrilled that there's so much more company on that path these days!

Q: What's your favorite place or ecosystem?

A: That one's easy for me. I am enticed every year to Big Sur, Calif., and the miles that stretch below Point Lobos. It's my place of retreat. The spiritual power of the place -- the wildness of the land, sky, cliff, and bird -- it just speaks to me. Twice now, I've seen a magnificent 12-foot condor sweeping down from the cliffs into the sea.

I find that I can draw upon this place even when I'm not there. I hope all who are reading this have such a place in their lives. I encourage you to take a moment in whatever busy day you are living today to close your eyes and go to the natural wild place that does it for your soul. Breathe it in, see it in your mind's eye and go there, sit in silence for a while, smell the wind, feel the sun, bask in that place for a few moments, make a mental picture to carry with you today, and bring it back to your life.

Q: If you could institute by fiat one environmental reform, what would it be?

A: Two things: A 5-cent-per-gallon gas tax or tithe, which would go for reforestation and alternative-energy development. And, on a more spiritual note, a bold new 11th commandment: "Be mindful of your footprint on this earth: Thou shalt not destroy this sacred and fragile earth!"

Q: What's your favorite TV show? Movie?

A: *The Daily Show*, with Jon Stewart; it's the only way I've been able to stand the news in the last five years or so. For movie, *My Cousin Vinny*; no obvious environmental connection, but I

love the movie's warm heart, each perfectly drawn character, and how my wife and I laugh in all the same places each and every time we watch it.

Q: Which actor would play you in the story of your life?

A: Ben Stiller, who knows how to play a young rabbi with edgy and passionate interests and a flair for pushing the threshold of a religious community. And hey, you've got to have a sense of humor for this line of work.

Q: If you could have every InterActivist reader do one thing, what would it be?

A: Take a daily walk through the woods or in any natural setting near you. Notice the miraculous and subtle daily changes all around. Walk in silence and soak it into your being! You will be awed and amazed at what you see in a year's time!

May 30, 2007

Published: May 29, 2007 at 3:42 PM
United Press International

“Vatican goes green with solar roofs”

VATICAN CITY, May 29 (UPI) -- The Vatican's traditional colors of white and gold are starting to look green with a new solar energy project. A rooftop garden of solar panels is set to be installed on the Vatican's Paul VI Audience Hall. The solar energy project will begin next year and, when completed, will create enough electricity to heat, cool and light the entire building year-round, the Catholic News Service reported.

"Solar energy will provide all the energy (the building) needs," said Pier Carlo Cuscianna, head of the Vatican's department of technical services.

And that is only the beginning. Cuscianna said that he had in mind other sites throughout Vatican City where solar panels could be installed, but that it was too early in the game to name names.

Although Vatican City State is not a signatory of the Kyoto Protocol, a binding international environmental pact to cut greenhouse gases, its inaugural solar project marks a major move in trying to reduce its own carbon footprint.

When the project is finished, more than 1,000 solar panels will cover the football field-sized roof. Whatever solar power the hall is not using will be funneled into the Vatican's energy grid and benefit other energy needs.

June 1, 2007

“CWS celebrates World Environment Day”
June 1, 2007

New York -- As part of the global celebration of World Environment Day, Church World Service is continuing its focus on water as a human right, and the increasing scarcity of the vital resource as one of the effects of climate change.

CWS is working with partners in the United States and around the world to educate people, to encourage citizen action, and to advocate in support of national and international policies that affect the environment, including environmental sustainability objectives contained in the Millennium Development Goals.

The agency also supports sustainable development initiatives that help provide livelihoods for people without further degrading the Earth's increasingly fragile environment.

World Environment Day is celebrated each year on 5 June as a way of increasing worldwide awareness of the environment and enhancing political attention and action. (Read more about World Environment Day at www.unep.org/wed/2007/english/).

June 5, 2007

ACHIM STEINER, UN UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME
MESSAGE ON WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY
5 June 2007

World Environment Day 2007 focuses on the challenges facing the people and ecosystems of the Arctic and Antarctic as a result of rapid environmental and climatic change. In doing so it also links to the wider world where glaciers are shrinking and an increasing number of extreme weather events are triggering more frequent droughts and floods.

In focusing on the polar regions we hold up a mirror to the accelerating impacts sweeping the whole planet from the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. These seemingly remote regions vividly illustrate the interconnectedness of all life on Earth—bringing home to the six billion people alive today how mutually reliant and linked we all are to landscapes and ecosystems both near and far.

The Arctic and Antarctica may be the Earth's climate early warning system—feeling the heat first—but we know it does not end there. Ocean circulation, the key driver of regional and global weather systems, is inextricably linked with melting and freezing processes in and around the poles. The polar regions are also a kind of protective shield, reflecting heat back into space that would otherwise be absorbed on Earth. There is also growing concern over so-called 'positive feedbacks' including the potential release of massive amounts of the powerful greenhouse gas methane, which is stored in the Arctic permafrost.

So, what happens in the Arctic and the Antarctic as a result of climate change is of direct interest to us all—from someone living in the Congo River Basin, the Australian outback and in rural China, to suburban dwellers in Berlin, New Delhi, Rio de Janeiro or Washington DC.

At the same time, the actions of those living outside the polar regions is of direct interest to Arctic peoples. The vast majority of emissions that are contributing to melting ice are being generated on the roads and in the factories, homes and offices of the industrialized and, increasingly, the rapidly industrializing economies.

We are currently locked into a vicious and ever widening circle. Our common responsibility is to make it a virtuous one—to underline that overcoming the profligate burning of fossil fuels is not a burden but an opportunity. Switching to a cleaner and more efficient development path can not only liberate us from the overarching threat of climate change, it can free us from dependency on a finite and, some might say, politically disruptive resource.

There are signs that this switch can—and is indeed starting to—occur as result of several central factors finally coming into play. Firstly the economics of inaction and the economic benefits of action have in recent months moved to the fore. A review by Sir Nicholas Stern, published in advance of the climate convention talks held in Nairobi in late 2006, has changed the landscape forever in this respect. It states that if no action is taken, we risk raising average global temperatures by more than 5 degrees Centigrade from pre-industrial levels, and this would lead to the equivalent of a minimum loss of 5 per cent of GDP annually.

In contrast, the costs of acting to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to avoid the worst impacts could cost as little as 1 per cent of global GDP each year. The US firm PricewaterhouseCoopers recently concluded that the world would have to sacrifice just one year's economic growth over the next four decades to reduce carbon emissions sufficiently to curb global warming.

The Stern Review also estimates that reducing emissions would actually make the world better off. One estimate indicates that, over time, a shift to a low carbon global economy would trigger benefits of \$2.5 trillion a year. Findings like this take climate change beyond the portfolio of the environment minister and firmly into the in-tray of the world's financeministers and heads of state.

The second factor is the issue of energy security—or, one might say, energyinsecurity—due to the global dependence on fossil fuels. Countries are increasingly recognizing that the benefits of renewable energy sources, low- or zero-emission coal-fired power stations and energy efficiency extend beyond the atmosphere to national security.

Others are also starting to grasp another notion of security, which includes the link between extreme weather events like floods and droughts to wider national and regional issues.

Climate change is magnifying existing disparities between rich and poor and aggravating tensions over fragile or increasingly scarce natural resources such as productive land and freshwater. It increases the potential to create a new class of displaced people known collectively as environmental refugees.

You do not have to take my word for that. Cristina Narbona, the Spanish environment minister, was asked at the recent climate change talks why her country was investing in a new partnership

between UNEP and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) to assist Africa adapt to climate change. Her response was clear. Spain links the increasing numbers of people from Africa who are risking life and limb in flimsy boats to sail to the Canary Islands with climate change impacts.

Finally, the science of climate change is now indisputable, and has been further underlined in the latest reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released in February this year. The findings put a full stop behind the scientific debate as to whether humankind is influencing the climate and now beg the question of what we are going to do about it.

Collective and decisive political will is the final—and still missing—piece in the jigsaw puzzle. While many sectors of society are moving to address climate change—including local authorities, industry, the financial sector and civil society—the collective political process is moving frustratingly slowly.

At the climate change meeting in Nairobi some steps were taken. UNEP and UNDP's just-mentioned new partnership aims to assist developing countries to secure a share of the clean energy projects that are starting to flow from the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism. It will also offer a rapid response so countries in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere can insulate their economies against climate changes that are already underway.

Furthermore, the Kyoto Protocol's Adaptation Fund was agreed, and there were other positive signs, not least on issues like avoided deforestation where there was productive and fulsome debate. However, no agreement was achieved on the deep and sustained cuts in greenhouse gas emissions needed to stabilize the atmosphere, an agreement which is also vital for maintaining confidence and investment in the blossoming carbon markets. If Nairobi was not the place, then where and when will this action on deeper cuts in a post-2012 world emerge?

It was John Tyndall, the English physicist, who first recognized the power of carbon dioxide and water vapour to change the Earth's climate. That was over 100 years ago in his seminal paper of 1863. We cannot wait another 100 years to act. Indeed there are some respected observers who claim we have as little as a decade or so to do so. Six months from now, on the Indonesian island of Bali, governments will resume the climate talks. I sincerely hope that Bali will be the watershed where science, security issues and economics combine to produce wide-ranging political action.

The theme for this year's World Environment Day is Melting Ice: A Hot Topic? Thus it is fitting that the main celebrations are being hosted by Norway on the edge of the Arctic Circle. The logo underlines the global theme by asking a polar bear, an African farmer, a Pacific islander, an insurer and businessman, two indigenous children and ultimately 'Yourself' the rhetorical question of whether indeed this is the topic of our time.

Perhaps we should have added a further person—namely a politician. World Environment Day has at its heart the empowerment of the individual citizen. UNEP urges everyone to embrace this year's theme and put the question to their political leaders and democratically elected

representatives: just how much hotter does this topic need to become before governments across the globe finally act?

For more information on World Environment Day 2007 see
<http://www.unep.org/wed/2007/english/>

UNEP PRESS RELEASE

“Financial Sector Calls on G8 to Back Deep Emission Reduction Targets to Avoid High Costs Caused by Global Warming”

Truth and Reconciliation--UNEP Head Urges Countries to Face Facts and Put Aside Differences to Overcome Climate Change

World Environment Day 2007

OSLO/NAIROBI, 5 June 2007--Heads of more than 20 leading financial service companies are today calling on the G8 to back deep emission reduction targets on the eve of the summit in Heiligendamm.

They fear that unchecked climate change is likely to lead to an increase in climate-related disasters, with “grave social and environmental harm”, including annual economic losses that could rise as high as \$1 trillion by 2040.

The companies, members of the United Nations Environment Programme’s Finance Initiative, said in a statement today to the G8 summit in Heiligendamm: “There has been a seismic shift in how climate change is perceived and it is widely considered to be the greatest market failure ever.”

“Many of the effects of climate change are beginning to be manifested and the threats posed by continued warming will affect—and even possibly disrupt—the operation of markets, societies, ecosystems and cultures”, it says.

The statement, signed by 23 Chief Executive Officers, Presidents, Chairmen and Managing Directors of banks, insurance and re-insurance companies, calls on Heads of State to formally adopt emission reduction targets no later than 2009. The statement was developed by the UNEP Finance Initiative’s Climate Change Working Group.

They suggest that proposals by the United Kingdom and the European Union, setting out mandatory emission reductions of between 20 per cent and 30 percent by 2020 and 60 per cent to 80 per cent by 2050, should be central to all industrialized country goals.

The move reflects growing global interest from business and industry for action on climate change. Today’s statement comes some six months after large corporations in the United States,

including Duke Power, Alcoa and General Electric, joined forces with non-governmental groups to establish the United States Climate Action Partnership along with calls for emissions controls.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, speaking on the occasion of World Environment Day (WED) hosted in northern Norway, today welcomed the move.

“We are here in Norway for WED under the banner ‘Melting Ice—A Hot Topic’. We have heard at first hand from local communities, including indigenous peoples such as the Saami, how climate change and disappearing ice is impacting on livelihoods, natural resources and ecosystems. Scientists advise us that melting ice at the Poles and in mountains will also impact on water supplies, coastlines and communities across the globe. So the issue of melting ice is as much an issue for the Arctic as it is for peoples south of the Equator.”

“The Arctic and icy regions are in the front-line, but there are front-lines opening up everywhere as a result of climbing greenhouse gases-- not least for industry and business like the financial services sector who are facing escalating risks to themselves and their customers”, he said.

“So I would urge leaders of nations at this G8+5 Summit to draw inspiration from other examples of how deep-rooted divisions of the past have been overcome. South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission is one example”, said Mr. Steiner, who as part of WED celebrations in Norway shared a podium with Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa.

“Let us acknowledge the truth as evidenced by the rigorous scientific findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in their striking reports this year. We must also recognize the fact that to delay action will only make the task harder and the solutions--be they market-led or technologically driven—slower in responding to the challenge,” said Mr. Steiner.

“Countries must reconcile their differences and find common cause and build mutual trust around the achievements already being made. Indeed instead of finger pointing, nations should point to the emissions cuts being made in developed and rapidly developing economies alike”, he added.

“These are proof that investments in change can indeed deliver quantum leaps forward towards the low-carbon economies that can transform the future. If the G8 can help build that trust, then it is not a very big step towards a multilateral agreement able to deliver the deep and meaningful reductions so urgently needed post-2012”, said Mr. Steiner.

Dr. Joachim Faber, Member of the Executive Board, Allianz SE, said: “Setting clear and mandatory, medium and long-term emission reduction targets and implementing appropriate incentive schemes should be part of a new climate change regime. Politics should not disappoint the trust of the market. What the economy needs is planning reliability for future investment decisions.”

Dr. Torsten Jeworrek, Member of the Board of Management Munich Re, said: “Munich Reinsurance Company has signed the declaration on climate change by the financial services sector because climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time.”

“The latest studies show that it is cheaper to invest in climate protection than to pay for the losses that result from inactivity. It is thus prudent to act now from an economic perspective as well”, he said.

Peter Sands, Group CEO, Standard Chartered, said: “At Standard Chartered, we take a long-term view of the consequences of our actions and we are committed to building a sustainable business. We recognize our capacity for social and economic contribution, the need to protect the environment and for good governance in all the markets that we operate in. We are proud to be a signatory to the UNEP FI Declaration on Climate Change.”

Barbara J. Krumsiek, President & CEO, Calvert, said: “As investors, we have a history of integrating climate change solutions into our investment philosophy and proxy voting. Now that the issue has reached the global crisis proportions, we need to help expand that focus by emphasizing the essential role public policy has to play.”

“This statement appropriately calls on Governments to take strong action to curb greenhouse gas emissions not only to address this crisis but to also help protect the long-term investment horizon by spurring companies to set and meet hard targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions”, she said.

Notes to Editors

The statement by members of the UNEP Finance Initiative in full:

Declaration on Climate Change by the Financial Services Sector

As heads of some of the largest financial service organizations in the world, we acknowledge that:

- * Unequivocally, human activity is a fundamental driver of climate change, as confirmed in the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report.
- * Unless action is taken now to set in motion a worldwide transition to a low-carbon economy, some scenarios suggest that by 2040, the world could experience annual economic losses as high as USD 1 trillion; and grave social and environmental harm from climate-related disasters.
- * Climate change could result in a reduction in global GDP equivalent to the economic impacts of the 20th century's major conflicts, as predicted by the Stern Review to the UK Prime Minister.
- * The most severe impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events, drought, crop failure and disease will fall most harshly on those regions and people least able to adapt to the impacts of climate change – the world's poor.

In 2002, the UNEP Finance Initiative Climate Change Working Group, made up of some of the largest financial institutions from around the globe, alerted the finance and business communities, Governments and public at large, to a number of the major risks posed by climate change to the world economy. In the 5 years since the landmark report, “Climate Change and the Financial Services Industry: Threats and Opportunities”, UNEP FI and its members have urged Governments to take greater and more concerted action, and have pushed for effective market-oriented solutions in tackling the problem.

More recently, there has been a seismic shift in how climate change is perceived, and is widely considered to be the greatest market failure ever. This is in part due to the fact that many of the effects of climate change are beginning to manifest, and that the threats posed by continued warming will affect—and even possibly disrupt—the operation of markets, societies, ecosystems and cultures. Many of the world’s politicians and business leaders are already taking action and proposing solutions.

These efforts, however, can only be regarded as a modest beginning, given the scale of the climate change problem. A global effort involving all nations, Governments, business and industry is required to address a problem considered one of the greatest threats to humanity and the future well being of the planet.

Our actions will be made much more effective by adequate political and economic frameworks created by government. Against this background, we recognize that there is an important role to be played by the financial services sector in tackling this crisis. We commit to:

- * Advance our knowledge and understanding of both climate change risks and opportunities.
- * Quantify and integrate those risks and opportunities into our core financial operations. This includes working with our clients and investments – through engagement and product development - to reduce their carbon emissions.
- * Similarly, assist our clients to manage the risks and opportunities of climate impacts, by assessing their exposure and providing products and services that improve their adaptive capability.
- * Reduce our own direct impacts and carbon footprint and report and assess our annual emissions transparently.
- * Incorporate the issue of climate change into our investment decision-making process to promote and protect asset growth in the companies and sectors in which we invest. This includes cooperation to encourage and harmonize disclosure of climate-related items in regular financial reporting, to more accurately assess the impacts of climate change on company performance.

Despite the pressing nature of the challenges posed by climate change, we believe that there is still time to act and that government leaders and policy-makers need to take action forthwith to

design the policy and market frameworks to facilitate this process. We call for and urge government leaders to:

- * Set clear and mandatory, medium and long-term emission reduction targets in industrial nations, building on the existing framework, such as the proposals presented by the UK and EU for a mandatory emissions reduction target in the industrial nations of 20-30% by 2020 and 60-80% by 2050.
- * Set ambitious emission targets to be formally adopted by 2009 as part of the post-2012 regime, in order to build confidence in the process and ensure time-sensitive carbon market continuity.
- * Expand use of market instruments such as emissions trading and those established through the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and Joint Implementation (JI) to produce a carbon price and help drive low-carbon investment.
- * As part of the new international post-2012 agreements, simplify, standardize and streamline the CDM/JI process by 2009, such that these instruments can maximize their role in delivering environmental and sustainable development objectives.
- * Adopt ambitious goals and incentives for renewable energy production, such as the target proposed by the EU to increase the share of renewable energy in European supply to 20% by 2020.
- * Take steps to enable and encourage developing nations to adopt a climate-friendly path for their economic development.
- * Implement energy efficiency programmes and Research and Development initiatives that include public-private partnerships and support the deployment of low-carbon technologies.
- * At the same time, we call for a systematic approach to adaptation that integrates climate change into existing and new programmes on disaster reduction and management, and sustainable development.

Signatories (in alphabetical order)

Mr. Maarten Dijkshoorn, Chairman and CEO, Achmea

Mr. Manuel Decaudaveine, President, Alcyone Finance

Dr. Joachim Faber, Member of the Executive Board, Allianz SE

Mr. Ewoud Goudswaard, Managing Director, ASN Bank

Mr. Doug Pearce, CEO and CIO, British Columbia Investment Management Corporation

Mr. Eduardo Villar Borrero, BCSC, President of the Board, Fundacion Social, Corporate Vice-President

Mr. Luciano Coutinho, President, The Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES)

Ms. Barbara Krumsiek, President and CEO, Calvert Group

Mr. Dirk Kohler, CEO, Carbon Re

Mr. Lee Hwa-eon, Chairman of the Board and CEO, Daegu Bank

Mr. Shigeharu Suzuki, President and CEO, Daiwa Securities Group Inc.

Mr. Paul Baloyi, CEO, Development Bank of Southern Africa

Mr. Axel Miller, Chairman of the Management Board and CEO, Dexia

Mr. Michael Hawker, Managing Director and CEO, Insurance Australia Group Limited

Dr. Torsten Jeworrek, Chairman of the Reinsurance Committee, Munich Re

Mr. Joe Keefe, President and CEO, Pax World

Mr. Peter Sands, Group CEO, Standard Chartered

Mr. Reto Ringger, CEO, Sustainable Asset Management Group

Mr. Simon Thomas, CEO, Trucost Plc

Mr. Alessandro Profumo, CEO, UniCredit S.p.A

Mr. Bob Welsh, CEO, VicSuper

Dr. David Morgan, CEO, Westpac Banking Corporation

Mr. Rana Kapoor, Managing Director and CEO, Yes Bank Ltd.

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UNEP News Release 2007/20

World Environment Day celebrated by Episcopal Relief and Development

June 05, 2007[Episcopal News Service] Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD) celebrates World Environment Day, designated as June 5 to promote awareness of the environment and enhance political attention and public action.

ERD supports environmental sustainability and development through its food security and primary health programs worldwide, assisting communities through forestry projects such as planting trees, creating tree nurseries, and maintaining woodlots. Farmers are taught new agricultural training techniques that help to correct poor farming practices that cause degradation to vast amounts of land, leaving it barren.

In Haiti, only 2 percent of the country is forested and 6,000 hectares of once-arable land is destroyed annually due to soil erosion. ERD's partnership with the Episcopal Diocese of Haiti and the Haiti Fund has managed the Comprehensive Development Project (CODEP), a reforestation and agricultural training center. In response to deforestation in Haiti's mountain regions, the partnership has established more than 870,000 meters of hedgerows, 60,000 meters of contour canals, and planted more than 2 million forest trees and 105,000 fruit trees since 2000.

In the Philippines, ERD is working with the Diocese of Central Philippines in the Rizal Province to teach farmers of the dangers of "kaingin," a type of farming where mountain sides are burned and planted with cash crops. In response to community concerns, ERD is assisting the diocese in creating a community farm. Coffee and fruit from the mountainous Central region of the country are in high demand due to better taste and quality. Bananas, coffee, and fruit will be planted on the farm and will serve as a source of income for farmers and help stop the practice of "kaingin" farming.

"Careful stewardship of land and water resources is a central component of ERD's agricultural programs," said Abigail Nelson, ERD's vice president for Programs. "Crop rotation, reforestation, and other integrated efforts have both a positive influence on the environment and help to sustain the lives that depend on that environment."

ERD's programs help to save lives and teach people how to appreciate and value planet Earth.

June 6, 2007

UGANDA: South Africa's 'green bishop' takes Christians to task on earth usage
Fredrick Nzwili

May 30, 2007[Ecumenical News International] South African Anglican bishop Geoff Davies stirred debate among church leaders and theologians attending an Ecumenical Water Network conference in the Ugandan capital when he asserted that Christians were making a mistake if they believed God only cared about humanity, while the rest of creation existed for the benefit of people.

"Everything God created is good and has value. We make a mistake of thinking God is only concerned about us at our peril," the former bishop of Umzimvumbu (which means "the home of

the hippopotamus" in Zulu) told the May 21-25 conference in Kampala that discussed Africa's water crisis.

Davies quoted Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan environmentalist and first African woman Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, who says we cannot live without the rest of creation and that we are dependent on it.

Davies is currently executive director of the Southern Africa Faith Communities' Environment Institute and he said that human beings could not live separated from nature, nor see nature as an object to be exploited.

"If the natural environment does not survive, we won't," warned Davies, who shocked a congregation one Sunday, when he halted a service he was leading to tip a rubbish bag full of bottles, plastic and other junk onto the floor of Cape Town's St. George's Cathedral. "The reality is that we are now in the midst of the sixth extinction. There have been five previous ones, millions of years ago. The big difference is that this time, we humans are causing it," he said.

"We must remember water is an integral part of the natural environment and we must look after the totality of the natural environment, if we are to survive and if we are to have clean water," said Davies, who has been dubbed the "green bishop" by some of his peers.

His comments in Entebbe triggered strong reactions with some leaders agreeing with him while others stuck to the view that human beings were created to have dominion over nature and thereby had a right to use resources to live.

"The Church is being challenged to play her prophetic role in raising justice issues and viewing environment and water issues as part of faith," the Rev. Maritim Rirei, a Kenyan Anglican church leader, told Ecumenical News International during the meeting.

Rirei agreed with Davies that humanity is slowly destroying itself, by failing to take action to save the environment. "There's a need for a paradigm shift in the interfaith focus on environment, theological training and advocacy," he said.

The Rev. Canon Grace Kaiso, executive secretary of the Uganda Joint Christian Council said churches should lead the way in calling for responsible stewardship of the environment, because poor stewardship would undermine Jesus' mission of ensuring that people enjoy fullness of life.

June 7, 2007

Boxer Opening Statement from Religion and Global Warming Hearing

Author: Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

Published on Jun 7, 2007, 09:48

Today we will hear testimony from witnesses representing over 100 million Americans of faith, who are joining together to protect God's Creation from global warming.

Americans are coming together, calling for action. Our common values are bringing us together. This is coming from the people, from the ground up.

Evangelical Christians, Catholics, African Methodist Episcopalians, Jews, mainline Protestant Christians, and many other people of faith see the need for action on global warming as a moral, ethical, and scriptural mandate.

We welcome their support, insight, and leadership as we work toward a solution to this great challenge. These people of faith strive for justice. They recognize that our best scientists say that global warming's impacts will fall most heavily on poor people around the world—both in developing nations, and in rich nations like the United States. Many developing nations are extremely vulnerable to drought and flooding, and Katrina has shown us that even in a wealthy nation like ours, major flooding or storms hit the poor hardest.

These people of faith tell us we must prevent these harms, and protect the poor from bearing an undue burden of carrying out the solutions. I wholeheartedly agree with them.

It is by joining together, with common purpose and with common values, we will solve this problem.

The warming of our earth is one of the great challenges of our generation. It is a challenge we should meet with hope not fear, and a challenge that will make us stronger as a nation and as a people.

Our generation faces a choice. Will we, in the stirring words of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, give our children "a world of beauty and wonder?"

And I ask: Will we leave them lush forests teeming with wildlife, and fresh air and clear streams? Will our grandchildren know the thrill of holding their child's hand watching with excitement a towering snow-capped mountain or awesome, calving glaciers? Will they have plentiful food and ample water, and be able to wiggle their toes in the same beach sand their grandparents played in? Will our generation leave them a climate that supports the awe inspiring diversity of Creation?

I have a vision for my eleven year old grandson and for my new grandson who is expected any day now.

My vision is that these children and yours will grow up and be able to know the gifts of nature that we saved for them. That they will understand we made the right choice for them...we protected the planet that is their home.

Our cars will run on clean renewable fuels that do not pollute the air we breathe. The United States will lead in exporting clean technologies and products that are the engine of a new green economy. We will lead the world in showing the way to live well, in a way that respects the earth.

To make this vision a reality, we must face our challenge in a way that overcomes our differences, and that defies our party affiliations. This issue is bigger than any person, any party.

We all must join together to solve it.

We see clearly, as we have in many other hearings before this Committee, that we have many partners in this fight to stop global warming.

Religious leaders are rolling up their sleeves to seek solutions in interfaith groups. They are fighting for what many call "Creation Care," the protection of the gifts we have inherited from our Creator.

We share common concerns about what scientists are telling us about the future. We have held Members' briefings with the leading world experts, from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC. Recently, these scientific experts told us that as many as 40 percent of the species on earth may be at risk of extinction from global warming, a deeply distressing prospect.

As some of our witnesses today note, this is God's Creation, and the possible extinction of many species would be a moral and ethical failure of mankind. I believe that together we can and will choose another course.

Today I want to enter into the record a document being released today by over 15 major national religious denominations and organizations, representing tens of millions of Americans—ranging from the predominantly African American African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, to Jewish, Evangelical Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and many other religious groups. They are calling for an 80 percent reduction in global warming emissions by the year 2050.

Many in the religious community add a strong voice to the discussion, calling for the strong actions needed to protect the future of our planet.

Action is needed by all sectors of our economy. We can become far more energy efficient. California has shown that this is already possible. If the rest of the nation had the energy efficiency of California, we would save the equivalent of all the oil we import from the Middle East. Energy conservation saves money, makes us more competitive, and reduces pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

We must look to renewable energy sources like wind and solar power, or capture and sequester their global warming emissions.

Cars, trucks, and other modes of transportation can move towards green, renewable fuels such as environmentally clean biofuels, or electricity.

We can move towards energy independence, with increased reliance on home-grown, clean fuels and clean renewable energy sources.

As the British have shown in addressing their global warming emissions, taking action can create hundreds of thousands of "green collar" jobs. Stepping up to this challenge will transform and invigorate our country.

I have a vision of a nation driven by innovation, energy efficiency, and green technology exported around the world. I see a strong American economic base, with entrepreneurs and businesses thriving....a people united by a challenge in their daily lives and as a society. And in the process, I believe we will find a common purpose.

What we will hear from many religious leaders today is that the Senate must rise to the challenge of addressing global warming. We need to be responsible, accountable and plan for the future of our planet. We can and will meet this challenge.

As the ancient religious writings say:

See to it that you do not destroy my world, for there is no one to repair it after you.

[Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13]

Working together we can reverse global warming. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

June 8, 2007

“Religious leaders assert need to act on climate”

Thu Jun 7, 2007 4:30PM EDT

By Deborah Zabarenko, Environment Correspondent

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. religious leaders -- Episcopal, Catholic, Jewish and evangelical Christian -- agreed on Thursday on the need to confront global warming, while other faith representatives questioned the climate change threat.

The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church and a former oceanographer, told the Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee that most religious people have reached accord on the need to act.

"While many in the faith community represented here today may disagree on a variety of issues, in the area of global warming we are increasingly of one mind," Schori said. "The crisis of climate change presents an unprecedented challenge to the goodness, interconnectedness and sanctity of the world God created and loves."

There was a clear divide between witnesses called by the Democratic majority on the committee, chaired by long-time environmentalist Sen. Barbara Boxer of California, and those chosen by the Republican minority, led by Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma, the Senate's most vocal climate change skeptic.

In addition to Schori, other witnesses summoned by Democrats were John Carr of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Rev. Jim Ball of the Evangelical Climate Initiative and Rabbi David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism.

'TIME TO FIX THE PROBLEM'

"We believe the science is settled and it's time to fix the problem," Ball told the committee, in a statement characteristic of this group of witnesses, who all noted that the consequences of global warming would disproportionately hit the world's poor.

Witnesses called by Republicans were Russell Moore of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Rev. Jim Tonkowich of the Institute on Religion and Democracy and historian David Barton.

Moore said Southern Baptists favor environmental protection but are not united in supporting any "specific legislation to combat global warming."

"Many of us ... are not convinced that the extent of human responsibility is as it is portrayed by some global warming activists, or that the expensive and dramatic solutions called for will be able ultimately to transform the situation," Moore said.

This is in line with the current position of President George W. Bush, who last week unveiled a long-term climate strategy that called for no mandatory limits on the greenhouse gases that spur global warming.

Instead, Bush planned to meet this year with leaders of the 15 countries that emit the most greenhouse gases, and to agree on a way forward to cut emissions by the end of 2008.

The Bush administration has been under fire for its stance on climate change, and at a summit of the Group of Eight richest countries on Thursday in Germany, world leaders agreed to pursue substantial but unspecified cuts in greenhouse gases and work with the United Nations on a new deal to fight global warming by 2009.

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Religion, politics mix at warming hearing
 SENATE PANEL INVITES RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO TALKS
 By Frank Davies
 MediaNews Washington Bureau
San Jose Mercury News

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WASHINGTON - Religious leaders and senators invoked the Old Testament, the teachings of Jesus, modern-day polls and hard-edged politics Thursday in a lively hearing that turned into a debate about the role of faith and doctrine in tackling global warming.

Using her prerogative as committee chair, Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., scheduled the hearing to highlight the growing importance of religious groups, including evangelicals, in grass-roots campaigns to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

After weeks of hearings on climate change that brought scientists, snowmobilers, CEOs, environmental activists and retired admirals before the Environment Committee, this hearing featured the nation's presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, a leader of reform Judaism, a representative of Catholic bishops, evangelical leaders and theologians.

Several leaders said denominations that often disagree over moral issues and policies have found widespread accord on the need to protect Earth and future generations by aggressively combating global warming.

"Faith communities, in the area of global warming, are increasingly of one mind that action is needed," said Episcopal Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, who also spoke for the National Council of Churches, which represents about 45 million Americans.

Rabbi David Saperstein, a leader of Reform Judaism, said "on the urgent need to address global warming and its particular impact on the poor, this degree of deeply shared unity is rare" among faiths.

The environmental fervor among some evangelicals has captured recent attention, and prompted a fierce disagreement over scriptural mandates, moral priorities and political manipulation. Citing Genesis and the teachings of Jesus, the Rev. Jim Ball, president of the Evangelical Environmental Network, told senators that a majority of evangelicals, especially younger people, "believe that a vigorous response to global warming is a spiritual and moral imperative."

Ball, a media-savvy minister, drove across the country with his wife in a Toyota Prius a few years ago with big signs asking, "What Would Jesus Drive?" on what he called his "WWJD Tour."

This was too much for Russell Moore, a dean at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who complained about the "hyper-politicization of the Gospel" and efforts to link biblical text to specific governmental policies. He noted that the Southern Baptist Convention has been skeptical about "massive governmental action" on global warming.

"The next time we see Jesus, he will be driving neither a Hummer nor a hybrid," Moore said. Polls over what religious voters want also were in dispute. At the prompting of Boxer, religious leaders said members of their denominations were endorsing stronger actions to curb emissions. Ball cited a 2005 poll of evangelicals by Ellison Research that showed 70 percent believed global warming was a serious threat to future generations, and 51 percent said steps should be taken to counter it "even if there is a high economic cost."

David Barton, an evangelical author and historian, said although evangelicals "are the most cohesive group in the nation" opposed to abortion and gay marriage, they are divided over what to do about global warming.

Moore also blamed Democratic leaders, including party chairman Howard Dean, for trying to make inroads among evangelicals by emphasizing global warming, ignoring abortion and then claiming there is a "liberalizing political trend within evangelicalism."

In a sharp critique of "the ecumenical left," Moore also said evangelicals would not be persuaded "on the basis of citations of the Garden of Eden and the Ark of Noah by churches that long ago relegated the narrative of Genesis to myth and saga."

Senators eagerly jumped into the debate about religion and politics. Sen. Kit Bond, R-Mo., said "faith should inform all our decisions," and Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., said "we have to have God on our side" in protecting the planet.

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., who once declared global warming to be a hoax, railed against "the theology of Al Gore and Hollywood elitists" and blasted efforts "to divide and conquer evangelicals."

The day before Thursday's hearing, the committee approved small measures to combat global warming: three bills to increase energy efficiency, clean technology and the use of solar power in federal buildings.

Boxer said the committee will meet June 26 to consider bills that would curb emissions from power plants, which are responsible for about 40 percent of U.S. greenhouse-gas emissions.

Contact Frank Davies at fdavies@mercurynews.com or (202)662-8921.

GreenFaith Announces National Fellowship Program

First Initiative to Train Ordained, Lay Leaders for Environmental Leadership

GreenFaith announced today that it is launching the GreenFaith Fellowship Program, the first comprehensive education and training program in the U.S. to prepare lay and ordained leaders from diverse religious traditions for religiously based environmental leadership.

"This program will offer these leaders the opportunity for educational, spiritual and vocational growth and skill development in religious environmentalism," said the Rev. Fletcher Harper, GreenFaith's executive director. "We believe they will make a lasting contribution to the development of an environmentally just and sustainable world."

The Fellowship Program will consist of three four-day residential sessions in ecologically varied settings (one urban, one rural, and one suburban), conference calls, mentoring sessions, an e-mail

list serve, networking within the program and in each Fellows' region, and substantial reading and writing assignments. The first Fellowship class will consist of at least 12 Fellows and will run from the fall of 2007 through the spring of 2009. Fellows will be selected through a competitive application process.

Rabbi Lawrence Troster is the Fellowship program director. Rabbi Troster is a nationally recognized religious environmental leader who has worked with the Coalition for the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL), the Jewish Theological Seminary, as a Steinhardt Fellow at the Center for Life and Learning (CLAL), and as a rabbi of congregations in Toronto and New Jersey. A graduate of the University of Toronto and the Jewish Theological Seminary, he has published and lectured widely on theology and environmentalism, and has led GreenFaith's Meeting the Sacred in Creation retreats for religious leaders.

"As the religious environmental movement gains momentum, we see a real opportunity for more diverse and sophisticated leadership to make an impact," said Rabbi Troster. "We are looking forward to working with Fellows from around the country to help them reach their potential."

Each retreat will feature faculty members with extensive experience in a range of religious and environmental fields. Kurt Hoelting, an experienced leader of wilderness retreats for clergy, will join Troster, Harper and others in leading the first retreat. The retreat will take place at the Garrison Institute in New York's Hudson Valley in the fall of 2007 and will focus on worship, spirituality, sacred texts and the environment. The second retreat, focused on

Environmental Justice, will be led by GreenFaith and WEACTION (West Harlem Environmental Action), a nationally-recognized environmental justice organization. A third retreat will focus on sustainable consumption and "greening" the operation of religious facilities. The leaders of each retreat will develop mentoring relationships with Fellows, and the Fellows will engage with the writings of the best religious environmental authors and write a personal eco-theological statement, grounding their learning in their own religious self-understanding.

Later in the program Fellows will design and implement their own religious environmental leadership plans, applying for up to \$1,000 in matching funds through a Fellowship mini-grant program designed to support their work. Upon graduating, they will join the Fellowship's alumni/ae network and mentor other emerging religious environmental leaders.

An advisory committee of nationally recognized religious environmental leaders have shared their experience and offered strong support.

"The GreenFaith Fellowship Program is a critical initiative for the religious environmental movement," said Drs. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, co-directors of the Harvard Forum on Religion and Ecology. "There is currently no such program of its kind and thus its potential contribution is clear. There is a dearth of religious leaders in the United States who are speaking out regarding the key environmental issues we are facing. This interfaith effort is indispensable."

Dr. Larry Rasmussen, Reinhold Niebuhr Professor Emeritus of Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary, said "The GreenFaith Fellowship Program meets a palpable need for a

select group at a critical time. I applaud the substance and details of the program – if it didn't exist, we would need to invent it.”

GreenFaith is a New Jersey-based interfaith coalition for the environment. Founded in 1992, GreenFaith inspires, educates and mobilizes people of diverse spiritual backgrounds to deepen their relationship with nature and to take action for the earth. Initial funding for the Fellowship has been provided by the Richard Oram Charitable Trust and the Keneda Sustainability Fund.

Individuals interested in learning more about the Fellowship or in applying should visit www.greenfaith.org or contact Rabbi Troster at ltroster@greenfaith.org or 732-565-7740.

June 11, 2007

UNEP NEWS RELEASE

World Environment Day in Barrow, Alaska : Inupiat Gathering Puts a Human Face on Climate Change

Barrow, Alaska, 11 June 2007— “We don't grow vegetables”. With these simple words, spoken during UNEP's June 5th World Environment Day Climate Change Forum, Inupiat Elder Wesley Aiken epitomized the unique challenges faced by the native community of Barrow, Alaska, situated 340 miles north of the Arctic Circle, and dependent on hunting, fishing and subsistence whaling, all activities which have changed considerably over the past decades due to evolving weather conditions.

As the nation's northernmost community, Barrow was a logical choice to host UNEP's North American World Environment Day (WED) festivities, which centered around a town hall meeting on climate change to celebrate this year's theme: “Melting Ice, A Hot Topic”. Brennan Van Dyke, Director of UNEP's Regional Office for North America, set the tone by orienting the day's activities: “We know that even if it were possible to stop green house gases today, the average temperature of the earth would continue to rise significantly for decades to come, precipitation patterns would continue to change, and sea levels continue to rise, all due to the inertia of the climate system. Therefore, adaptation to climate change is key, said Ms. Van Dyke. “We are looking forward to hearing from you, the residents of Barrow, as you share your observations on the evolution of climatic conditions, and your suggestions on adaptation, since all over the globe, communities can learn from Barrow's experiences”.

Barrow Mayor Nathaniel Olemaun Jr., co-hosting the event with UNEP, said: “In Barrow, we know about adaptation. Inupiat hunters at every single outing on the land or sea ice, base their behavior on the conditions of the day. We are looking forward to sharing our experiences during today's Climate Change Forum”.

Welcoming messages were sent by video from Alaskan Senator Lisa Murkowski, Honorary Patron of the Barrow event, and Helen Bjornoy, Environment Minister of Norway, the country that hosted this year's global World Environment Day celebrations a continent away.

The Climate Change Forum provided an opportunity for the residents of Barrow to share their observations with members of the scientific community in the interests of advancing the dialogue between traditional knowledge and scientific research. On the side of community-based knowledge, Elder Wesley Aiken, Hunter Hubert Hopson, Subsistence Provider Ida Olemaun, and Whaler Lloyd Leavitt brought a unique perspective to the discussion on the impacts of climate change. Unlike the usual focus of climate change's impacts on human populations and the infrastructure thereto, Barrow residents stressed its impact on Arctic wildlife, and its potential to accelerate the loss of the traditional Inupiat hunting culture.

When the public was invited to participate, many volunteered their stories of the changes they had witnessed due to climate change: shorter hunting and fishing seasons under unusually precarious conditions, riskier winter travel on lakes and rivers, abnormally aggressive polar bears, skinny and parasite-ridden caribou, and unhealthy fish, resulting in food shortages, scarcity of skins for whaling boats and traditional clothing and overall stress, strain and anxiety over constantly changing ice conditions and weather patterns.

One of the volunteers, 83 year old Inupiat elder Jenny Ahkivgak, delivered her testimony in a native dialect, translated by Ida Olemaun, wife of Barrow Mayor Nathaniel Olemaun. She spoke of her parents who long ago had predicted that "winter would turn into summer and summer into winter" due to climate change, and marveled that their prophecy concerning scientists coming together to discuss climate change seemed to be coming true before her very eyes with the Barrow gathering.

Representing the scientific community, Hajo Eicken, Associate Professor of Geophysics at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, presented some disturbing statistics concerning the thinning sea ice and the warming ocean, which has been absorbing 5% more heat per year since 1982. He demonstrated how scientific data could be combined with traditional knowledge to propel the Arctic to the forefront of climate adaptation research.

A tour of the newly inaugurated Barrow Arctic Research Center, managed under the auspices of the Barrow Arctic Science Consortium (BASC), was also part of the day's activities. BASC is committed to helping scientists interact with the local community and in transferring knowledge between researchers and the people of the North Slope.

John Crump, UNEP's Polar Issues Coordinator, presented the publication "Global Outlook for Ice and Snow", compiled by UNEP and a network of 70 of the world's best experts, in part to support the International Polar Year, running from 2007 to 2008. Copies of the report were distributed to the participants, who have experienced first hand the impacts outlined in the report, of the decline in snow cover, sea ice, glaciers, permafrost and lake ice, all linked to climate change.

According to Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, "...the report underlines that the fate of the world's snowy and icy places in a climatically challenged world should be cause for concern in every ministry, boardroom and living room across the world."

Next on the programme, images of stranded polar bears on shrinking sea ice gave way to slides of balmy Caribbean beachscapes, as John Crump introduced the recently formed alliance “Many Strong Voices”, representing Arctic communities and small island developing states (SIDS) from the Caribbean and the Pacific. These islands are experiencing similarly disruptive problems as the Arctic because of climate change, and have chosen to band together to amplify their voices in global negotiations.

This message of solidarity was well received by the residents of Barrow, who cope daily with the isolation of a community, like many other locations throughout Alaska, that has no roads connecting it to other communities.

“There are many strong voices in the Arctic and the Small Island Developing States,” said John Crump. “When we discuss adaptation to climate change, these voices need to be heard – at the local, regional and international levels”.

Edward Itta, Mayor of the North Slope Borough, presented the political perspective as Chair of the Alaskan Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC). The ICC represents over 160,000 Inuit living in the Arctic Region of Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Russia, advancing their interests during international symposia, national policy debates, congressional hearings, etc.

Mayor Itta emphasized: “Global discussion on the effects of climate change must start and end with the people that experience it every day”. He spoke of the traditional knowledge of the elders as more than just “window dressing”, encouraging the Inupiat to identify ways of documenting this valuable source of information, in order to facilitate a more widespread utilization, and to promote scientific studies for Barrow’s youth.

At mid-day, participants were treated to a Community Pot Luck, sponsored by the Barrow City Council and Barrow Blue Ribbon Commission, featuring caribou, fermented whale and duck soup. The day’s celebration ended with a demonstration of native Inupiat dances and an award ceremony honoring Camille Elisabeth Heubner, the 9 year old Alaskan winner of UNEP’s 16th International Painting Competition, sponsored by Bayer Corporation.

Summing up the positive feedback generated by the day’s gathering, Richard Glenn, President of the Barrow Arctic Science Consortium and Moderator of the Climate Change Forum, said: “When you have participants good-naturedly vying for the microphone, you know that they have a vested interest in the subject at hand, and that they appreciate the opportunity that has been provided by today’s forum to have their voice be heard.”

Notes to Editors

Details concerning UNEP’s World Environment Day celebrations around the world can be found at www.unep.org/wed/2007.

For more information, please contact: Elisabeth Guilbaud-Cox, Regional Office for North America on tel: (202) 974-1307 or (202) 812-2100; Nick Nuttall, UNEP Spokesperson, on Tel: 254 20 762-3084, Mobile: 254 733 632755, E-mail: nick.nuttall@unep.org.

June 11, 2007

“God goes green”

By Oliver "Buzz" Thomas

Does the Bible actually advocate environmentalism? If so, might the movement become the next cause for religious Americans?

I used to marvel at how foolish an organism is cancer. It can't seem to pace itself. Left to its own devices, it will greedily consume its host until the host dies, thereby causing the cancer's own premature death.

Then, one day I had an epiphany. We're like cancer. Unable to pace ourselves, we are greedily consuming our host organism (i.e. planet Earth) and getting dangerously close to killing ourselves in the process.

The difference is that cancer has an excuse: No brain.

Consider that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has issued one of its most sobering reports to date. The hundreds of scientists and scores of nations participating in the project paint an apocalyptic future of flooding, drought, disease and food shortages. In the face of such a crisis, one might expect people of faith to flock to the cause of protecting the environment. After all, the theological issue appears a simple one. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. The world and all that dwell in it!" proclaims Psalm 24:1. The earth is on loan. God owns it, and we are God's caretakers or "stewards," according to the Bible.

Slow going

Despite all that, and the fact that 90% of us say we believe in God, most Americans appear reluctant to begin making the sacrifices necessary to address global warming. Evangelical Christian leaders in particular seem to be dragging their heels. So, why the hesitation? Why aren't more Christians trading their SUVs for hybrids, turning down the thermostat and writing letters to Congress?

First, our political loyalties get in the way. Evangelical Christians tend to vote Republican, and party leaders such as the president and vice president have been outspoken in their skepticism about the urgency of the global climate crisis.

Then, there's money. In the short run at least, it simply costs more to go green. Hybrid cars, fluorescent bulbs and alternative energy sources don't come cheap. Until substantial government incentives or market forces change that equation, many Americans will opt to save a buck rather than the environment.

There's also the fact that for many Christians, the Bible appears contradictory on the subject of global warming. Didn't Jesus say there would be wars and rumors of wars, famine and earthquakes before he could return? Isn't that exactly what the Intergovernmental Panel on

Climate Change is predicting? For millions of Christians, the world's downward spiral into political and ecological chaos may appear a necessary prerequisite to the second coming of Christ.

The problem with this fabled passage from Matthew 24 is that few of us bother to read what comes immediately before it. Jesus was responding to a series of questions. One was about his so-called second coming and the end of the age, but first and foremost was the disciples' inquiry about the destruction of the Jewish temple. Jesus had just shocked the disciples by telling them that soon "there will not be left here one stone standing upon another."

The temple was indeed destroyed after the Jewish rebellion some 40 years later. And, in those chaotic days before the Roman general Titus sacked Jerusalem, most of the things Christians associate with Christ's second coming came to pass. War, famine, messianic pretenders, the whole bit. As for his second coming, Jesus said it would be like a "thief" in the night. Thieves seldom announce their entry.

A moral question

Yet the biggest barrier to energizing people of faith to fight global warming with the same vigor we fought racism is probably moral sloth. Ethical indolence.

Living a moral life is hard work. Just ask your priest or rabbi. Riding the bus takes longer, and that means getting up earlier. Walking to work can get you sweaty or muss your hair. Riding a bike can get you run over. Even writing a letter to your senator can cause you to miss 15 minutes of the ballgame.

Plus, we have some excuses. The science is confusing. Al Gore is a Democrat.

We also have at least one legitimate reason. Much of the problem lies beyond our control. China, for example, will soon surpass the USA as the largest producer of greenhouse gases. The Chinese are building an astonishing number of coal-burning power plants. Nearly 50 per year! Worse yet, the Chinese plants are only half as efficient as their U.S. counterparts. Already, China is burning more coal than the United States, Russia, India and Japan combined.

Instead of throwing up our hands, this should motivate religious people to do more. Aren't Christians, Muslims and Jews all commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves? Consider for a moment that more than 10 million Chinese still have no electricity. Imagine that. Perhaps we should be helping them build nuclear power plants as a clean alternative energy source. Perhaps we should start rebuilding some of our own nuclear plants.

People of faith have been at the forefront of nearly every great social movement in U.S. history, starting with the abolitionist movement. The jury is still out on whether we will rise to the occasion this time. Let's hope we turn out to be smarter than cancer.

Oliver "Buzz" Thomas is a minister, lawyer and author of *10 Things Your Minister Wants to Tell You (But Can't Because He Needs the Job)*.

(NCC News)

“Faith leaders call for climate policy to help people in poverty”

Washington D.C., June 7, 2007--Testifying before the Environment and Public Works Senate Committee today, Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, joined with other major faith leaders representing Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish organizations to call for the U.S. Congress to alleviate the burden on people in poverty by reducing U.S. carbon emissions through mandatory climate policy.

The testimony of the Most Reverend Jefferts Schori, a trained oceanographer who testified on behalf of the National Council of Churches USA (NCC), comes on the heels of a global warming resolution passed by the NCC's General Assembly in November 2006 and a Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas statement issued at their May 23, 2007, session held at St. Vladimir's Seminary in Crestwood, NY.

"As a priest, trained as a scientist, I take as a sacred obligation the faith community's responsibility to stand on the side of truth--whether that be the truth of science or the truth of God's unquenchable love for God's children," said Bishop Jefferts Schori. "Science has revealed that global warming is real, caused by human activities and is a threat not only to God's good creation but to all of humanity."

Jefferts Schori highlighted that global warming will have a negative impact on all of God's creation including those living in poverty, communities of color, and vulnerable communities in the U.S. and abroad. Jefferts Schori stated that "inaction now is the most costly course of action for those living in poverty" and noted that climate change legislation now will help protect those who would suffer most from global warming.

Testimony submitted during the hearing included a Statement of Principles on Global Warming [see below] signed by 12 religious organizations representing more than 46 million people of faith and numerous religious resolutions calling on the U.S. Congress to act immediately to address global warming. Other panelists included Rev. Jim Ball, Evangelical Environmental Network, John Carr, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Rabbi David Saperstein, Union of Reformed Judaism.

The NCC is the ecumenical voice of America's Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, historic African American and traditional peace churches. These 35 communions have 45 million faithful members in 100,000 congregations in all 50 states.

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FAITH PRINCIPLES ON GLOBAL WARMING

Justice: Strive for justice and acknowledge that global warming's societal impact already falls, and will continue to fall, most heavily on the people around the world who are least able to mitigate the impacts—poor and vulnerable populations in the U.S. and in developing countries. As a leading industrialized nation that has disproportionately contributed to greenhouse gas emissions, it is incumbent upon us to rectify this injustice. To reach our goal of justice, we require that legislation:

- Include mechanisms that mitigate the impacts of global warming particularly for vulnerable populations in the U.S. and abroad.
 - o Prevent further harm to human health and all of God's creation by utilizing clean energy sources when addressing global warming and carbon pollution.
- Focus on a fair and equitable distribution of total benefits and costs among people, communities, and nations, and in particular rectify the disproportionate impact that low-income communities have and will experience as the climate continues to change.
- Enable our brothers and sisters now living in poverty to have both economic independence and stability and to eliminate the devastating impacts that global warming has and will continue to have on those people in the U.S. and around the world living in poverty.
- Take action now to avoid placing the burden of carbon reduction unduly on our children's children.
- Endorse policies that place a high priority on allowing all people to live in God's abundance and with dignity by ensuring that basic human needs and worker justice are not adversely impacted by the effects of global warming or future efforts to address global warming.

Stewardship: Heed the call to be faithful stewards and caretakers of God's creation by limiting the future impacts of global warming on God's Earth. Already, global warming has damaged the precious balance of God's creation, including increasing the number of threatened species, causing long-term drought, and melting Arctic ice. To reach our goal of stewardship, we require that legislation:

- Follow recognized scientific guidelines and recommendations in order to protect all of God's creation and prevent catastrophic damage to God's Earth and God's people. Following their recommendations, legislation must include comprehensive, mandatory, and aggressive emission reductions that aim to limit the increase in Earth's temperature to 2 degrees Celsius or less. Legislation should focus on the short term goal of reducing U.S. carbon emissions to reach a 15-20 percent reduction in carbon by 2020 with a long term vision to achieve carbon emissions that are 80 percent of 2000 levels by the year 2050.
- Avoid catastrophic global warming, which would devastate God's creation, put more pressure on disaster and relief responses, and endanger the future of the planet. Although global warming impacts are already being felt, we must ensure that God's people and planet are protected from the catastrophic effects that may occur if we fail to significantly curb our carbon emissions.
- Call on major emitters to take responsibility for their actions and work to significantly reduce their carbon emissions.

Sustainability: Ensure that efforts to curb global warming prevent further environmental and societal tragedies. As people of faith we are guided by the value of sustainability. Sustainability

requires that we enable biological and social systems that nurture and support life not be depleted or poisoned. To reach our goal of sustainability, we require that legislation:

- Maintain God's good creation by preventing policies that place the burden of our lifestyles on one aspect of creation and encouraging policies that sustain and restore vibrant eco-systems with economic justice so that communities of life can flourish for generations to come.
- Respond to global warming in a way that reflects the interdependence of all of God's creation.
- Support energy sources that are renewable, clean, and avoid destruction of God's creation.

Sufficiency: In a world of finite resources, for all to have enough requires that those among us who have more than enough will need to address our patterns of acquisition and consumption. We can not achieve significant reductions in global warming emissions unless we make changes in our lifestyles and particularly in our energy consumption. To support the goal of sufficiency, legislation must:

- Encourage energy conservation in our homes, our communities, and our places of worship.
- Encourage energy conservation in national transportation and distribution systems and commercial enterprises.
- Encourage the federal government to lead through research and example in the practice and implementation of energy conservation.

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June 13, 2007

“General Assembly President stresses value of interfaith dialogue in securing peace”

13 June 2007 – Accepting an award for her work for peace and development, the President of the United Nations General Assembly has emphasized the importance of interfaith dialogue in realizing these goals.

“Promoting a true dialogue among civilizations and religions is perhaps the most important political instrument that we can use to reach out across borders and build bridges of peace and hope,” said Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa on Tuesday evening upon receipt of the Path to Peace Foundation award.

“Together – no matter what our religious affiliations are,” she said, “we can work towards our common goals with love, compassion, humility and vision – and bring about real change.”

The President pointed out that religious values are critical to defusing violence, which in turn will help towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of global antipoverty targets.

“Religious values can play an important role by advocating a culture of peace to counter intolerance,” she said. “They are also pivotal in promoting equal rights and prosperity for all.”

Stating that climate change is “a moral issue about the preservation of the planet for future generations,” she said religious values can also make an important contribution to debate on the issue.

Sheikha Haya called on religious leaders to “motivate their followers to engage ‘others’ more reasonably and with greater mutual respect, while remaining true to their own beliefs.”

Founded in 1991, the Foundation, in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the UN, serves as a vehicle to foster within the international community the social teaching of the Catholic Church on important questions of ethics, development, human rights and peace, according to Ashraf Kamal, a spokesperson for the Assembly President.

Past recipients of the award include former President of Poland Lech Walesa, and former UN Secretaries-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan.

In a separate development, Mr. Kamal announced today that the Assembly’s planned debate on climate change, originally scheduled for 26 to 27 July, will be held instead from 31 July to 1 August.

He also called attention to a meeting on financing development to achieve the MDGs which the Assembly will hold from 17 to 18 June in Doha, Qatar. The meeting will cover domestic resource mobilization by the world’s least developed countries, multilateral and bilateral aid, as well as “new and emerging donors,” Mr. Kamal said.

June 14, 2007

“Southern Baptist resolution questions role in global warming”

06/14/2007

By ERIC GORSKI / Associated Press

Southern Baptists approved a resolution on global warming Wednesday that questions the prevailing scientific belief that humans are largely to blame for the phenomenon and also warns that increased regulation of greenhouse gases will hurt the poor.

The global warming debate has split evangelicals, with some not only pressing the issue but arguing humans bear most of the responsibility for the problem because of greenhouse gas emissions. Other evangelicals say talking about the issue at all diminishes their influence over more traditional culture war issues such as abortion, gay marriage and judicial appointments.

The SBC resolution, approved near the end of the denomination's annual meeting, acknowledges a rise in global temperatures. But it rejects government-mandated limits on carbon-dioxide and

other emissions as "very dangerous" because they might not make much difference and could lead to "major economic hardships" worldwide.

Originally, the measure also backed more government-funded research into global warming's causes and alternative energies to oil. But the resolution was amended to drop that language, in part over concerns that it would endorse strong government engagement in the issue.

The two-day annual meeting of the nation's largest Protestant denomination, which boasts 16.3 million members, ended Wednesday night. The gathering was highlighted by new steps to prevent child sexual abuse, calls for unity to reverse stagnant membership and a struggle over defining Baptist identity. About 8,500 "messengers," or delegates, registered to attend.

The global warming resolution acknowledges humans bear some responsibility for rising temperatures while urging caution, said Barrett Duke, vice president for public policy and research with the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

"It does not deny there has been a recent warming trend in average global temperatures," said Duke, who helped write the measure. "What it does do is call for more objective analysis in the data that would explain causes of the warming we're experiencing."

The resolution stands in contrast to a statement last year signed by 86 evangelical leaders that said human-induced climate change is real, and that the consequences of warming temperatures will cause millions of people to die, most of them "our poorest global neighbors."

The SBC statement frames the global warming debate as a moral issue with profound implications for the poor — but does so through a different lens.

"Our concern is for the vulnerable communities as well," Duke said. "But we think if the data is being misinterpreted, and policies are being implemented to reduce the human contributions, those policies are bound to drive up the costs of goods and services for poor and underdeveloped parts of the world."

The Rev. Richard Cizik, vice president of governmental affairs for the National Association of Evangelicals, said Wednesday the Southern Baptist resolution can do some good by bringing attention to the issue. However, he added: "I think we need to be careful not to craft a position that puts us out there by ourselves."

Cizik, a lightning rod in the debate over whether evangelicals should engage in the climate change debate, supports findings announced in February by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. That panel said it is 90 percent certain human-generated greenhouse gases account for most of the global rise in temperature over the last 50 years.

Another resolution approved Wednesday on protecting children from sex abuse urged Southern Baptists churches and organizations to respond quickly to allegations and conduct background checks. The resolution also denounced any efforts to "cover up," ignore or condone abuse.

Victims' groups have pressured the SBC to adopt reforms in response to allegations against Baptist clergy, and another measure approved at the meeting calls for a report next year on the possibility of developing a national database to help churches root out abusers.

In a live address by satellite Wednesday, President Bush highlighted his administration's common ground with Southern Baptists on abortion, fighting AIDS and other issues.

"You're rising to meet the challenges of broken souls, in a broken world, with compassion and courage," Bush said.

Earlier Wednesday, Southern Baptists concerned about a rightward shift in the denomination claimed a victory with the passage of a motion centered on Baptist identity.

By a vote of 58 percent to 42 percent, messengers supported a statement calling the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 the sufficient standard for establishing Southern Baptist credentials.

Backers of the statement said some conservatives have been narrowing the definition of who is considered a Baptist in good standing by condemning various worship practices.

But conservatives said the motion was confusing and would not undermine the ability of trustees at Southern Baptist schools and entities to set standards for hiring.

June 17, 2007

“A Sacred River Endangered by Global Warming: Glacial Source of Ganges Is Receding”

By Emily Wax

Washington Post Foreign Service

Sunday, June 17, 2007; A14

VARANASI, India -- With her eyes sealed, Ramedi cupped the murky water of the Ganges River in her hands, lifted them toward the sun, and prayed for her husband, her 15 grandchildren and her bad hip. She, like the rest of India's 800 million Hindus, has absolute faith that the river she calls Ganga Ma can heal.

Around Ramedi, who like some Indians has only one name, people converged on the riverbank in the early morning, before the day's heat set in. Women floated necklaces of marigolds on a boat of leaves, a dozen skinny boys soaped their hair as they bathed in their underwear, and a somber group of men carried a body to the banks of the river, a common ritual before the dead are cremated on wooden funeral pyres. To be cremated beside the Ganges, most here believe, brings salvation from the cycle of rebirth.

"Ganga Ma is everything to Hindus. It's our chance to attain nirvana," Ramedi said, emerging from the river, her peach-colored sari dripping along the shoreline.

But the prayer rituals carried out at the water's edge may not last forever -- or even another generation, according to scientists and meteorologists. The Himalayan source of Hinduism's holiest river, they say, is drying up.

In this 3,000-year-old city known as the Jerusalem of India for its intense religious devotion, climate change could throw into turmoil something many devout Hindus thought was immutable: their most intimate religious traditions. The Gangotri glacier, which provides up to 70 percent of the water of the Ganges during the dry summer months, is shrinking at a rate of 40 yards a year, nearly twice as fast as two decades ago, scientists say.

"This may be the first place on Earth where global warming could hurt our very religion. We are becoming an endangered species of Hindus," said Veer Bhadra Mishra, an engineer and director of the Varanasi-based Sankat Mochan Foundation, an organization that advocates for the preservation of the Ganges. "The melting glaciers are a terrible thing. We have to ask ourselves, who are the custodians of our culture if we can't even help our beloved Ganga?"

Environmental groups such as Mishra's have long focused on pollution of the Ganges. More than 100 cities and countless villages are situated along the 1,568-mile river, which stretches from the foothills of the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, and few of them have sewage treatment plants.

But recent reports by scientists say the Ganges is under even greater threat from global warming. According to a U.N. climate report, the Himalayan glaciers that are the sources of the Ganges could disappear by 2030 as temperatures rise.

The shrinking glaciers also threaten Asia's supply of fresh water. The World Wildlife Fund in March listed the Ganges among the world's 10 most endangered rivers. In India, the river provides more than 500 million people with water for drinking and farming.

The immediate effect of glacier recession is a short-lived surplus of water. But eventually the supply runs out, and experts predict that the Ganges eventually will become a seasonal river, largely dependent on monsoon rains.

"There has never been a greater threat for the Ganges," said Mahesh Mehta, an environmental lawyer who has been filing lawsuits against corporations dumping toxins in the Ganges. He is now redirecting his energies toward the melting glaciers. "If humans don't change their interference, our very religion, our livelihoods are under threat."

Mehta and other environmentalists want to see the Indian government here enforce strict reductions of greenhouse gas emissions, the primary cause of climate change.

But during this month's Group of Eight conference of the major industrialized nations, both India and China, eager to protect their market growth, joined the United States in refusing to support mandatory limits on greenhouse gas emissions. President Bush has instead pushed a plan for nonbinding goals to reduce emissions.

"It is a fact that more and not less development is the best way for developing countries to address themselves to the issues of preserving the environment," Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said in a public statement before leaving for the G-8 summit in Germany.

While India is one of the world's top producers of greenhouse gas emissions -- along with the United States, China, Russia and Japan -- it argues that the United States and other developed countries should reduce their own emissions before expecting developing nations to follow suit.

Environmentalists call that kind of thinking shortsighted and say India desperately needs strong laws in place at a time when the country is growing so quickly.

"Economic growth is important, but can you imagine a billion cars in India?" Mehta asked. "As people become affluent, they want cars and air conditioners and refrigerators. What effect is that going to have on the environment?"

About 1 million pilgrims a year visit this ancient, hardscrabble city, many traveling hundreds of miles on foot. Many of them leave with vials of Ganges water to wear around their necks or display in their homes, sometimes sprinkling droplets of water into their town's wells, spiritually purifying their drinking water.

On the stone steps leading up to the Ganges' famous temple ghats, graffiti reads: "Happy is the person who lives by Ganga, Ma" and "I love my India."

"The government should realize that climate change will hurt not just communities, but also businesses and even the Ganga itself, our most sacred river," said Srinivas Krishnaswamy, a climate and energy expert for Greenpeace in India.

"When the Ganga River is threatened, Indians will have to wake up the government to this crisis."

June 22, 2007

“Environmental Degradation Triggering Tensions and Conflict in Sudan”

Investments in Management and Rehabilitation of Natural Resources Central to Conflict Resolution and Peace Building in Sudan Says UN Environment Programme

Geneva/Nairobi, 22 June 2007

Sudan is unlikely to see a lasting peace unless widespread and rapidly accelerating environmental degradation is urgently addressed.

A new assessment of the country, including the troubled region of Darfur, indicates that among the root causes of decades of social strife and conflict are the rapidly eroding environmental services in several key parts of the country.

Investment in environmental management, financed by the international community and from the country's emerging boom in oil and gas exports, will be a vital part of the peace building effort, says the report.

The most serious concerns are land degradation, desertification and the spread of deserts southwards by an average of 100km over the past four decades.

These are linked with factors including overgrazing of fragile soils by a livestock population that has exploded from close to 27 million animals to around 135 million now.

Many sensitive areas are also experiencing a "deforestation crisis" which has led to a loss of almost 12 per cent of Sudan's forest cover in just 15 years. Indeed, some areas may undergo a total loss of forest cover within the next decade.

Meanwhile, there is mounting evidence of long-term regional climate change in several parts of the country. This is witnessed by a very irregular but marked decline in rainfall, for which the clearest indications are found in Kordofan and Darfur states.

In Northern Darfur for example precipitation has fallen by a third in the past 80 years says the report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and its Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch.

The scale of climate change as recorded in Northern Darfur is almost unprecedented, and its impacts are closely linked to conflict in the region, as desertification has added significantly to the stress on traditional agricultural and pastoral livelihoods.

In addition, "forecast climate change is expected to further reduce food production due to declining rainfall and increased variability, particularly in the Sahel belt. A drop in crop yields of up to 70 per cent is forecast for the most vulnerable areas," says the Sudan Post-Conflict Assessment.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, said: "This report encapsulates the scale and many of the driving forces behind the tragedy of the Sudan—a tragedy that has been unfolding for decades touching the lives of millions of people and thousands of communities".

"However, the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement in 2005 and recent developments including the decision to deploy a joint African Union-UN peace keeping force for Darfur, offer a real chance to deliver a different future for the people of Sudan," he added.

"It is clear however that a big part of that future and central to keeping the peace will be the way in which Sudan's environment is rehabilitated and managed. Sudan's tragedy is not just the tragedy of one country in Africa—it is a window to a wider world underlining how issues such as uncontrolled depletion of natural resources like soils and forests allied to impacts like climate change can destabilize communities, even entire nations," said Mr Steiner.

While the tensions and conflicts in Darfur are currently in the headlines, the report warns that other parts of the Sudan could see resurrections of historical clashes driven in part by declines in environmental services.

This is particularly the case in some north-south border zones. In the Nuba mountains region in Southern Kordofan, for example, the indigenous Nuba tribe expressed concern over the damaging of trees and other vegetation due to the recent presence of the camel-herding Shanabla tribe. Like many pastoralist communities, the Shanabla have been forced to migrate south in search of adequate grazing land lost in the north to agricultural expansion and drought. Some Nuba warned of 'restarting the war' if this damage did not cease.

The assessment, which was requested and carried out in cooperation with the new Government of National Unity and the Government of Southern Sudan, makes raft of wide-ranging recommendations.

These include investment in environmental management including climate adaptation measures; capacity building of national and local government in environmental affairs and the integration of environmental factors in all UN relief and development projects.

"The total cost of this report's recommendations is estimated at approximately \$120 million over three to five years. These are not large figures when compared to the Sudanese GDP in 2005 of \$85.5 billion," says the UNEP study.

Some Key Findings

Rainfall and Agriculture

There is evidence of long term regional climate change in several parts of the country with very irregular and marked decline in rainfall.

Indeed historical data in Darfur indicates that rainfall declines of between 16 per cent and over 30 per cent have occurred turning millions of hectares of marginal semi-desert grazing land into desert.

Overall, deserts in some northern regions of Sudan may have advanced by an average of 100km over the past 40 years.

Areas on the fringes of the Sahara will be acutely vulnerable including conflict- and drought-stricken parts of Darfur, Northern Kordofan, Khartoum state and Kassala state.

Climate models for Northern Kordofan indicate that temperatures are set to rise by 0.5 degrees C to 1.5 degrees C by 2030 and 2060 with an average rainfall decline of five per cent.

The impacts on agriculture are likely to be disastrous in some areas. For example sorghum production could decline from yields of close to 500kg/hectare to 150 kg/hectare—a drop of 70 per cent.

By 2020, the level of failed harvests in Darfur could be between five to 20 per cent.

The crisis is being aggravated by degradation of water sources in deserts known as wadis or oases. "Virtually all such areas inspected by UNEP were found to be moderately to severely degraded, principally due to deforestation, overgrazing and erosion," says the report.

Despite these serious water shortages, flooding and related natural disasters also contribute to human vulnerability in Sudan.

The most devastating floods occur on the Blue Nile, as a result of deforestation and overgrazing in the river's upper catchment. Riverbank erosion due to watershed degradation and associated flooding is particularly destructive and severe along the fertile Nile riverine strip.

"UNEP anticipates that pulsed water releases from the new Merowe dam will become a major cause of downstream riverbank erosion on the main Nile," says the report.

Sustainable management of agriculture ? Sudan's largest economic sector ? would have important benefits.

"Disorganized and poorly managed mechanized rain-fed agriculture, which covers an estimated area of 6.5 million hectares, has been particularly destructive, leading to large-scale forest clearance, loss of wildlife and severe land degradation," the report says.

Population Displacement

There are five million internally displaced people and refugees in Sudan. Environmental degradation is one of the driving forces of displacement and the environment is being further undermined by the sheer scale of displaced people and refugees in some areas.

The environmental impacts of many of the camps is high, especially in respect to deforestation for fuel wood. The UNEP study found that in Darfur, extensive deforestation can be found as far as 10km from a camp. The situation is being aggravated by brick making in some camps.

One large tree is needed to provide the fire to make around 3,000 bricks. In addition, the clay needed for brick-making can damage trees by exposing roots and also create pits in which water collects and mosquitoes can thrive.

"It is possible that some camps in Darfur will run out of viable fuel wood supplies within walking distance resulting in major fuel shortages," says the report.

Returning displaced people to their homelands is clearly a laudable aim but the report warns that in some areas this may be impossible because environmental degradation has gone too far.

A preliminary analysis by UNEP of the environmental sustainability of some states indicates that "the situation in Darfur is particularly clear". Many regions of Northern and Western Darfur are

undergoing desertification and land degradation at a significant rate. Other states facing similar issues are Southern Kordofan, eastern Kassala, northern Blue Nile, northern Upper Nile and northern Unity state.

"For most of Southern Sudan the situation is relatively positive in that the higher rainfall provides for greater agricultural productivity," says the UNEP study.

Forests

Sudan is undergoing a rapid loss of forests. Forest cover has declined by 11.6 per cent since 1990 or approximately 8.8 million hectares.

This is largely driven by slash and burn agriculture and energy demands. UNEP estimates that fuel wood requirements for 2006 were around 27 to 30 million cubic metres.

"At the regional level, two-thirds of the forests in north, central and eastern Sudan disappeared between 1972 and 2001. In Darfur, a third of the forest cover was lost between 1973 and 2006. Southern Sudan is estimated to have lost 40 per cent of its forests since independence and deforestation is ongoing," says the report.

A further study by ICRAF, the World Agroforestry Center, commissioned by UNEP for the report indicates that Sudan has lost 30 per cent of its forests since independence with the majority of forests in the north already lost.

At Timbisquo and Um Chelluta, two sites in Southern Darfur the annual deforestation rates are 1.3 and 1.2 per cent respectively. Overall the Sudan's deforestation rate of natural forests may be close to two per cent per year.

Demand for charcoal is flagged as a potential flash point and conflict between northern and southern Sudan as well as in Darfur.

"UNEP predicts that within five to ten years, the northern states of Sudan will only be able to obtain sufficient supplies of charcoal from Southern Sudan and Darfur as all other major reserves will have been exhausted," says the report.

Freshwaters

20 per cent of Sudan's freshwater resources are produced internally from rainfall. The rest comes from sources outside the country like the Nile.

Land degradation, in part linked with deforestation, is dramatically reducing the capacity of Sudan's existing dams, due to sedimentation. The Sennar dam on the Blue Nile has lost 60 per cent of its capacity with the Khashm el Girba dam on the Atbara River down by over 50 per cent.

The report highlights concerns linked with the new Merowe dam?the largest dam project in Africa after the Aswan dam in Egypt. The UNEP assessment concludes that water discharges

from the dam are likely to trigger impacts on nearby agricultural schemes and erosion of river banks.

Other concerns include loss of flow for the recharge of underground aquifers and the 'blocking of fish migrations'.

Notes to Editors

The post-conflict assessment process began in the Sudan in late 2005 with field work carried out between January and August 2006. The team consisted of UNEP personnel and a large number of national and international experts.

The full report including pictures and other resources can be found at <http://www.unep.org/sudan>

UNEP's Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch website is <http://postconflict.unep.ch>

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July 7, 2007

“Eco-Kosher Movement Aims To Heed Tradition, Conscience”

By Alan Cooperman

Washington Post Staff Writer

Saturday, July 7, 2007; A01

First she had to find an organic cattle farm near Washington. Then a shochet, a person trained in kosher slaughtering, who was willing to do a freelance job. Then a kosher butcher to carve the beef into various cuts and other families from her synagogue to share it.

All told, it took Devora Kimelman-Block of Silver Spring 10 months to obtain 450 pounds of meat that is local, grass-fed, organic and strictly kosher. Which is a lot of effort -- and a lot of meat -- for someone who keeps a kosher vegetarian household.

"Here I am, leading this meat thing, and we don't even eat meat in our house," she said.

The only way to make sense of Kimelman-Block's effort is to understand that she is part of a budding movement, sometimes called "eco-kosher," that combines traditional Jewish dietary laws with new concerns about industrial agriculture, global warming and fair treatment of workers. Eco-kosher, in turn, is part of the greening of American religion -- the rapid infusion of environmental issues into the mainstream of religious life.

Notoriously drafty churches are insulating their ceilings and buying renewable energy through a ministry named Interfaith Power & Light. Synagogues are switching to compact fluorescent

light bulbs. The vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals drives a Toyota Prius, and more than 50 other evangelical Christian leaders have pledged to neutralize their "carbon footprints" through energy conservation.

But, for many people, the primary daily impact of rising environmental consciousness is on the food they eat. They want it to be produced locally, sustainably, organically and humanely. Increasingly, religious people view this as a religious obligation, not just a matter of good health or ethics. The trend is advancing particularly fast among Jews, who have a long tradition of investing food with religious meaning.

"I would no sooner bring eggs from caged, battery-farmed hens into my home than I would shrimp or pork," said Nigel S. Savage, who keeps a kosher household in New York. He edits a Web site, the Jew and the Carrot (<http://www.jcarrot.org>), that is devoted to what he calls "the new Jewish food movement."

Since going online in November, the Jew and the Carrot has vaulted from 300 hits a month to 300,000. But the most dramatic expansion of eco-kosher principles is likely to come in the next few years as Conservative rabbis and congregations, which occupy the middle ground between Orthodox and Reform Judaism, create a new ethical standard for food production.

The Conservative seal of approval will not be based on traditional kosher requirements, such as separating meat from dairy products, avoiding pork and shellfish, and slaughtering animals with a sharp knife across the throat.

Rather, the Conservative hechsher tzedek, Hebrew for "justice certification," will attest that a particular food was produced at a plant that meets ethical norms in six areas: fair wages and benefits, health and safety, training, corporate transparency, animal welfare, and environmental impact.

Rabbi Morris Allen of Mendota Heights, Minn., head of the committee drafting the rules, said he hopes to have enforceable standards in place by Rosh Hashanah, in September. Within a year after that, he said, the justice certification should begin to appear on packaged foods.

Allen emphasized that the hechsher tzedek is meant to supplement, rather than replace, traditional kosher certification. Still, the idea has stirred attacks from some Orthodox authorities, who contend that it will cause confusion about what is truly kosher.

"We're not trying to muscle ourselves into the business that others have developed" of certifying kosher foods, Allen said. "We do believe that most Jews, if given a choice between 'This item is kosher' and 'This item is kosher and also was produced by a company that respects its workers and the environment,' that most Jews will choose the latter."

Only about 15 percent of the nation's roughly 5.2 million Jews keep kosher. Yet their buying power, plus the appeal of kosher items to some other consumers, has resulted in a huge market. Kosher certification now appears on 100,000 food products, made by 10,500 companies, worth

\$225 billion a year, according to Menachem Lubinsky, editor of the trade publication *KosherToday*.

In consumer surveys, less than a quarter of the shoppers who deliberately choose kosher products are observant Jews, Lubinsky said. That statistic is not lost on Conservative rabbis, who acknowledge that their new certification could appeal to both Jews and non-Jews.

Kimelman-Block, who is married to a Conservative rabbi, recalled feeling ashamed after reading articles last year in the Jewish newspaper *the Forward* about the treatment of workers and cattle at a large kosher slaughterhouse in Iowa.

"I know that [the Iowa plant] is probably no worse than the other U.S. food processors, but they're doing it in the name of Judaism, in the name of holiness," she said. "That's the thing about kashrut -- it's supposed to be ethical, and it . . . has this dark side that either people don't know about, or if they know about, they think it's irrelevant."

Allen voiced similar feelings after he and other Conservative rabbis inspected the Agriprocessors plant in Postville, Iowa, in March 2006 and found labor practices that they suspect are also common in non-kosher plants.

"We found people arriving from the mountainsides of Guatemala on a Tuesday and being on the front of the production line on Wednesday," Allen said. "We saw people who could barely read Spanish getting training in English and having no idea what was said to them."

Agriprocessors says the allegations were false or overblown and have been resolved, and Orthodox inspectors have reiterated that the plant's output is strictly kosher. But Allen said his visit to the slaughterhouse changed his thinking.

"Having promoted kashrut for 21 years and made it a central part of my rabbinate, all of a sudden it made sense to me: How could I be satisfied if the ritual aspects of kashrut were being followed, but the way the workers were treated was degrading and contrary to Jewish ethical norms?" he asked.

As the movement catches on, the number of products certified as both kosher and organic is rising fast. *The Jew and the Carrot* Web site has spawned 10 community-supported agricultural cooperatives, in which Jews around the country have bought shares in local farmers' organic harvests.

One of them is Kimelman-Block's group of about 25 families at Tifereth Israel Congregation on 16th Street in Northwest Washington. Three years ago, they began obtaining fruits and vegetables from a farm in Brandywine. This year, they arranged for free-range kosher chickens and grass-fed kosher beef as well.

"I'm very interested in my children having a relationship with where their food comes from," said Kimelman-Block, 36, who has two daughters and a son, ages 2 to 7. "I just think it's an important

part of what I'm teaching them that we go out to this farm and we know the farmer and we help plant the potatoes and help pick the strawberries."

Since many eco-kosher Jews are reducing or eliminating meat from their diet, Kimelman-Block is faintly embarrassed to be moving in the other direction. But after 14 years of mostly vegetarian eating, with occasional fish for protein, she is excited about consuming small quantities of beef and chicken -- as long as she knows its origin.

"Environmental issues used to depress me. It was just bleak," she said. "Doing something makes me feel much more positive."

July 9, 2007

“Renowned monk calls for balanced lives”

By Manya A. Brachear
Tribune religion reporter

July 9, 2007

A renowned monk occasionally called upon by the Dalai Lama to channel the Tibetan oracle told an audience Sunday that living more balanced lives would reduce greenhouse gases and reverse rising temperatures that scientists call global warming.

Nearly 100 people fanned themselves in the sweltering Lake Street Church in Evanston as the Venerable Thupten Ngodup -- known by Tibetan Buddhists as Nechung Kuten -- explained how the effects of global warming can be seen most dramatically in his Himalayan homeland of Tibet, often called "the rooftop of the world."

There, he said, Chinese firms have cleared forests, drilled for minerals and diverted waterways, destroying natural treasures and driving some species to the brink of extinction. Such activities have also increased the level of heat-trapping carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, he said, and melted the thick white blanket that gives Tibet its nickname, "Land of Snows."

"Where Tibet was located, it was a prime location for keeping teachings alive and containing a certain energy for peace of the world," Ngodup told the audience through a translator. "What we kept peaceful and sacred for 1,000 years or more has really changed. Much advantage was taken of Tibet. ... Because of its high plateau, whatever happens here has an effect on Asia and the rest of the world.

"That along with pollution caused by everyone in the world, particularly larger countries, larger consumers in the world, the imprint left behind by exhaust and factories and greenhouse gases -- a lot affects the climate change we have today."

Ngodup, known as the medium of the State Oracle of Tibet, escaped Tibet with his family in the 1960s and became a monk in Dharamsala, India, at age 12. Eighteen years later, while chanting

at Nechung Monastery, he experienced a trancelike sensation that was reported to the 14th Dalai Lama, the spiritual and political leader of the Tibetan people in exile.

The Dalai Lama put Ngodup through tests and intensive training before concluding that the monk had been selected as a medium by Nechung, the deity of wisdom and chief protector of the dharma. In addition to being the Dalai Lama's medium, Ngodup was made a cabinet-level member of the Tibetan government in exile.

Ngodup does not travel to the U.S. often. This summer's 11-city tour, which includes stops in New York, San Francisco, Washington and Miami, marks the medium's first visit to the U.S. in more than a decade.

Ngodup's tour comes just two months after the Dalai Lama addressed a crowd of thousands at Millennium Park on topics of tolerance, forgiveness and the human desire for wealth. The Dalai Lama, whose worldly name is Tenzin Gyatso, fled Tibet in 1959 at the advice of the oracle after a Chinese invasion.

The medium's visit also comes at a time when religious leaders have become more vocal about environmental stewardship. Last month, seven religious leaders addressed the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. While all agreed that caring for the Earth should be a priority, not everyone agreed that humans are responsible for greenhouse gas emissions blamed for heating up the planet.

Ngodup said Buddhist scriptures foretold global warming centuries ago. Those scriptures predicted seven suns would rise, making it difficult for certain species to survive.

"It's symbolic," he said. "I believe it's referring to the intensity of the heat that will be affecting this planet."

Gretchen Neve of Chicago, a student of Tibetan Buddhism, said she had never known that the Dalai Lama relied on an oracle or medium. She also had never heard a religious leader address a scientific topic so authoritatively.

"It was an interesting wake-up call," she said.

Richard Tinajero, 47, of Evanston said leaders such as Ngodup fill the void left by government leaders who remain silent.

"I think you need people like him because politicians can't speak across borders," Tinajero said. "Any holy person who has something important to say, I think it's our responsibility to listen in order to make changes because we ourselves are vehicles to make change. Clearly the Earth is not in a good place."

“Vatican agrees to reforestation project in efforts to promote green awareness”

The Associated Press
Thursday, July 12, 2007

VATICAN CITY: The Vatican is pushing its green agenda, joining a reforestation project aimed at offsetting its CO2 emissions for this year, officials said Thursday.

The Vatican accepted a certificate from Hungarian-based firm Planktos/KlimaFa stating that the reforestation of a large area of the Bukk national park in Hungary would compensate for all its emissions this year.

"The amount of polluting emissions has been offset by the reforestation," Monsignor Melchor Sanchez de Toca, the undersecretary for the Pontifical Council of Culture, told The Associated Press. "To eliminate emissions, there are two ways: either you reduce them by renouncing the use of cars or heating systems, for example, or you do something good to compensate them, such as planting trees."

On July 5, representatives of the firm — which is dedicated to large-scale tree-planting in the EU — met with Cardinal Paul Poupard, head of the cultural office, to deliver the certificate, the firm said in a statement.

The company is planting the trees and the Vatican's acceptance of the move is purely symbolic.

"These are small initiatives that try to send a signal," Sanchez de Toca said. "We hope that other churches contribute with small gestures to spread the concern for the protection of the environment."

Just how much of the national park will undergo the reforestation project will be determined by this year's energy usage in the Vatican and its other emission reduction efforts, the statement said.

The reforestation project is part of a broader effort by the Vatican to go green.

Some of the Holy See buildings will start using solar energy next year, with photovoltaic cells to convert sunlight into electricity being placed on the roof of the Paul VI auditorium, which is used for the pontiff's general audiences.

Last summer, Pope Benedict XVI called on Christians to unite to take "care of creation without squandering its resources and (share) them in a convivial manner." He said lifestyle choices were damaging the environment and making "the lives of poor people on Earth especially unbearable."

The Vatican is also considering solar energy for other Holy See buildings, though historic landmarks like St. Peter's Basilica will not be touched.

July 14, 2007

Deseret Morning News, Saturday, July 14, 2007

“Caring for creation: Utah churches aim to lessen their impact on the Earth”

By Susan Whitney

Deseret Morning News

In England, it is against the law to disturb the roosting place of bats, even if they are living in the eaves of your church. Bats are endangered.

Of course, if your congregation is one of the more than 6,000 that have joined the nation's Wildlife Trust "Living Churchyards," you are proud when the bats choose your belfry. You are happy about all the mammals, insects, birds and wild grasses that flourish around your house of worship.

Nettles, too. You're glad for the nettles growing around the graves.

And lichen. English churchgoers seem proud of the lichen on walls and headstones. In British newspapers they talk reverently about how slowly lichen grows and how colorful it is. They would no more spray herbicide around their house of worship, these living churchyard folks, than they would dream of calling an exterminator for the bats.

In photos, the long-grass churchyards are lovely, like something out of Thomas Hardy. In practice, however, caring for God's green Earth is not without complications.

Snakes have been spotted in the tall weeds of the living churchyards — mostly grass snakes but occasionally an adder. Sometimes a human is found sleeping under the hedgerows. Tourists come searching for the graves of their ancestors, and a few have left angry notes about the upkeep, not realizing the grass is unmowed on purpose.

Then, too, the bat guano tends to accumulate, and the congregation may have a hard time finding someone to clean it up. So, yes, congregations have reached the point that they complain to the trust. Then the trust sends out a crew to relocate the bats.

Here in Utah, believers have their own methods of honoring God's creation. They work hard to save the Earth, some of them, even when it is complicated. Increasingly, they are talking to each other about what God wants and about what is possible. They are willing to listen when people of other faiths — or of no faith at all — seek to influence their decisions.

Elaine Emmi, a Quaker and head of Utah's Interfaith Roundtable, says global warming is mobilizing a religious response across the nation. She says believers have always cared about creation and some have even hired environmental lobbyists — but now they are coming together around one very specific question: "What can we do to reduce our carbon footprint?"

This fall, Emmi says, the Interfaith Roundtable will announce a new venture, Utah Interfaith Power and Light. The plan is to encourage every Utahn to make a pledge to lower energy use.

Their first event will include giving away compact fluorescent light bulbs. "If everyone in the state used them, we might not need to build new power plants," she says.

The Utah group will be loosely affiliated with the national Interfaith Power and Light group, which has sent a letter, signed by leaders of a dozen different faiths, calling for the president and Congress to take immediate action on global warming. Emmi acknowledges that a lot of Utahns probably do want some action from their government. However, she says, she is committed to keeping the Utah Interfaith effort free from partisan politics. They'll focus on things like making buildings more energy-efficient.

Emmi knows individual churches are already working through their larger denominations on energy efficiency and recycling and a variety of projects. (For instance, according to church spokesman Scott Trotter, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has partnered with Rocky Mountain Power on a conservation program that has resulted in big energy savings. The lighting in the Church Office Building has just been updated and the more efficient lamps and ballast consume 50 percent less energy than the old lighting did.)

Emmi believes the Interfaith Power and Light can help Utah's various denominations to inspire each other. And she credits Holladay United Church of Christ and First Unitarian Church for inspiring her.

At First Unitarian, for example, Joan Gregory coordinates the environmental ministry. Over the years, the Unitarians have tried a dozen approaches, from teaching classes on voluntary simplicity to setting up a table on Sundays where worshippers can drop by to learn more about carbon offsetting.

"We have to do something more than just wash our cups," Gregory says, referring to the fact that they avoid Styrofoam.

As for her Quaker congregation, Emmi says they've spent months studying about their impact on the Earth. They are considering going solar. For one thing, solar panels might encourage others, Emmi says. "If a congregation of only 40 people can do this ... "

Of course, Emmi adds, they know their 100-year-old building needs storm windows and weather-stripping. "Solar is sexy," she says. But the congregation might not have enough money to do everything they'd like.

The new offices of the Episcopal Diocese of Utah, currently under construction on 100 South, may well be the best local example of an energy-efficient church building.

Steve Hutchinson says the diocese has constructed and remodeled a number of buildings lately, learning more about green construction as they go. (Their new church in Price is insulated to a value of R44, for example.)

The diocese offices will save 40 percent on heating and air-conditioning costs, due to an innovative system of wells that will tap groundwater, circulate it, then return it to the earth. Of

course this new system was expensive, costing \$160,000, and the diocese won't make up the initial outlay for a decade.

So the decisions about energy efficiency are made carefully and always prayerfully, Hutchinson says. However, he says, "our denomination, from the national church through the diocese, has been committed to the environment for a long time."

A few weeks ago, through their connections with the Interfaith Roundtable, employees of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance found themselves at a dinner hosted by the LDS Church at the Joseph Smith Memorial Building. Deeda Seed, SUWA development manager, thought hard about what she, "not a religious person," was going to say over the food.

She knew she'd be dining with Catholic nuns, several Protestant pastors and a number of LDS faithful — all of whom might expect some sort of blessing. In the end, Seed said, "I give thanks to the forces of nature and the universe, which I barely understand, but which somehow have the capacity for bringing people together to talk peacefully and energetically."

During the dinner discussion, Seed says, "we asked people to speak from the heart." As they did, taking turns talking about how much Utah's wild lands have meant to them, Seed says she heard her love of the land echoed around the room. She got teary. Others did, too, she says.

After the dinner, SUWA published a list of areas of agreement, including, "Wilderness connects us to something larger than ourselves." Not everyone may call it God, this "larger" connection. However, the shared experience of something larger through nature, Seed says, "allows us to come together in a profound way."

George Handley, professor of humanities at Brigham Young University, went to the SUWA dinner. Handley teaches environmental literature courses and says today's college students care much more deeply about the Earth than his students did 10 years ago.

He doesn't claim to be an expert, but Handley says as he grew more interested in ecology, he became more aware of the points in Mormon doctrine that reflect on creation.

For example, there is the doctrine that says God created the world spiritually before he created it physically. And every church president since Joseph Smith has had something to say about stewardship of land and animals, Handley adds. He'll give a public talk about religion and the environment next Saturday. (See related link at top.)

Caring about the Earth can cause huge ethical dilemmas, notes Elise Lazar, who also came to the SUWA dinner. This is her current painful dilemma: How do you love your neighbor who is building a house that you believe is too big?

Lazar describes herself as culturally Jewish, not as a practitioner of the religion. Still, when she read about tikkun olam, she connected with her religious heritage in a new way, she says.

Tikkun olam is explained, in Jewish religious thought, as the belief that as the world was created, the earthen vessel on which we live was unable to contain all of God's light. It is our duty, as his people, to keep working toward the world's perfection.

Last Christmas, Lazar gave out compact fluorescent light bulbs, including leaders of the LDS Church on her gift list. Along with the bulbs, she wrote a letter explaining the concept of tikkun olam.

In a similar way, E.O. Wilson sought to educate when he was in Utah last February. The Pulitzer Prize-winning biologist was raised as a Baptist. He no longer believes in God, but he knows how to talk to those who value creation as God's handiwork.

So he travels the country speaking about the shared values of science and faith. When he came to Utah, he met with LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley.

Wilson's latest book, "The Creation," has been well received. But a small minority of reviewers thought it sounded condescending, were troubled by the way a nonbeliever like Wilson presumes to tell believers what their faith requires.

In person, though, Wilson's earnestness is evident. His specialty is insects, and he is passionate about the miracle of small details. He longs to preserve every vacant lot and field, every tangle of sunbaked weeds.

Meanwhile, the closest thing the United States has to Great Britain's "Living Churchyards" is the National Wildlife Federation's "Churchyard Habitat" program. Roxanne Paul of the NFW reports only one church in the state has registered as a habitat church, Murray Park Church of Christ in Murray.

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On a weekday morning, if you drop by the the Murray Park church, you'll see no sign of humans. But you will see plenty of birds.

The church's official certification of habitat is posted in the window of the tidy-looking building. As for the grounds, well, the lawn has been mowed and the surrounding natural areas feature some xeriscaping-type grasses as well as some random weeds, which have obviously sprung up naturally.

The Murray church owns only a small piece of land. Statistically, this is a small amount of habitat.

Still, every tiny step is significant, Emmi says.

"I think you start with one thing," she says. If you start with energy-efficient light bulbs, then pretty soon every person in your congregation has switched to the bulbs at their homes, too. And then maybe they all start walking to church or carpooling. And maybe the next thing you know, they've stopped spraying for weeds.

Emmi says the Quakers try to avoid spraying for weeds by asking each member of the congregation to pull a weed on Sundays.

She sounds thoughtful as she notes that the yard around their meetinghouse is starting to look a little ratty.

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July 22, 2007

“Flocks going green for God”

Many congregations building with the environment in mind.

By Asher Price

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Sunday, July 22, 2007

To explain her church's decision to build its new sanctuary using recycled drywall and paints that are less toxic than conventional types, the Rev. Tina Carter points to a passage in Genesis in which God promises Noah that he will look after all creatures.

Since 2001, her growing United Methodist congregation, called the Rock, had gathered at Running Brushy Middle School in Cedar Park, but in late May, it moved into its own 10,000-square-foot church on West New Hope Drive nearby.

This weekend, church members will construct a playground, but they will eschew rubberized flooring in favor of a natural surface: the ground. The church is also designed to have a rainwater collection system through which water can be reused for gardening.

"God is so not kidding about caring about not just the bipeds," Carter said. "And if God cares, we should care."

For years, environmentalism has been preached from the pulpit as a form of Christian stewardship. Now, a growing number of Central Texas churches are turning those teachings into action by going green as they expand to accommodate growing congregations.

In San Marcos, St. Mark's Episcopal Church has bought land for a new church and is weighing options for green construction, including solar panels, rainwater collection systems and concrete floors that would help keep it cool.

"We're supposed to take care of the Earth, not just take what we can get from it," said Larry Hanson, chairman of the church's building committee.

The Episcopal Diocese of West Texas, which includes parts of Central Texas, has set up a Web site explaining how churches can build in environmentally sensitive ways.

The Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit in Dripping Springs recently completed a church that has double-paned, tinted glass — "70 percent of the time, we don't even have to turn on a light," said the Rev. Nancy Coon — and a zoned heating and air-conditioning system so the church can heat or cool only the areas that are occupied.

Churches in other parts of the state are also joining the green push. Last year, the 26,000-member Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano hired a consulting company to help it cut energy use. The executive pastor, Mike Buster, said the decision was influenced by a passage in the Gospel of John in which Jesus tells his disciples to "let nothing be wasted." In the past year, the church has saved about \$1 million in utility bills, Buster said.

The Christian Life Commission, the policy arm of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, recently set up a "Creation Care" project to inform churches about environmental stewardship.

But churches often operate on tight budgets and have to weigh the cost of eco-friendly construction against basics such as Bibles. In the short run, going green can be costly, and some churches have had to balance their environmental convictions with economic realities.

St. James' Episcopal Church, which is finishing a new building in East Austin, has put its rainwater collection system on hold and scrapped a high-tech heating and cooling system because it would cost three times as much as a conventional system, said Amy Bramwell, a project manager at Steinbomer and Associates, the architectural firm handling construction.

"It's a bigger investment upfront, but you get the payback over 10 or 15 years," she said.

The congregation did preserve most of the trees on its new site and is reusing bricks from its old church near Huston-Tillotson University.

"We want to be as green as we can be and not break the bank," said Ora Houston, a member of the church's building committee.

Although churches' tax-exempt status means they aren't always eligible to get the tax benefits that businesses receive from green construction, some cities and states offer rebates for using green construction materials, said Bob Adams, a consultant with North Carolina church building company J.H. Batten.

Austin Energy and Austin's water utility offer customers rebate programs for actions including adding insulation and installing a rainwater collection system. Some private Texas utilities also offer incentives.

Adams said much of the energy behind greener churches is coming from congregations, rather than pulpits. More church members are seeing their employers pursue green construction, he said, and "they come back to their churches and say, 'What are we going to do?'"

In Cedar Park, Carter said congregation members are struggling with how to be environmentalists all seven days of the week.

"We're a suburban community. Most people are driving to church, and they absolutely grapple with it the rest of the week," Carter said. "In one of my sermons, I said if we're going to live faithfully, for more than our own convenience, we have to look at what kinds of cars we're driving. I talked about SUVs. That got some people angry, but no one left over it."

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July 25, 2007

Listen to Earth, Pope Says in Environmental Plea

LORENZAGO DI CADORE, Italy - Pope Benedict said the human race must listen to "the voice of the Earth" or risk destroying its very existence.

The Pope, speaking as he was concluding his holiday in northern Italy, also said that while there is much scientific proof to support evolution, the theory could not exclude a role by God.

"We all see that today man can destroy the foundation of his existence, his Earth," he said in a closed door meeting with 400 priests on Tuesday. A full transcript of the two-hour event was issued on Wednesday.

The setting of the appeal was appropriate. Benedict is wrapping up a three-week private holiday in the majestic mountains of northern Italy where residents are alarmed by the prospect of climate change that can alter their way of life.

"We cannot simply do what we want with this Earth of ours, with what has been entrusted to us," said the Pope, who has been spending his time reading and walking in the scenic landscape bordering Austria.

World religions have shown a growing interest in the environment, particularly the ramifications of climate change.

The Pope, leader of some 1.1 billion Roman Catholics worldwide, said: "We must respect the interior laws of creation, of this Earth, to learn these laws and obey them if we want to survive."

"This obedience to the voice of the Earth is more important for our future happiness ... than the desires of the moment. Our Earth is talking to us and we must listen to it and decipher its message if we want to survive," he said.

Last April the Vatican sponsored a scientific conference on climate change to underscore the role that religious leaders around the world could play in reminding people that wilfully damaging the environment is sinful.

THEORY OF EVOLUTION

In his talk with the priests, the Pope spoke of the current debate raging in some countries, particularly the United States and his native Germany, between creationism and evolution.

"They are presented as alternatives that exclude each other," the Pope said. "This clash is an absurdity because on one hand there is much scientific proof in favour of evolution, which appears as a reality that we must see and which enriches our understanding of life and being as such."

But he said evolution did not answer all the questions. "Above all it does not answer the great philosophical question 'where does everything come from?'"

Story by Philip Pullella

Story Date: 26/7/2007

15 Green Religious Leaders

24 Jul 2007

These men and women represent many different religions, but they're all spreading the eco-gospel. Read about them, then tell us which spiritual leaders have inspired you to greener heights in the comments section at the bottom of the page.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I

"Crime against the natural world is a sin," says Bartholomew I, leader of more than 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide. "The Green Patriarch" has thrown his weight behind various international environmental causes, and urges leaders of other faiths to raise environmental awareness among their believers. The winner of both the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal and the Sophie Prize for leadership in environmental protection and sustainable development, Bartholomew I takes his "fisher of men" duty seriously: In 2003, he brought together 200 scientists, political leaders, and journalists on a cruise ship in the Baltic Sea to discuss marine preservation and the hazards of overfishing. "To protect the oceans is to do God's work," he says. "To harm them, even if we are ignorant of the harm we cause, is to diminish His divine creation."

The Dalai Lama

The 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet has been talking up environmental protection since he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. He has said that he considers environmental issues to be among the key challenges facing humanity today -- and as an exile whose homeland is under occupation, he's a man who knows challenges. The U.K. Environment Agency named him one of the top 100 green campaigners of all time last year. This year, the Dalai Lama is offsetting emissions

generated by his world tour, and at many of the stops he's stressing the importance of kindness to the planet. He has been outspoken about protecting forests and wildlife and controlling the spread of nuclear power. He calls a clean environment a basic human right, and declares, "It is therefore part of our responsibility towards others to ensure that the world we pass on is as healthy, if not healthier, than we found it."

Rev. Sally Bingham

Sally Bingham -- an Episcopal priest and the environmental minister at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, Calif. -- brings light to congregations in more ways than one. Via the Interfaith Power & Light campaign, she's been a leader in encouraging religious groups to purchase green power and conserve energy by, among other things, replacing old-style light bulbs with compact fluorescents. The Regeneration Project, which she heads, recently united leaders from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish faith groups to ask the U.S. Congress and the White House to act on global warming. Bingham previously served on the board of Environmental Defense and San Francisco's Commission on the Environment, and has earned many accolades for her work, including the Green Power Leadership Pilot Award and the 2002 Energy Globe Award.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams

Use organic bread and wine for Holy Communion. Sell fairly traded products at church events. Carpool. Recycle. All of these were among the recommendations of Rowan Williams, senior clergyman of the Church of England, in "Sharing God's Planet," his 2005 report to the General Synod meeting. Williams says Christians have a moral duty to practice "sustainable consumption" and "celebrate and care for every part of God's creation." He launched a church-wide national environmental campaign, and, most recently, endorsed a booklet encouraging Christians to play their part in protecting the environment: "How Many Lightbulbs Does it Take to Change a Christian?"

Richard Cizik

As vice president of governmental affairs for the U.S. National Association of Evangelicals, Richard Cizik uses his significant political sway to raise awareness about climate change and other environmental maladies. Evangelicals should "return to being people known for our love and care of the earth and our fellow human beings," says Cizik, who travels the U.S. spreading the doctrine of "creation care," a Bible-based understanding of why Christians have a duty to be environmental stewards. He's faced criticism from other evangelicals for stealing attention away from homosexuality and abortion, but Cizik remains steadfast in his earth evangelizing. "There are still plenty who wonder, does advocating this agenda mean we have to become liberal weirdos?" he says. "And I say to them, certainly not. It's in the scripture. Read the Bible."

Pope Benedict XVI

In addition to using an electric Popemobile on the grounds of solar-power-friendly Vatican City, Pope Benedict XVI has been increasingly vocal about the suffering that climate change will cause for the world's poor. "The world is not something indifferent, raw material to be utilized

simply as we see fit," he has said. "Rather, it is part of God's good plan." He has said that humans must listen to "the voice of the earth," supported the celebration of a "day for the safeguarding of Creation," spoken out on the need to protect the Amazon, and denounced factory farming. In his recent *Sacramentum Caritatis*, he endorsed the need for environmental stewardship guided by Catholic faith: "The justified concern about threats to the environment present in so many parts of the world is reinforced by Christian hope, which commits us to working responsibly for the protection of Creation."

Fazlun Khalid

Founder and director of the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences in Birmingham, U.K., Fazlun Khalid is recognized as the foremost expert on ecology from the Islamic perspective. He has also worked as the director of training at the Alliance of Religions and Conservation and served as a consultant for World Wildlife Fund. Khalid believes that protecting the environment is a form of worship, and that humans have a basic right to the benefits of a healthy planet. "As the guardians of Allah's creation we have a responsibility to protect the environment," he says.

Norman Habel

Norman Habel is the editor and a contributing author of the *Earth Bible*, a Biblical interpretation that incorporates ecology, eco-ethics, and eco-theology. A professor at the School of Theology at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, Habel's work centers on eco-justice and reconciliation. He serves as coordinator for Season of Creation, an initiative that asks Australia's Lutheran churches to devote a month each year to celebrating creation, much as they celebrate Advent or Lent. "Many people would say it's a kind of New Age movement in many ways, and that Greenies are a little bit loony in many ways," says Habel. "But it's very clear now that more and more people see the crisis of the earth and the crisis for our planet as being something that we all have to face. It's not something that we can ignore."

Rabbi Warren Stone

As rabbi of Temple Emanuel in Kensington, Md., Warren Stone has brought a religious element to discussions of the environment and politics in the Washington, D.C., metro area since 1988. Stone has long been active in efforts to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and combat climate change, and he is founder and chair of the Central Conference of American Rabbis' Committee on the Environment, co-chair of the Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation, and member of the Carbonfund advisory board. In 1997, the self-declared "environmentalist rabbi" was a United Nations delegate at the U.N. Conference on Climate Change in Kyoto, Japan, where the Kyoto Protocol was forged.

Sister Miriam MacGillis

So a Roman Catholic nun founds a farm in New Jersey. No, it's not a joke -- it's Miriam MacGillis, a Dominican Sister on a mission to save the planet. MacGillis is co-founder of the 226-acre Genesis Farm, a "learning center for earth studies" where "all people of goodwill" are welcomed to learn about and share a love for the earth by working the land. For nearly three

decades, this "green nun" has taught impoverished youth from urban areas about organic agriculture, earth literacy, and heritage seed preservation. The farm partnered with other local groups to start the Foodshed Alliance, a grassroots effort to sustain farmers, agricultural lands, and the rural way of life in their region. In 2005, MacGillis received the Thomas Berry Foundation Award for her work.

Rev. Fred Small

Fred Small doesn't merely preach about the sanctity of creation: he has protested at SUV dealerships, demonstrated at the United Nations, and gotten himself arrested outside a U.S. Department of Energy building for nonviolent civil disobedience on behalf of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. A minister at First Church Unitarian in Littleton, Mass., and co-founder of Religious Witness for the Earth, Small believes faith groups need to do more to respond to environmental crises. He recently served as a lead organizer of a nine-day, 85-mile Interfaith Walk for Climate Rescue, during which more than 800 walkers called on the U.S. government to reduce globe-warming emissions 80 percent by 2050. "Living as we do, we are stealing from our children and grandchildren," says Small. "It's unconscionable."

Rev. Joel Hunter

As a megachurch pastor in Longwood, Fla., and a board member of the National Association of Evangelicals, Joel Hunter might seem an unlikely candidate to spearhead a movement of religious-based environmental stewardship -- but that's exactly what he's doing. He was one of 86 evangelical Christian leaders to sign on to last year's Evangelical Climate Initiative. Last fall, he was selected as the next leader of the Christian Coalition of America, but declined because of disagreements over whether the group's priorities should be expanded to include global warming and poverty. "With God's help, we can stop global warming, for our kids, our world, and for the Lord," says Hunter, who recently was part of a coalition of more than 20 major religious groups urging the U.S. Congress and the Bush administration to take action on climate change.

Karen Baker-Fletcher

Eco-justice theologian Karen Baker-Fletcher interprets the Bible from an environmental, African-American, and womanist perspective. In her book *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit: Womanist Wordings on God and Creation*, she celebrates both traditional nature and urban nature as part of God's creation. "We are responsible for giving life back to that which has given us life -- God and the elements of our planet," she writes. Baker-Fletcher is associate professor of theology at the Perkins School of Theology of Southern Methodist University, and was keynote speaker at this year's Interfaith Creation Festival, co-sponsored by Earth Ministry.

Paul Gorman

Paul Gorman is co-founder and executive director of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, which brings a variety of American faith groups together with the goal of "caring for all creation." The partnership has reached well over 150,000 congregations, including every Catholic parish, tens of thousands of synagogues, and Protestant, Evangelical, and Eastern

Orthodox churches. Gorman, who also serves on the board of trustees for the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, received the 1999 Heinz Award for the Environment for his work in bridging religion, spirituality, activism, and social justice.

Father Thomas Berry

Raised in the hills of North Carolina in a family of 15, Thomas Berry entered a monastery at the age of 20 and later went on to a prodigious career as a spiritual leader, academic, and historian of the earth. An ordained Catholic priest who attests that the environmental crisis is fundamentally a spiritual crisis, the 93-year-old Berry is widely regarded as the most important eco-theologian of our time -- or, as he describes himself, an "Earth scholar" or "geologian." He spent 25 years as the director of the Riverdale Center of Religious Research in New York City, and became a well-regarded lecturer on the intersection of culture and ecology. "The destiny of humans cannot be separated from the destiny of earth," writes this widely published author, who has covered subjects including Buddhism, the religions of India, and the cosmos.

Runners-up

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

In a recent address to mark World Environment Day, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu asserted that world leaders who continued to ignore climate change were violating the rights of future generations. "We must act now and wake up to our moral obligations. Ignoring global warming is a sin, and the future of our beautiful planet is in our hands," said the South African Anglican cleric, a leader of the anti-apartheid movement, winner of the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize, and now an anti-AIDS activist. His commitment to human rights feeds his concern about global warming, as he notes that the poor will suffer most from the droughts, floods, and other ravages of climate change.

Calvin DeWitt

For more than 25 years, Calvin DeWitt combined his passions for biology and Christianity as director of the Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies, an academic institution that promotes Christian environmental stewardship. DeWitt, who teaches environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, is also co-founder of the International Evangelical Environmental Network and former president of the Christian Environmental Council. "The Bible is an ecological handbook," DeWitt says. "I shock some of these evangelical congregations by saying Jesus almost always taught on field trips. They're thinking of him all dressed up and standing behind a pulpit in the church. Jesus was earthy."

Sallie McFague

Theologian Sallie McFague spent 30 years teaching at Vanderbilt University's Divinity School, where she united Christian theology with economics and ecology. Her many writings on the subject have included the books *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* and *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature*. Her work espouses an ecological liberation theology and contends that humanity should glorify God by taking care of the earth. "The planetary agenda, the well-being of the whole, is the context within which theology should operate," writes McFague.

Rev. Jim Ball

As leader of the influential "What Would Jesus Drive?" campaign and a signatory to the Evangelical Climate Initiative, Rev. Jim Ball has been an active player in both public policy debates and on-the-ground social change. He's president of the Evangelical Environmental Network, a coalition of faith-based communities that believe many environmental problems are fundamentally spiritual problems. Previously, Ball served as climate-change policy coordinator for the Union of Concerned Scientists, and wrote the book *Planting a Tree This Afternoon: Global Warming, Public Theology, and Public Policy*.

Allen Johnson

As the head of Christians for the Mountains, Allen Johnson rallies Christians against mountaintop-removal mining in the Appalachian Mountains. Johnson says his religious and environmental epiphany occurred while volunteering in Haiti in the early 1990s, and led him to quit his job to attend seminary. "We believe that God made this planet, that God loves the earth, God loves creation, God loves humanity, and that even though God gives us freedom to spin our destiny, God doesn't want it to be trashed," says Johnson.

Did we skip over an inspiring green voice? Enlighten us in comments below.

From *Grist Magazine*.

August 2, 2007

UNEP Champions of the Earth 2008

Deadline for submission of nominations: 15 September 2007

The Award

A renaissance in environmental policy does not come in a vacuum. It emerges as a result of collective efforts of governments, civil society organizations and private business. It needs the long-term commitment and vision of men and women. It needs people who are and continue to be Champions of the Earth. Champions of the Earth is an international environment award established in 2004. It is presented each year by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to seven outstanding environmental leaders. No monetary award is attached to the prize.

Selection Criteria

UNEP invites nominations of individuals or groups who have made a significant and recognized contribution globally or regionally to the protection and sustainable management of the Earth's environment. Each Champion must have made an important impact at the policy level through their leadership, vision and creativity. Persons may nominate themselves or their own organization, or they may choose to nominate a third party who they believe should receive recognition. All nominations must be supported by a letter from three referees who are familiar

with the nominee's work. Candidates are judged by a senior UNEP panel with input from UNEP regional offices.

The Award Ceremony

The Champions of the Earth are invited to accept their award at an international ceremony which publicizes and encourages the worldwide replication of the achievements of the Champions. This special event will be held in Singapore in April 2008. Singapore is a natural choice for such a global event as it has become an inspiration for other nations striving to achieve the goal of sustainable development. The fact that Singapore is also a leading international events hub makes the country an ideal location to host Champions of the Earth.

Background on the Champions of the Earth award and all the laureates, including biographies and photographs, is available at <www.unep.org/champions> or from UNEP's Division of Communications and Public Information (DCPI) at <championsoftheearth@unep.org>. The nomination form is available at

http://www.unep.org/champions/Champions_Nomination_Form_2007.pdf

August 2, 2007

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“Sisters to the rescue: Springfield's Dominicans fight to end the lead poisoning tragedy in Peru”

By Amanda Robert

In a small city in the Andes Mountains, a father takes his 3-year-old daughter to the doctor. She's sluggish and behaving strangely. “Something's not right,” he thinks. He's shocked, but not surprised, when he hears the news: His child has a blood lead level of 58 micrograms per deciliter, more than five times the recommended limit set by the World Health Organization.

The father confronts the suspected source — his employer. They offer him two thousand soles — roughly \$700 — to keep quiet. Defeated, the father takes the money for his daughter's medical bills and returns home to his family.

Stories such as these travel between La Oroya, Peru, and Springfield and between the Dominican sisters in each city who have stepped forward to share them on behalf of those silenced by Doe Run Peru, the company whose metal smelter is accused of spewing lead and other life-threatening toxins into the soil, water, and air for the past decade.

According to a recent Saint Louis University study, more than 97 percent of the children in La Oroya have higher-than-normal levels of lead in their blood, often between 50 and 70 micrograms per deciliter. Levels above 10 micrograms are considered unsafe.

“Intertwined through all of this are the stories of the children of La Oroya and their illnesses, and that tugs at anyone’s heart,” says Sister Rose Marie Riley, prioress general of the Dominican Sisters of Springfield, “and for every one of those children there is a mother holding that child, saying, ‘What can I do?’ No family should have to be suffering that.”

The Dominican Sisters of Springfield have served in La Oroya for more than 40 years alongside natives of the city. In 2005, Springfield’s Dominican sisters joined Friends of La Oroya — an international organization initiated in Peru — and have since participated in a three-city delegation calling for an end to the lead poisoning and pollution.

“It was an issue that our sisters in Peru have been talking about and living with with the people for many years,” Sister Rose Marie says, “and so, in my position of leadership, a big part of it is walking with our sisters — wherever they are — which also means walking with their people.” Sister Mila Díaz Solano understands the plight of the La Oroyans. A native of La Oroya, she lived in the shadow of the smelter’s belching smokestacks.

Sister Mila recently returned to visit her family, still living in her childhood home, and again felt the invisible weight that burdens her people.

“When I am in La Oroya, I can feel the carbon monoxide,” she says while visiting Springfield on retreat. “It’s very hard to breathe.”

Doe Run Peru — an affiliate of the St. Louis-based Doe Run Resources Corp. — has run the La Oroya metallurgical complex since purchasing the smelter from the Peruvian government in 1997. Since then, the company reported recently, emissions of particulate matter and heavy metals, including lead, from the main stack of the smelter have fallen within government-set limits.

“There was a neglect on environmental issues by the company and Peruvian state-owned enterprise,” says Victor Andrés Belaúnde, manager of institutional affairs for Doe Run Peru. “We took over the facility in 1997, and for the first time in La Oroya we started to implement a number of environmental procedures to radically improve performance.”

But a new report from LABOR, a Peruvian nonprofit group, asserts that Doe Run’s data are incorrect. Instead, the organization says, its air-monitoring stations show that none of the company’s emissions is within government-set limits and that concentrations of arsenic and sulfur dioxide continue to increase.

Health officials say that exposure to toxic metals damages the nervous and reproductive systems and the kidneys. It leads to high blood pressure and anemia and interferes with metabolism of calcium and vitamin D. High levels of lead are especially harmful to young children and fetuses,

causing learning disabilities, behavioral problems, mental retardation, convulsions, coma, and even death.

Sister Mila moved away from the smelter city and its adverse conditions, but, she says, she cannot demand that her mother and brothers do the same. Like many others in La Oroya, her family does not want to leave a lifetime of memories behind.

“When I talk with my brother,” Sister Mila says, “he says, ‘This is our house; we built it together with Dad — I don’t want to leave.’ ”

Others stay in La Oroya because they have no choice; their livelihoods depend on their employment with Doe Run. Because Peru is impoverished, explains Sister Mila, finding jobs is often difficult, even for college graduates. When large companies such as Doe Run offer work, the desperate need to support spouses and children often overrides health concerns.

“The workers know the level of contamination; they know they are making themselves sick, but they have families and they need that job,” Sister Mila says. “It is very hard to say something against the company, because if they lose that job they don’t have anything to survive.”

Sister Adele Human also once lived in La Oroya, but now she resides in Lima. Like many of her Dominican sisters, she became committed to fighting for change after seeing too much sickness and death. Sister Adele says that many children are riddled with cancer and that she was shocked to hear that five women living in the same area each gave birth to a stillborn baby.

“The people at Doe Run would say, ‘It is connected but not connected to us,’ ” Sister Adele says. Many sisters say that Doe Run uses intimidation to keep La Oroyans from looking more closely at these connections. The company has threatened to close its doors and move elsewhere if its practices are questioned. Because the town’s survival depends on the smelter, they say, many residents pretend that the harmful health effects don’t exist.

“If you don’t believe there is a problem,” Sister Adele says, “you don’t believe there needs to be a cleanup.”

The Dominican Sisters of Springfield and of La Oroya joined forces in June with this mission in mind: to publicize the problem and to call on Doe Run to clean up its smelter. As part of the first interfaith delegation, comprising Catholic, Jewish, and Presbyterian leaders, the sisters met with executives from Doe Run Peru in Lima and then traveled to St. Louis and New York to discuss the need for corporate responsibility to Doe Run’s affiliate company and its parent company, Renco.

Other activist groups have attempted to use environmental or scientific tactics to plead with Doe Run, but this delegation called attention to ethical questions concerning the smelter. They asked that Renco’s chief executive, Ira Rennert — a devout Orthodox Jew and philanthropist — apply the same ethical principles by which he lives his personal life to the situation at the smelter and in La Oroya.

Sister Beth Murphy, a Springfield Dominican who, along with Sister Rose Marie, represented the congregation in St. Louis, says that Rennert could turn his “biggest public-relations nightmare” around if he would only agree to reduce emissions.

“He would be a hero in the environmental movement and would set the standards for mines not only in Peru but all over the world,” Murphy says. “It is puzzling to us why he wouldn’t want to do that.”

Murphy and the Dominican sisters want to make it clear that their mission is not to shut Doe Run Peru down but instead to call on the company’s officials to improve the health of ailing children, provide a cleaner environment for their families, and ensure medical attention for those in need.

“This not about closing down the smelter,” Murphy says. “This is not what we’re asking for. We believe jobs and good health can coexist in La Oroya.”

Sister Adele says that she feels that these messages were heard in Lima, where she represented the Dominican congregation. Delegates were provided with booklets detailing Doe Run Peru’s environmental actions and statistics of decreasing emissions, she says, and the meeting was cordial. She calls it a big step in the right direction.

“I think if they will take the time to sit around and listen and know the worries and questions that other people have,” Sister Adele says, “there can be progress made.”

The Dominican sisters visiting the American cities were not as well received. Sister Mila represented the sisters in New York City, where Rennert rejected the delegation. The success of the operation, says Sister Mila, instead came from the delegates’ opportunity to speak with journalists about La Oroya and its people.

Doe Run officials also refused to meet with the St. Louis delegation, but the Springfield Dominicans say that they were grateful for the chance to stand with their Peruvian sisters, especially during a visit to Doe Run’s smelter in Herculaneum, Mo., south of St. Louis. Murphy says that the delegates from Peru looked around, amazed, by the presence of grass and absence of black smoke. They were impressed, she says, because conditions in severely lead-polluted Herculaneum are so much better than those in La Oroya.

The Springfield Dominicans also saw the delegation as an opportunity to learn from their Peruvian counterparts.

“It’s just been a wonderful benefit for me to get to know them and to see, in a different way, what they’re dealing with every day in their ministry in Peru,” Murphy says. “That has been true not just for me but, ultimately, that’s a good thing for our community north and south.”

Despite the protests of the Dominicans and other activist groups, Belaúnde holds that Doe Run Peru has been working to clean up the toxins left by the smelter’s previous owners. He that says in early 2007 Doe Run Peru decided to increase its investment in environmental programs from

\$107 million to \$250 million to help improve the health of La Oroya's children and pregnant mothers.

"The health issues of La Oroya are very complex," Belaúnde says. "There is a facility that has been working here for 85 years, and during the first 75 years they followed no environmental procedures. We as a company are doing more than our fair part of what has to be done." Doe Run Peru also provided \$1 million to the Ministry of Health to create a program to address children's excessive blood lead levels. This program tracks the blood lead levels of affected children and pregnant mothers and buses children daily to a daycare facility, 10 miles outside La Oroya, where they receive nutritional and health assistance.

It is a model program that has already been successful in reducing blood lead levels, says Belaúnde.

He admits that more work needs to be done, though, and the Dominicans agree. "Doe Run is not responsible for all of the damage that has been done in the past and what they inherited," Murphy says, "but they are certainly responsible for remediating the situation — they do have some responsibility to try to help the people of La Oroya."

The Dominican Sisters of Springfield will continue to spread awareness on the local and national levels, Murphy says, to let Doe Run know that people are watching. She hopes that eventually Doe Run Peru will find a way to reduce the emissions as Doe Run did for the U.S. smelter. "There is a kind of environmental apartheid we practice, so if our lead and other metals can be smelted in a place where people are poor and don't have the power to fight the companies, it's OK," she says, "but it's not. Those families have the same hopes and dreams for their children as we have for ours here in Springfield."

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August 8, 2007

Warming Draws Evangelicals Into Environmentalist Fold

By Juliet Eilperin

Washington Post Staff Writer

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LONGWOOD, Fla. -- At 8 on a Saturday morning, just as the heat was permeating this sprawling Orlando suburb, Denise Kirsop donned a white plastic moon suit and began sorting through the trash produced by Northland Church.

She and several fellow parishioners picked apart the garbage to analyze exactly how much and what kind of waste their megachurch produces, looking for ways to reduce the congregation's contribution to global warming.

"I prayed about it, and God really revealed to me that I had a passion about creation," said Kirsop, who has since traded in her family's sport-utility vehicle for a hybrid Toyota Prius to

help cut her greenhouse gas emissions. "Anything that draws me closer to God -- and this does -- increases my faith and helps my work for God."

Her conversion to environmentalism is the result of a years-long international campaign by British bishops and leaders of major U.S. environmental groups to bridge a long-standing divide between global-warming activists and American evangelicals.

The emerging rapprochement is regarded by some as a sign of how dramatically U.S. public sentiment has shifted on global warming in recent years. It also has begun, in modest ways, to transform how the two groups define themselves.

"I did sense this is one of these issues where the church could take leadership, like with civil rights," said Northland's senior pastor, Joel C. Hunter. "It's a matter of who speaks for evangelicals: Is it a broad range of voices on a broad range of issues, or a narrow range of voices?"

Hunter has emerged among evangelicals as a pivotal advocate for cutting greenhouse gas emissions that scientists say are warming Earth's climate. A self-deprecating 59-year-old minister who can quote the "Baby Jesus" speech that Will Farrell delivered in the 2006 movie "Talladega Nights" as readily as he can the Bible, Hunter regularly preaches about climate change to 7,000 congregants in five Central Florida sites and to 3,000 more worshipers via the Internet. He even has met with lawmakers on Capitol Hill to talk about environmental issues.

While he remains in a distinct minority, and a number of others on the Christian right disparage his efforts, Hunter and others like him have begun to reshape the politics around climate change.

Reaching Across the Ocean

Hunter came to the cause not on his own but rather through a six-year effort by British religious leaders to mobilize their U.S. counterparts on the issue.

"The United States is absolutely key to the question of climate change," said Sir John T. Houghton, a British atmospheric scientist and an evangelical. For nearly a decade, Houghton -- who said he has long sought to "put my science alongside my faith" -- worked to convince Hunter and other American evangelical leaders that their shared beliefs should compel them to focus on global warming.

In 2001, Houghton, a 75-year-old Welshman who has been honored twice by Queen Elizabeth II for his scientific work, walked the grounds of Windsor Castle with Calvin B. DeWitt, a professor of environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin. The two, later joined by the Bishop James Jones of Liverpool, England, started organizing conferences on both sides of the Atlantic to convince U.S. evangelicals that human-generated warming poses a threat to God's creation.

Not long after that, several prominent American environmental leaders and scientists decided that they, too, needed to win over that same group.

Peter A. Seligmann, chief executive of Conservation International, an Arlington-based nonprofit group that seeks to preserve terrestrial and marine biodiversity worldwide, asked himself what sector of society was best positioned to shift U.S. climate policy: "What bloc of people has enormous influence, especially on the Republican Party? That group of people is right-wing Christian evangelicals" -- who made up 24 percent of the U.S. electorate in the 2004 and 2006 elections.

So Seligmann set about wooing church leaders. At the suggestion of former NBC anchor Tom Brokaw and his wife, Meredith, who serves on his organization's board, Seligmann flew to Colorado Springs to discuss global warming with Ted Haggard, then president of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Haggard proved to be a willing partner until a scandal involving drugs and homosexual activity ended his public career. ("I bet on the wrong horse," Seligmann observed wryly.)

But Seligmann also made savvy choices, such as hiring Ben Campbell -- an evangelical who had worked on agricultural policy for Conservation International in the past -- to reach out to the religious right.

At the same time that Conservation International and other groups such as the Sierra Club were starting to strengthen their ties with religious groups, Houghton was making headway with Protestant leaders including Hunter and NAE lobbyist Richard Cizik.

Cizik -- another ebullient evangelical, who quips that "When I die, God isn't going to ask me 'Did I create the Earth in six days or five days?'" but "What did you do with what I gave you?" -- started lobbying other evangelicals to sign a statement on climate change. Jim Ball, a friend of both who heads the Evangelical Environmental Network, sent it to Hunter.

Hunter began researching the subject. Afterward he wondered, "How have I missed this?" He not only signed the statement but also filmed a national television ad on climate change, and by summer of 2006 he found himself at a Windsor Castle retreat with Houghton and Cizik, talking about global warming. There was a private session with Prince Charles and a tour of the organic garden at the prince's Highgrove estate, as well as intense conversations among the participants about how Genesis 2:15 calls upon Adam to "serve" and "keep" the Garden of Eden.

Hunter had joined the civil rights movement in college, but he became disillusioned with activism after the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. Global warming offered a chance to reconnect his faith to national politics.

King's death prompted "a crisis of faith," he recalled. He questioned whether politics could actually spur societal change. "What I realized was political systems are simply mechanisms of power," he said. Religious faith, on the other hand, could prompt people to change the way they lived their lives. Now he was doing both.

Seeking Reconciliation

Several eminent scientists also set out to repair the breach that had divided American faith leaders and scientists for nearly a century. Harvard University entomologist Edward O. Wilson,

who had grown up Southern Baptist but drifted away in college, decided that if he could win over the religious right, he might be able to convince Americans that their entire ecological heritage was in jeopardy.

"I was working off the 'New York effect': If you can make it in New York, you could make it anywhere," Wilson said. In the fall of 2006 he published "The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth," a short treatise in which the biologist makes his case for environmentalism in a series of letters to an imaginary pastor.

Last fall, Hunter and Wilson were among more than two dozen scientific and evangelical leaders who met secretly at a retreat in Thomasville, Ga., to draft a joint statement calling for immediate action on climate change. A month and a half later, they released a statement saying both camps "share a moral passion and sense of vocation to save the imperiled living world before our damages to it remake it as another kind of planet."

After the meeting, Hunter and Conservation International's Campbell drafted a tool kit titled "Creation Care: An Introduction for Busy Pastors" to send to evangelical leaders. Within a matter of months, they had produced a package of Bible passages and information on scientific findings to promote action on climate change.

Strong Push-Back

The "greening" of Hunter and others still elicits scorn from many evangelicals, including Focus on the Family's James Dobson and Prison Fellowship's Charles W. "Chuck" Colson. They question whether humankind really deserves the blame for Earth's recent warming and argue that their battles against abortion and same-sex marriage should take precedence.

Even some of Hunter's own congregants remain skeptical: Glenda Martinet refers to his sermons when she's urging her kids to stop wasting electricity, but her husband, Gary, notes that NASA scientists have detected warming on Mars. "Obviously they must have a bunch of SUVs running around there we can't spot," he joked as he walked into one of Hunter's Saturday-night services.

But the fledgling alliance has begun to reshape attitudes among some evangelical and environmental leaders. Hunter, who helped gather about 4,000 signatures during the 2006 election for an initiative opposing same-sex marriage, talks of moving beyond "below-the-belt issues" such as homosexuality and abortion. And Sierra Club Executive Director Carl Pope is reaching out to the 40 percent of Sierra Club members who are religiously observant.

"We don't have a Sierra Club prayer circle -- that's conceivable, but we don't have that yet," Pope said. But he noted: "It's the role of faith in our lives to help us act on something that is inconvenient and is, in some ways, abstract."

And Hunter, who knows that a handful of his congregants have left his church in response to his environmental activism, said that he is comfortable with the shifting direction of his religious mission. In November he turned down the presidency of the Christian Coalition after deciding that the group was not fully committed to fighting climate change and world poverty.

"There's something in me that really admired Gandhi -- these people who did what was right, no matter what it cost," he said.

Staff researcher Eddy Palanzo contributed to this report.

August 12, 2007

August 12, 2007

Resolved: Public Corporations Shall Take Us Seriously

By DASHKA SLATER

The ring tone on Sister Patricia Daly's cellphone is the "Hallelujah" chorus from Handel's "Messiah," which makes every call sound as if it's coming from God. On the particular May afternoon, however, David Henry, who handles investor relations for the ExxonMobil Corporation, was on the line. Henry wanted to know if Daly planned to attend the annual shareholder meeting later that month — a rhetorical question, really, since Daly had been at every one of them for the past 10 years. At each she posed roughly the same question: What is ExxonMobil, the world's largest publicly traded oil company, planning to do about global warming?

Daly's order, the Sisters of Saint Dominic of Caldwell, N.J., owns about 300 of the 5.5 billion Exxon Mobile shares outstanding, but she has used those few shares to keep the company talking about an issue that it would just as soon ignore. In a few weeks' time, the company's millions of shareholders would be able to vote on a resolution she wrote, which asked ExxonMobil to set a firm date for reporting on its progress to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions from both its operations and its products. The board opposed the resolution, as it did each and every one of the 20 resolutions related to climate change submitted over the past 10 years, but Henry wasn't calling to debate the issue. That had already been done, ad nauseam, in countless meetings and phone calls between representatives of the company and its dissident shareholders, and it would be done again at the annual meeting on May 30. This was a courtesy call.

Daly assured Henry that she would be there to present her resolution in person, and then she smiled at the phone and made small talk, first about Ford Motor Company's annual meeting, which she attended earlier that day, and then about the weather.

"Very pleasant," she remarked afterward. "We can laugh about a few things." Then her mouth turned downward in a gesture that managed to convey simultaneously humor, pathos and wry acceptance. "At one point he said, 'Well, global warming can't be going on because we just had an ice storm here in April,' " she related. "I mean, can we review that global warming means that the upper atmosphere is warming, which is creating really weird and severe climate incidents — like ice storms in Dallas in April?" She fell back in her chair, clutching her head in astonishment.

For a certain kind of shareholder, particularly a religious shareholder, ExxonMobil poses a quandary. By every conventional measure, it is an exemplary investment. The company made \$39.5 billion in profits in 2006, earnings that keep the value of its stock at around \$85 per share and make it the most profitable American corporation, with a market value that is larger than the

national budget of France. It is also the most technologically advanced of all the world's oil companies, and it has an admirable record of workplace safety and spill reduction.

But these days, corporations are increasingly judged not only by their quarterly earnings but also by their commitment to social and environmental values, and by governance standards like openness and accountability. By these standards, ExxonMobil is a mess. The company retains a reputation for environmental skullduggery that dates from the Exxon Valdez spill in 1989. Its skeptical stance on global warming has earned it the disapprobation of everyone from the Royal Society, Britain's premier scientific academy, to Senators Olympia Snowe and Jay Rockefeller. The company is known to be insular and hostile to the press (its representatives declined to be formally interviewed for this article), and its rumored and oft-denied participation in Dick Cheney's Energy Task Force did nothing to increase its popularity.

As a result, ExxonMobil has the dubious distinction of outperforming the competition in both the size of its shareholder dividends and the intensity of its shareholder discontent. This year, the company faced 15 separate shareholder resolutions — many more than most companies in the nation — on topics that include executive compensation and shareholder rights as well as global warming. For Daly, who has spent 30 years persuading companies like Dow, General Electric, Nestlé, Ford, Pepsi and General Motors to do things they didn't want to do, ExxonMobil is the great white whale of multinational corporations, unparalleled in size, power and elusiveness. "I've never worked with a company this long with so little progress," she says.

Daly, who is 51, is also the executive director of the TriState Coalition for Responsible Investment, a regional alliance of Roman Catholic investors who, like the Caldwell, N.J., Dominicans, are using the power of their pension funds to pressure companies to take action on issues as varied as genetically modified organisms and health care for employees with H.I.V. The eldest daughter of a mother who was a New York City schoolteacher and a father who worked in logistics for international freight, Daly didn't choose the religious life with the expectation that she would be spending her time crossing swords with corporate C.E.O.'s. But in 1977, while she was still a novice, she learned about attempts to unionize JP Stevens textile mills, a bitter decades-long struggle that would eventually be portrayed in the movie "Norma Rae." The Caldwell Dominicans happened to have JP Stevens stock in their retirement fund, and so Daly went to the annual meeting to tell company executives what she thought of their behavior. At the meeting, she discovered that there was a network of religious shareholders called the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility; it used the stocks in its members' portfolios to pressure companies to address issues like poverty, racism and the environment.

Daly returned to the convent thrilled to have discovered this new kind of social movement. "I said, 'There's a whole network here, shouldn't we be part of it?'" she recalls. "And they said, 'O.K., good, that's your job.'" In the years since, she has been involved in campaigns that confronted Nestlé over its infant formula and pressured G.E. to clean up PCBs in the Hudson River, among others.

Daly doesn't pick the investments for her convent's \$15 million retirement fund — that's done by its financial advisers, who are prohibited only from investing in the top 25 weapons manufacturers and the makers of abortifacient drugs and devices. Daly's job is to flag the

companies in the portfolio whose behavior, in her view, needs improving. “The Dominicans are an order of preachers,” she says. “I do it in boardrooms, and those kinds of inner arenas. It’s not always public preaching. But preaching is really the mission.”

Just about anyone who has owned a given company’s stock for at least a year can file a shareholder resolution. As of June 15, shareholders had filed 1,151 proxy resolutions with U.S. companies in 2007, 361 of them on social issues. These resolutions, which address issues like domestic-partner benefits and the disclosure of political contributions, represent a significant shift in the way that Americans think about the stocks they own and pose a direct challenge to the way corporations are used to operating. While shareholders are technically the owners of a company, corporate executives have tended to view them the way a symphony orchestra might view its subscribers. The last thing the symphony expects is for its concertgoers to start giving the oboist pointers on her technique, or to suggest that the conductor choose a different program of composers.

Yet that is exactly the sort of thing that has been happening at shareholder meetings nationwide, thanks to the fall of Enron, the rise of socially responsible investment funds, a new sense of mission on the part of institutional investors and an Internet-age impulse toward participatory democracy. At Citigroup’s annual meeting in April, for instance, Chairman Charles Prince listened patiently for nearly three hours while shareholders sounded off on subjects ranging from business strategy to tooth decay.

It’s fair to ask, of course, if shareholder activists are promoting interest-group politics or economic goals when they ask companies to take action on global warming. While environmentalists have long framed the issue in terms like “the health of the planet” or “the future of our children,” activists like Daly now talk about “risk” and “long-term profitability.” Their argument goes like this: climate change poses an enormous risk to nearly every sector of the economy. It is therefore prudent to plan for both its environmental impacts and the inevitable regulatory constraints that are coming.

Daly does have a vested interest in keeping ExxonMobil profitable — her own retirement depends on it. But her approach is undoubtedly a rhetorical strategy as much as a financial one; return on investment isn’t what keeps her on the phone with people like David Henry. “In any conversation with a company,” she admits, “it’s clear that I’m there because of a faith commitment.”

Yet global warming does seem to be an area in which social and fiscal concerns overlap. Recent reports by Goldman Sachs, Citigroup and Lehman Brothers have reinforced the notion that climate change has the potential to affect a company’s bottom line, and shareholder resolutions have been remarkably effective at getting companies to take global warming seriously. After the Connecticut state treasurer’s office filed three consecutive climate resolutions with American Electric Power, the nation’s single-largest producer of carbon dioxide, the company agreed in 2004 to study the impact on its operations of various carbon cap-and-trade proposals, whereby companies must either limit their carbon emissions or purchase emissions credits from other companies that pollute less. Today American Electric is one of the companies calling for mandatory carbon constraints. Other companies singled out by shareholder activists, like Home

Depot, Ford, Prudential, Cinergy, Chevron Texaco, Apache and ConocoPhillips, have variously agreed to disclose their greenhouse-gas emissions, study the impact of climate change on their businesses, invest in renewable energy sources or support a mandatory carbon cap.

The exception, as Daly notes, is ExxonMobil. For years the company denied that global climate change was occurring. According to a Greenpeace report in May, ExxonMobil funnels more than \$2 million a year to groups that dispute the reality of global warming. The company's current C.E.O., Rex Tillerson, made headlines in February when he admitted that the risks from climate change "could prove to be significant," but he continues to emphasize the uncertainty of the science. In May he said: "I know people like to boil it down to something very simple — the polar ice caps are melting, the planet is seven-tenths of a degree centigrade warmer. It's really not that simple of an equation." And while BP, Shell and ConocoPhillips have joined the United States Climate Action Partnership, which is lobbying for mandatory carbon limits, and are investing in renewable energy sources like wind, solar and biofuels, ExxonMobil remains coy about which, if any, carbon constraints it would support and has stated unequivocally that the company will not be putting money into renewables.

Whether the company's seeming indifference to the impact its emissions have on global climate change will affect its profitability remains to be seen, but a growing number of analysts suggest that it could. A recent Citigroup report, "Climactic Consequences: Investment Implications of a Changing Climate," noted that companies that "voluntarily adopt climate friendly policies ahead of competitors" might have an advantage over those that wait for regulation before they act. "One could argue," the report remarked parenthetically, that BP, "which has been focusing on climate issues for many years, and which regularly shows up at the top of surveys of 'climate-friendly' companies, is relatively well positioned, compared to ExxonMobil, which has funded pro-carbon advertisements."

That seems to be the concern of a growing number of shareholders. In 1997, when a Capuchin priest, the Rev. Michael Crosby, filed the first global-warming resolution at ExxonMobil, a mere 4.6 percent of the proxies were in favor of it. By 2005, a resolution asking the company to explain how it would meet greenhouse-gas-reduction targets in countries that had adopted the Kyoto Protocol garnered 28.4 percent of the vote.

Given Tillerson's wary admission of global warming's potential risk, and the business community's growing interest in the issue, shareholder activists were feeling cautiously optimistic about what might happen at this year's annual meeting. Daly, too, was thinking of changing her strategy.

"There was a gentleman, a retired man, who followed me out of the ExxonMobil meeting last year," she reflected. "He said: 'You know, Sister, I've been listening to you for a long time. We get the science, and we get the investment piece. You should be talking about their moral responsibility.'"

Daly looked out the window for a moment, as if the elderly shareholder might be lurking below, and the corners of her mouth ducked downward again. "I lost sleep over that comment," she continued. "I mean, I'm an investor. I know I get pay because I'm this nun, and there's a lot of

intrigue around that, but I'm no more interesting and far less qualified than a lot of other people I work with. And you know, I don't play the God card. But basically, he was saying, 'You should play the God card.' ”

ExxonMobil has been on the defensive about global warming long enough to have developed a highly nuanced statement of its position. At a press briefing on the issue that was held before the annual meeting, Ken Cohen, the vice president of public affairs, allowed that something definitely might be going on: “Is climate change a risk that should be taken seriously? The answer is yes . . . there is a risk that human activity is contributing to climate change.”

But while the dangers associated with climate change include catastrophic floods, hurricanes, drought and famine, there is little risk that gasoline will stop being a profitable commodity any time soon. That, from ExxonMobil's point of view, is all that matters. Between 2000 and 2030, ExxonMobil expects global energy demand to grow by 60 percent, driven largely by the developing world. Given that renewables are still in their infancy, Cohen argues that traditional fossil fuels are the only energy source that can meet that demand. By 2030, Exxon projects, fossil fuels will still be supplying about 80 percent of the world's energy needs.

ExxonMobil's projections are based on studies from reputable sources (the International Energy Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy), and the company has factored in slightly higher automotive efficiency standards — 30 miles to the gallon, rather than the current 27.5. But it's clear that when ExxonMobil executives look ahead to the next quarter century, they see a world that operates much as it did in the previous quarter century. Given ExxonMobil's profits over the past few years, that's a pretty comforting view, and one that doesn't encourage any radical change of course, no matter what people like Patricia Daly say. Climate change “is just another risk that we have to understand as best we can and respond to in a way that protects the shareholder value,” Tillerson would explain at the annual meeting. “So I don't think it introduces any greater or lesser threat than a whole host of other risks that we manage day to day and that have been part of this business for decades.”

The fact that a corporation can preoccupy itself with quantifying the financial risks of a global catastrophe while ignoring the human and environmental ones is what inspired a tall, courtly Boston Brahmin named Robert A. G. Monks to begin advancing the notion that shareholders use the power of their proxies to influence corporate behavior. Monks, who was a founding trustee of the Federal Employees Retirement System during Ronald Reagan's administration, responds to Tillerson like this: “The notion that a company that creates a problem is exempted from trying to find a solution to that problem is like being in the elephant business but not having anyone in charge of going behind the elephant and cleaning up after it.”

The son of an Episcopal clergyman, Monks has been a partner in a corporate law firm, a venture capitalist, a oil-and-gas-company executive and a director of 10 publicly held companies. He is, in other words, a consummate insider, or would be one, had he not happened to stop by the Androscoggin River in 1972 while campaigning — unsuccessfully, as it turned out — as a Republican candidate for a United States Senate seat in Maine. The surface of the river glistened with a six-foot layer of foam, the effluent of the nearby International Paper Company.

For Monks, the foam came to symbolize all that was wrong with the way the modern corporation functions in society: none of its owners feel responsible for its actions. The dispersal of ownership through millions of shares, he argues, is the institutional equivalent of the tragedy of the commons: each shareholder is happy to reap his share of the profits, but no one feels responsible for the behavior of the company as a whole. His solution has been to try to make corporate boards more accountable by encouraging them to have directors who are truly independent, rather than being the friends and associates of management. He has done this in a variety of ways — by writing books, by pressuring companies from within and by founding various corporate governance institutions, among them Institutional Shareholder Services and the Corporate Library. In 1991, he went so far as to run for the Sears board himself, a move that inspired Sears to spend \$5.5 million to defeat him.

Sears wasn't the first company whose board Monks nominated himself for — he also tried nominating himself for the Exxon board in 1987. The company didn't respond to his letter, and he chose not to pursue the matter. Yet as time went on, Monks came to believe that Exxon was “the symbol of a reality that nobody in the reformist area wanted to deal with” — a company that performed exceptionally well as a business and an investment yet failed to take responsibility for its greenhouse-gas emissions, which Monks sees as the 21st-century equivalent of foam on the river.

Monks's solution was to submit a resolution that would separate the positions of chairman and C.E.O., something that has been done at BP and Royal Dutch/Shell. Monks argues that an independent chairman would be able to raise questions about ExxonMobil's position in the world that will never otherwise be asked, much less answered, questions like, “Why is our company the one with the bull's-eye on its chest?” As it stands, he says: “The board is just there as the parsley on the fish. You're really talking about, when you have a combined chairman and C.E.O., a dictatorship.”

Monks has submitted his proposal six times, but it has gone before the shareholders only four times, having been thrown out the other two by the Securities and Exchange Commission. Nonetheless, it has gotten a greater percentage of the vote each time it has been on the proxy ballot, he says, up to about 35 percent last year.

Getting a majority of the vote is an enormous task, in part because the number of shareholders is so vast. About 2,000 institutional shareholders and 2.5 million individuals can vote. At ExxonMobil, about 85 percent of the shares are voted, which is slightly higher than average. That's a pretty good turnout compared with that of the last presidential election, when only about 64 percent of the nation's registered voters made it to the polls, but in most other ways, corporate democracy is far from democratic. Shareholder votes aren't binding. They are advisory, which means that boards are free to ignore them. Shareholders have even less say over the boards themselves — most directors are handpicked by management and run unopposed.

In truth, most shareholders have very little real power over a company's behavior. “What we have to do is throw gorilla dust,” Monks says. “When two gorillas get ready to fight, they throw dust at each other. I'm in the gorilla-dust business, and I'm in the gorilla-dust business not because I like it, but because it's the only game in town.”

Shareholder activists began arriving in Dallas on the afternoon of May 29, and by evening, they were sitting in the lobby of their hotel planning the next day's strategy. Daly was clearly delighted to be reunited with longtime colleagues in the struggle, including Michael Crosby, the Capuchin priest, and Tracey Rembert from the Service Employees International Union. As they settled into the hotel's brightly colored armchairs, they began telling stories of past meetings. The stories tended to star Lee Raymond, the former chief executive, who was openly hostile to any discussion about global warming. One year's meeting featured the Rev. Robert Sirico, whose Acton Institute was a regular recipient of ExxonMobil donations, testifying that Daly and Crosby were trying to overthrow the free-enterprise system. "I always had a headache leaving that meeting," Daly said. "You'd walk away and say, 'There's got to be another way.' "

This year was expected to be far more cordial. For one thing, Tillerson is more genial than his predecessor, and he impressed everyone with his politeness the previous year. In addition, it was clear that mainstream shareholders no longer see climate resolutions as recommendations from the company's lunatic fringe. To everyone's surprise, the three largest proxy advisory firms, I.S.S., Glass Lewis & Company and Proxy Governance, had all recommended that their clients vote in favor of Item 15, which was Daly's resolution. A number of state pension funds were on board, including Calpers, which owns 30 million shares, and Stanford University had announced that its endowment would be voting its proxies in favor of the resolution as well.

But Crosby reminded them of some bad news. ExxonMobil had changed the rules of engagement, reducing the amount of time for discussion of each resolution from 10 minutes to 3. That didn't leave much time for the shareholders to make their case.

"The only other company like this is Reynolds," sighed Crosby, who spends much of the proxy season battling Big Tobacco.

Rembert nodded. "I tell everyone, if you can survive this meeting, you can survive anything."

The shareholders began going over their arguments. They raised the question of whether the developing world was going to be as profligate with petroleum as the United States had been. They talked about how Detroit automakers lost their competitive advantage by banking on gas guzzlers and suggested that Exxon might find itself in a similar position. They discussed why ExxonMobil seemed intent on torpedoing its own reputation and speculated as to whether there really was any more cheap oil to be had.

The prospect of feverishly trying to cram several hours' worth of arguments into three minutes was deflating, particularly when most of the proxies had already been voted.

"They know, going into the meeting, what the vote is," Crosby said.

Daly, who was one of the few people in the room whose energy and humor hadn't flagged as the hour got later, explained that the real work of a shareholder activist happens before and after the proxy season, in meetings with company representatives. "This is the theater," she said.

Crosby nodded. “If you know the Catholic tradition, this is the liturgy,” he said. “It’s all happened before, but it’s worked out in ritual.”

Daly laughed. “You might have to change the homily,” she said.

It was precisely 9 o’ clock the next morning when Tillerson called the annual shareholder meeting to order. About 450 shareholders filled the seats of the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center concert hall. Many were retirees — elderly men in turquoise-encrusted bolo ties, elderly women in red wool suits. Tillerson stood behind a large, box-shaped lectern, an imposing man with thick eyebrows, a square jaw and a deep voice. He was, as predicted, polite throughout, but the new time limits made it difficult for the shareholders to say much of anything. Monks, Crosby and the others raced through their remarks, keeping one eye on the panel of green, yellow and red lights that governed the time.

The 11 members of board sat in the balcony, listening impassively. I wondered what they made of the shareholders who had spent so many hours trying to shape an argument that would persuade them, and so a few days later, I called a board member, Dr. Reatha Clark King, and asked her. “As a board member, I’m thinking, this group or this individual has invested their resources to show up, to ask their question or to make a point,” she told me. “I process the information eagerly, with the thought: What could I learn from this?”

Did that mean that board members were likely to be persuaded by shareholder arguments? King — who agreed to speak only in general terms about the job of a board member — said it wasn’t that simple. After 10 years on the board, she figured she knew more about the issues than the shareholders, and wasn’t her expertise the reason she’d been selected for the board in the first place? “You’re working to maximize shareholder value,” she said. “It’s very different from the political environment, where you are persuaded because you are afraid of being voted out by your constituents.” (King, like all the members of the ExxonMobil board, was nominated by the company and ran unopposed.)

And so the morning continued, in short bursts of truncated rhetoric that were received with polite silence. At last, Daly stood to introduce Item 15. She began, as she usually did, by talking about shareholder value. “We’re the most profitable company in the history of the planet, but what will be our long-term health when we are really faced with the regulatory and other challenges around global warming?” she asked. She praised the company’s resourcefulness and suggested that a company like ExxonMobil could achieve anything it wanted. Then she played the God card.

“I truly believe that every one of us has a very special vocation and we’re here on this planet for a reason,” she said. “We are now, this company and every single one of us, challenged by one of the most profound moral concerns. And we have the wherewithal to respond to that. We all want to be able to tell the children in our lives and have those children tell their grandchildren that we were part of the solution, not part of the real problem. . . . And that’s why we want to be able to have our company show us how we are responding to the true moral challenge, the great work for the future of this planet.”

Tillerson didn't respond at the time, other than to say that the board's reasons for recommending against the proposal were explained on Page 61 of the proxy statement. But at the post-meeting news conference, I asked him whether he agreed with Sister Daly's assertion that ExxonMobil had a moral responsibility to find a solution to global warming.

"We know that we have social and moral obligations as a corporate entity just as we all have personal social and moral obligations," he replied. "First and foremost our obligation, because of the business we have been in for more than a century, is to continue to provide reliable and affordable energy to the world to allow the world's economic growth to continue."

Tillerson is an intelligent man, and a fierce one, and for the last half-hour of the shareholder meeting he fielded a host of very pointed questions about ExxonMobil's stance on global warming and its refusal to invest in alternatives to fossil fuels.

He spoke as a man whose company excels at extracting oil from difficult and faraway places so that people can fill their gas tanks with it, and who continues to believe that this is a useful and necessary service.

"The world, like it or not, is going to have to live off fossil fuels for the foreseeable future," he said in response to a question from John Wilson of Christian Brothers Investment Services. "It's fine if people want to find ways to replace them. . . . We're not threatened by that at all. But we're not in that business. We're in the business of oil and natural gas. We're going to work on the things that we know how to do."

By now the votes had been counted, and the results were in. Robert Monks's plan for separating the positions of chairman and chief executive received 40 percent and Patricia Daly's greenhouse-gas-reduction proposal earned 31 percent of the ballots — about 1.4 billion shares. It was the largest number an ExxonMobil climate-change proposal had ever received.

Afterward, the shareholders went out for Mexican food, as they do every year. At the restaurant, Tracey Rembert of the Service Employees International put her laptop on the table and read aloud news stories about the meeting. They all hit two themes — ExxonMobil's staggering profits and the flak that the company was taking over global warming. Most portrayed the votes as a resounding defeat for shareholder activists, but the activists themselves saw victory in the fact that the resolutions made the news in the first place.

"The truth is, we've collectively stamped this problem on Lee Raymond and Rex Tillerson's obituary," gloated Kert Davies, research director for Greenpeace. "It's so embedded in how they're perceived, it's more than a P.R. problem, it's a liability."

"I found the board was listening more," John Wilson said. "Some of them were actually leaning forward."

In a few days the shareholders would begin strategizing again, drawing up a list of demands for a fall meeting with ExxonMobil officials. For now, they took pleasure in finding a few small indications that their message had been heard, if not by Tillerson, than perhaps by the board, or

at least the press. They had done better this year than last, and hopefully they would do even better next year.

At the far end of the table, Daly was already talking about the next shareholder meeting on her calendar — General Motors, the following week. To her mind, the day had been a success. “I always put it in the context of here’s a company that’s making oodles of money for their shareholders and everyone should be thrilled,” she said. “So to walk away with a third of the vote was just a remarkable win.”

Dashka Slater has written for Salon, Mother Jones and More, among other publications. She is also the author of “The Wishing Box,” a novel.

August 22, 2007

“Of church and steak: Farming for the soul”

By Joan Nathan

Wednesday, August 22, 2007

Howard, South Dakota:

Near a prairie dotted with cattle and green with soy beans, barley, corn and oats, two bearded Hasidic men dressed in black pray outside a slaughterhouse here that is managed by an evangelical Christian.

What brought these men together could easily have kept them apart: religion.

The two Hasidim oversee shehitah, the Jewish ritual slaughtering of meat according to the Book of Leviticus. The meat is then shipped to Wise Organic Pastures, a kosher food company in New York owned by Issac Wiesenfeld and his family. When Wiesenfeld sought an organic processor that used humane methods five years ago, he found Scott Lively, who was just beginning Dakota Beef, now one of the largest organic meat processors in the country.

Lively adheres to a diet he believes Jesus followed. Like Wiesenfeld, he says the Bible prescribes that he use organic methods to respect the earth, treat his workers decently and treat the cattle that enter his slaughterhouse as humanely as possible.

"We learn everything from the Old Testament," Lively said, "from keeping kosher to responsible capitalism."

Humane, sustainable practices like Lively's are articles of faith for many Americans concerned with the way food gets from farm to plate. But they are even more deeply held matters of faith for a growing number of farmers and religious groups. In the past few years protecting the environment has emerged as a religious issue. Now, something similar is taking place in the way people of faith view their daily bread.

Christians, Jews and Muslims who see food through a moral lens are increasingly organized and focused on showing their strength. The Religious Working Group on the Farm Bill, a national

coalition of more than a dozen religious organizations, is lobbying Congress for legislation to help small farms. The National Catholic Rural Life Conference is helping congregations and universities in the Midwest buy local produce from family farmers.

Environment-minded Jews are asking the leaders of Conservative Judaism to rewrite their kosher certification rules to incorporate ethical concerns about workers, animals and the land. Hazon, the Jewish environmental organization, has set up community-supported agriculture programs, or CSA's, in which customers purchase shares of a farm's harvest.

"This is the first time I have seen such a deep and growing involvement of the faith community," said Brother David Andrews, who is on sabbatical from his job as executive director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference and has followed these kinds of issues for 30 years.

If this nascent cause was taken up by large numbers of churches and synagogues, the economic effect alone could be profound. "The religious movement is a huge force," said Arlin S. Wasserman, the founder of Changing Tastes, a consulting firm in St. Paul that advises food companies and philanthropic organizations on trends in food and agriculture. "Already, religious institutions oversee the production of \$250 billion per year in food if you bundle together halal, kosher, and institutional buying.

"Religious leaders have been giving dietary advice for decades and centuries, telling us to eat fish on Friday or to keep kosher in your home. What we are seeing now are contemporary concerns like the fair treatment of farm workers, humane treatment of animals and respect for the environment being integrated into the dietary advice given by the churches."

Religious officials say agricultural issues seem to be particularly appealing to younger people.

"Food and the environment is the civil rights movement for people under the age of 40," said the Rev. John Wimberly, pastor of the Western Presbyterian Church in Washington.

The church recently helped restore a small farmers' market called the Fresh Farm Market at Foggy Bottom, using its facility to house tents, signs and carts. At the end of the day parishioners glean the food left at the market for their soup kitchen.

The ideas behind faith-based farming relate to the principles of several popular diet books that take inspiration from the Bible, like "Holy Cow! Does God Care About What We Eat?" by Hope Egan (First Fruits of Zion, 2005); "What Would Jesus Eat?" by Don Colbert (Thomas Nelson, 2002); and "The Maker's Diet," by Jordan S. Rubin (Siloam Press, 2004). All advocate a return to what they see as the healthy eating practices and humane livestock treatment described in the Bible.

Lively, who follows the Maker's diet, slaughters about 45 steer a day at Dakota Beef. Larger facilities will slaughter 2,000 or more.

"We take time to be sure the animal has been processed humanely," he said. "This is not only important for our humane handling standards, but it is also very much biblical in our minds."

The slaughterhouse weds ancient practices with modern insights and technology. Much of the plant was planned with the help of Temple Grandin, a designer of humane livestock facilities and professor of animal sciences at Colorado State University. She suggested changes like shielding the animals from humans milling about and nestling them in a comfortable head-holder as Tal Ginter, the shohet, or kosher slaughterer, wields the knife that slices their jugular vein, rather than first stunning the animals, as is a common commercial practice.

"It is not a horrible thing," said Ginter, who worked in the slaughterhouse until recently under the supervision of Crown Heights Kosher and the Orthodox Union. "It looks bloody, but according to the Bible and the Torah, you have to be mindful of the animal and let it die as fast as you can, to cause less pain."

Many of the ideas in the faith-based agriculture movement were expressed 30 years ago by advocates of eco-kashrut, a Jewish environmental consciousness movement. Jewish groups like Kosher Conscience in New York and blogs like the Jew & the Carrot (jcarrot.org), which is sponsored by Hazon, are still in the forefront. Two years ago the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, which has long been involved in agriculture issues, gave the Alliance for Jewish Renewal a two-year, \$200,000 grant to start the Sacred Foods Project, which developed ethical guides to food buying.

For some religious people, change starts from the ground up, beginning with the way they treat the land. Adnan Aldayel, a Saudi Arabian financial consultant living in New Rockford, North Dakota, runs what he believes is the nation's only organic halal producer, Dakota Halal. "We try to raise our animals the proper way, the right way," he said. "We are the custodians of the ground."

Environmentally sensitive farming has been taken up by at least 50 orders of nuns in the United States and Canada. Their number has increased about fivefold in the past decade, said Sarah McFarland Taylor, who recently published a book about this movement, "Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology" (Harvard University Press, 2007).

Among them is Sisters Hill Farm, a seven-acre organic farm in Stanfordville, New York, operated by the Sisters of Charity of New York. When they began working the land in 2000, it had not been cultivated since 1940. The sisters sell some of their vegetables at a stand on the farm and some through a CSA based at the College of Mount Saint Vincent in the New York.

"We decided to revive this farm so that the sisters could have a place to go to from the city to do something in a sustainable way to care for the earth," said Sister Mary Ann Garisto, director of ecological concerns for the Sisters of Charity.

For many who farm according to religious principles, the treatment of animals is a great concern. Catherine and Myron Horst of Dickerson, Maryland, wrote about the problem on their Bible study Web site, biblicalresearchreports.com, in an article called "Farming Based on the Word of the God."

"The secular corporate business world and the state universities have dismissed God from the farming picture," they wrote. The Horsts wanted to alter that picture when they took over a 38-acre farm seven years ago.

"We asked the Lord what we were to do with the farm," said Horst, a born-again Christian.

So he and his wife put their chickens out to pasture during the day, gather the eggs by hand, and move them back to shelters at night. It is far more work than keeping them cooped up or caged, but for the Horsts the Bible's promise of dominion "over every living thing" entails responsibilities as well as rights.

Faith-based farming can also mean taking responsibility for the hired hands. Roy Brubaker, a Mennonite who grows strawberries, blueberries and vegetables on his 20-acre farm near Mifflintown, Pennsylvania, said: "My faith tells me that workers should be fairly paid. I have never paid the minimum wage. That is not the biblical standard for a living wage."

Joel Salatin, who is considered a guru of organic agriculture, said he has seen a change in the people who visit his Polyface farm in Virginia.

"Ten years ago most of my farm visitors were earth muffin tree-hugger nirvana cosmic worshippers," Salatin said. "And now 80 percent of them are Christian home schoolers."

August 23, 2007

“Mining Banned After Monks Protest in Sacred Mountains”

Chinese authorities have banned mining on mountains sacred to Buddhists after monks protested that blasting was damaging ancient temples.

"We had to endure the almost deafening blasts, but the explosions can't be heard any more. The government measures are taking effect," said Abbot Shi Renfa of the Manjusri Monastery, in the Wutai Mountains.

The Wutai Mountains, the dwelling place of Manjusri Bodhisattva, the Buddha of Wisdom, are home to 47 temples dating back to the Eastern Han Dynasty (25 AD- 220 AD) and about 3,000 Buddhist monks and nuns.

Located in Xinzhou City, Shanxi Province, the mountains were listed as a national heritage site by the Ministry of Construction last July, and the government is seeking its listing as a United Nations World Heritage. The vote will take place in 2008.

But the sacred mountains are also home to rich iron ore deposits, and have been vigorously exploited by mining companies. About 10 mines have been set up in the area.

"The blasting to extract ore has cracked the walls, and ruined some of the frescoes. I used to worry greatly that they would also break the Buddha statuettes and the outdoor pagoda made of colored glaze," Shi said.

In June, the monks filed a joint letter to the provincial religious association, Shi said.

At the same time, domestic media started carrying reports that the Wutai -- "Five Peaks" -- mountains were being leveled by mining operations into the "Four Peaks".

The monks' letter prompted the provincial government to investigate. "We have to be resolute and take action to protect the Wutai mountains," said Zhang Baoshun, Party secretary of Shanxi.

In mid-August, the city and provincial governments announced they would close the three mines within the mountain range, and suspend operations of seven other mines in the outer regions.

Local forestry administrations also sent workers to plant trees and restore grass coverage on the mountains.

Qin Xinnian, vice mayor of Xinzhou, said the government was assessing compensation for the companies, and planning to transfer the operations of some mines to other sites.

"We are pleased that the government accepted our petition," said Miaojiang, head of the Wutai Mountains Buddhism Association.

"Banning mining will not only protect the environment, but also help the pure and sacred ambience of the mountains recover," he said.

(Xinhua News Agency August 24, 2007)

August 24, 2007

Young Environmentalists to Discuss How Technology Can Harness the Gifts of Nature
 Nairobi 24 August 2007 – More than 180 young people from 85 countries around the world will meet in Germany later this week to discuss ways in which technology can be used to promote environmental protection. 'Technology in service of the environment' is the theme of the third Tunza International Youth Conference, organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Leverkusen, Germany, from 26 to 30 August 2007.

These young people, aged 15 to 24, are all involved in environmental activities in their respective countries. They will meet at the headquarters of Bayer, the largest sponsor of UNEP's children and youth activities, and the host of the conference, to discuss the critical environmental issues of today, including climate change, clean development and renewable energy. The youth will participate in workshops and field trips to experience first-hand how technology and environment can go hand-in-hand.

The Tunza conference, which derives its name from a Kiswahili word meaning "to treat with care and affection" or "to nurture" will reinforce the links between a growing network of young people working with UNEP on various environmental issues.

"Our hope is that on the basis of discussions at this conference, 180 young people will return to their communities and nations and become beacons of activities and also motivators for many others to play a part in addressing environmental challenges," said Achim Steiner, the Executive Director of UNEP.

The participants will also participate in other activities, including the creation of the Tunza Globe and a performance on contemporary environmental issues, as well as a tree planting event in support of UNEP's Billion Tree Campaign, a global drive by UNEP to mobilize government, individuals, businesses and civil society to plant up to 1 billion trees in 2007.

At the end of the conference, the participants will elect a new Tunza Youth Advisory Council, with two advisors for each of the six UNEP regions (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and West Asia), and two advisors representing indigenous youth organizations.

The main objective of the Council is to represent youth in international environmental fora and to make their voices heard. The Council also advises UNEP on better ways of engaging young people in its work.

The Youth Conference is hosted by Bayer, the first private company to engage with UNEP on a comprehensive environmental programme for young people. The partnership aims at strengthening young people's environmental awareness and engaging children and youth in environmental activities around the world.

"We are looking forward to welcoming young environmental protection activists from all over the world to Bayer," said Bayer Board of Management Chairman Werner Wenning. "This conference is a further milestone of our partnership with UNEP."

"In working together with the private sector, with governments and with youth organizations across the world, the Tunza Programme has established itself as one of the fora of the United Nations to bring youth, the multi-lateral system and the environmental issues that we face in the world today, closer to each other," said Mr. Steiner.

The Tunza International Youth Conference is one of the main platforms for cooperation and interaction between UNEP and its youth partners. It provides young people with an opportunity to share experiences and showcase their environmental activities. The conference also provides participants with an opportunity to develop regional and global networks for joint implementation of environmental programmes. It acts as a forum for UNEP to receive input from young people on programmes and processes involving youth.

"What I like most about the Tunza International Youth Conference is that it doesn't only "speak" about youth, but it is made by youth for youth," said Mihaela Hristova, UNEP Tunza Youth Advisor for Europe. "Time and time again it proves to be more than a conference – it is action-packed, inspiring and supportive. Although it only takes place every two years, its impact spreads far beyond those five days. It's like a flame that you feel – and participants take a spark of it back home to spread."

"At this conference, young people from around the world will share experiences with peers, including the importance of working with civil society, and engaging the Youth Advisory Council on environmental issues such as climate change," said Abdoul Byukusenge, UNEP Tunza Associate Advisor for Africa. "Today's youth are the leaders of tomorrow, and it's essential that we take measures to protect the environment today in order to ensure a healthy future."

The conference promotes environmental dialogue and strengthens young people's capacity to develop and implement community environmental projects by allowing them to share experiences, create partnerships with their peers and develop regional action plans to address environmental issues.

About the Tunza Programme

The Tunza programme, endorsed in 2003, is a comprehensive six-year strategy to promote the participation of children and youth in every part of the world in environmental activities. It focuses on four thematic areas: awareness building, capacity building, information exchange and facilitating the involvement of young people in environmental decision making.

Other activities of the Programme include regional and sub-regional seminars and workshops in Asia and the Pacific, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean, a quarterly magazine for and by young people entitled Tunza, an annual International Children's Painting Competition and an environmental illustrated series for children.

The event in Leverkusen follows conferences in Dubna, Russia, in 2003 and Bangalore, India, in 2005. It alternates every year with the Tunza International Children's Conference which took place last year in Putrajaya, Malaysia, and will be held in Stavanger, Norway, in June 2008.

Note to Editors

For more information on the 2007 conference and the Tunza programme, please visit:

Tunza International Youth Conference Website: <http://www.tunza2007.unep.bayer>

UNEP Tunza International Youth Conference Website:
<http://www.unep.org/tunza/youthconference/>

Podcast by Mr. Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director: Young Environmentalists (available on 27 August 2007): <http://www.unep.org/newscentre/default.asp?ct=podcast-list&l=en>

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UNEP News Release 2007/25

August 29, 2007

“Churches put their faith in green power; Religious-based eco-organization helps houses of worship save on electricity”

MICHAEL VALPY

From Wednesday's Globe and Mail

August 29, 2007 at 5:17 AM EDT

San Francisco-based Interfaith Power and Light has proclaimed God green. It uses the slogan "What would Jesus drive" for its anti-SUV campaign in the United States.

The head of IPL in Washington, D.C., Rabbi Daniel Swartz, delivered a recent thought-stopping homily titled, "This compact fluorescent light of mine: electrical and spiritual power."

IPL's Georgia state branch hands out gift bags of energy-efficient Christmas and Hanukkah lights. Most state branches do free energy audits of churches, and California's IPL has negotiated for its member churches discount green energy contracts with electricity providers.

Since its founding in 1997 by a San Francisco Episcopal priest, the Reverend Sally Bingham - who got herself ordained specifically to bring environmentalism to faith communities - IPL has become a muscularly influential religious eco-organization with branches in 23 states, federal grants, funding from the Ted Turner Foundation and links to all the major players in the green movement.

This week it took a big step into the public domain by launching ShopIPL.org, a national online store selling everything from solar-cooking devices to smart switches for lights and water-heater tanks, all carrying the imprimatur of the U.S. federal Environmental Protection Agency.

The greening of faith communities has become a growing phenomenon over the past decade, especially in the area of global climate change.

Toronto-based Faith and the Common Good is heading in the same direction as IPL, persuaded by environmentalist David Suzuki a couple of years ago to focus more on climate change.

It created Greening Sacred Spaces, an education program offering expert advice on energy conservation and other ecological issues to more than 60 Canadian faith communities representing 14 different religions.

The IPL online store, first developed by Wyandotte, Mich., Roman Catholic priest Charles Morris, who heads up Michigan IPL and has a wind turbine on the roof of his rectory, offers high-quality, affordable energy-efficient products at quantity discount prices to the more than 4,000 U.S. religious congregations that have affiliated with IPL.

It also sells to the public at large.

Clark Bisel, senior vice-president in San Francisco for a global engineering consulting firm that designs energy systems for buildings, is a customer. He said in an interview that it's the only green store on the Web with a complete range of energy-efficient products.

In addition to smart switches and solar devices, it sells light bulbs and lighting accessories, heating, venting and air-conditioning products, weatherization materials, meters, thermostats and a range of devices for reducing water consumption.

Mr. Bisel, who has bought compact fluorescent light bulbs and dampers from the store, said what it is missing is sufficient education materials telling buyers how to use its products. But he said that's a small complaint matched against all the good it does.

Rev. Bingham - who says bluntly, "People who call themselves religious, they are environmentalists" - has been invited to lecture in Canada, Australia and Europe.

Grist, a U.S. environmental magazine, has called her one of the world's 15 most important environmental religious leaders.

August 30, 2007

“Alaska global warming trip pairs evangelicals, scientists”

By DAN JOLING
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

GIRDWOOD, Alaska -- Standing at a federal visitors center that once offered views of a spectacular glacier, global warming's odd bedfellows got a firsthand look Wednesday at the effects of climate change on America's northernmost state.

Evangelical Christians and prominent scientists on a weeklong trip in Alaska are seeing the effect of warming on glaciers, forests and people and continuing their call for changes that could blunt its devastating effects over the rest of the century.

They acknowledge they don't agree on the origins of life. But whether it's called nature or creation, they agree that life on Earth is at risk from warming caused by humans.

"The days of wondering what's happening, or whether there are alternatives to explain where we are with natural cycles or other mysterious factors, are past," said James McCarthy, president-elect of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and a Harvard oceanography professor.

"The planet itself is in peril. That is clear," said the Rev. Richard Cizik, vice president of governmental affairs for the National Association of Evangelicals.

The expedition of professors and pastors grew out of a retreat last year. Scientists said they had low expectations for the meeting but quickly found common ground.

"Here were two of the most influential communities in the country, who could have enormous influence on protecting the creation, life on Earth, who were barely speaking to each other about some of these issues," said Eric Chivian, director of Harvard University's Center for Health and the Global Environment.

For evangelicals, it was a departure from issues prominent in recent political campaigns such as marriage sanctity and fetal rights. Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, said action on global warming stems from a concern for people not only when they are conceived but after they are born.

"The simplest definition of evangelicals is that we are those who have a commitment to Jesus Christ as savior and lord and we take the Bible seriously and believe it," he said. "Those commitments and beliefs call us to stewardship of God's creation and the protection of human life. So our theology has actually been in place for 2000 years. We're connecting to 21st century science now."

The two sides agreed on an "urgent call to action" letter that said human behavior had put the environment at risk. Among the signers were Edward O. Wilson, a two-time Pulitzer prize-winning scientist and author, and James Hansen, a prominent NASA climatologist.

On Wednesday, 10 scientists and evangelicals toured the National Forest Service's Begich Boggs Visitors Center, constructed about 50 miles south of Anchorage in 1986. Federal officials hoped it would offer protected views of Portage Glacier until 2020. But like other rivers of ice affected by warming, Portage Glacier has retreated.

Today, the multimillion-dollar visitors center has exhibits on the glacier but its blue ice 3.5 miles away can be seen only in floes that drift by.

The group will tour the Kenai Peninsula, where more than 3 million acres of spruce forests have been devastated by destructive beetles once kept under control by colder winters. The group spent two days in Shishmaref, an Inupiat Eskimo village slowly eroding into the Chukchi Sea because shore ice no longer protects it from fierce winter storms.

Bishop Harry Jackson, Jr., senior pastor of Hope Christian Church in Washington, D.C., called himself the closest thing to a global warming skeptic before the trip.

"Only from this perspective: How urgent is this issue? I think most thinking evangelicals are not saying there is absolutely no problem. But the issue of priority and urgency is an issue," he said.

Seeing how the Chukchi Sea is eating away at an Inupiat Eskimo village made global warming real to him.

"That perspective you don't get on the East Coast, or places where some of us come from, that this is more than just some philosophical discussion that a bunch of scientists are having or perhaps an agenda by folks we might not agree with in terms of our fundamental beliefs of faith."

Chivian said he hopes the public's imagination will be captured by two such diverse groups coming together.

"I think that has enormous power in convincing people of the urgency of addressing issues like climate change and loss of biodiversity," he said.

On the Net:

National Association of Evangelicals: <http://www.nae.net/>

Harvard Center for Health and the Global Environment: <http://chge.med.harvard.edu>

August 30, 2007

New Voices of Youth International Youth Conference Elects Advisory Council

Nairobi/Leverkusen 30 August 2007 - The election of a new Youth Advisory Council today marked the culmination of the third biannual Tunza International Youth Conference, held in the German city of Leverkusen. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) conference brought together more than 180 young people from 85 countries to discuss ways of promoting environmental awareness through technology.

With two advisors for each of the six UNEP regions (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, and West Asia), the Council is a vital link between UNEP and young people, as well as providing a strong youth representation in environmental conferences.

"I want to make the voices of young people heard", said Sara Svensson, from Sweden, a newly elected member for Europe. "The Council is a place where we can also share ideas on ways to have a better future".

During its two-year mandate, which ends at the next Tunza International Youth Conference, the Council will advise UNEP on better ways of engaging young people in its work, represent their peers in international environmental fora and increase youth involvement in UNEP's work by informing young people in their regions about UNEP's programmes for youth.

The new Council brought together six young men and six young women, who are heavily involved in environmental activities in their respective countries. The gender balanced Council was elected by the participants, aged 15 to 24, at the end of the five-day conference (August 26 to 30), which was hosted at the headquarters of Bayer, the largest sponsor of UNEP's children and youth activities.

The new Tunza Youth Advisory Council members are: Adel Rahmani (Algeria), Margaret Koli (Kenya), Wang Fengzhu (China), Jessie James L. Marcellones (Philippines), Sara Svensson (Sweden), Dmitri Tasmali (Turkey), Gabriela Almeida Monteiro (Brazil), Handy Acosta Cuellar (Cuba), Caitlin MacLeod (Canada), Thomas Christian (USA), Zainab Humdain (Bahrain) and Jamal Alfalasi (United Arab Emirates).

"The conference was very interesting. It gave me the opportunity to meet people with the same interests and I learned a lot on how to address environmental problems within my community and with my government's help", said Gabriela Almeida Monteiro.

"In Brazil, we have problems regarding clean energy. Here, at the conference, we visited a windmill and this will help us develop a similar project and present it to the government for adoption," she added.

The Tunza Youth Advisory Council, launched in 1999, also helps to supervise the implementation of the pledge and commitments made at the conference.

At this year's conference, with the theme 'Technology in service of the environment', the delegates expressed their concern in their pledge with the "social impacts of environmental degradation, and the global and regional distribution of environmental threats upon vulnerable communities".

Adding that they were "aware of the implications of inequality and the need for environmental reform", they pledged to advocate "environmental justice in our work and the work of the Tunza network, and lobbying decision makers, UNEP and its governing council to protect, empower and support these groups."

They also asked the new Advisory Council members "to use our pledge as a basis for their work in advising UNEP and representing youth."

Pledge of the Tunza Conference for Environmental Justice

"We, the youth gathered in Leverkusen, are concerned with the social impacts of environmental degradation, and the global and regional distribution of environmental threats upon vulnerable communities.

We are aware of the implications of inequality and the need for environmental reform.

We envision a world wherein environmental benefits and natural resources are equitably distributed, and access to information and participation in decision making are enjoyed by all.

We call for the support of vulnerable communities, including small island states and less developed countries, women, and indigenous groups.

We commit ourselves to advocating Environmental Justice in our work and the work of the Tunza network, and lobbying decision makers, UNEP, and its governing council to protect, empower, and support these groups.

We ask the incoming TYAC to use our pledge as a basis for their work in advising UNEP and representing youth.

As we consider the state of the planet that we will inherit, we stand together to address the challenges of our generation.

We wish to pass our children a fair and sustainable world; we know the problems and we know the solutions: the time to act its now.

We want environmental justice, and we want it now."

Tunza Youth Advisory Council members

Adel Rahmani (Algeria), born in 1987, is a member of the LE SOUK Association, where he works on environmental education. He has organized environmental awareness campaigns for students. In June 2007, Adel organized an excursion for 200 children from the Algiers hospital to a dam where they learned about the importance of conserving and protecting water.

Koli Margaret (Kenya), born in 1987, is a member of the Youth Environment Network-Kenya where she helps to organize youth workshops to create environmental awareness. She has helped to create a strong network of young environmentalists in Nairobi.

Wang Fengzhu (China), born in 1986, is a member of the Green Association of HZAU (Huazhong Agricultural University), in Wuhan City, and of the Green Long March and the Northeast Asian network of TUNZA. She wants to be involved in the creation of a sustainable environment youth network in the Asia Pacific region. Her favourite quote is "Let our green dream fly".

Jessie James L. Marcellones (Philippines), born in 1986, is a member of the Boy Scouts of the Philippines (BSP) and is a Bayer Young Environmental Envoy-Philippines, where he helps to implement environmental protection activities among the people of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

Sara Svensson (Sweden), born in 1984, is the vice-chair and project officer of Youth and Environment Europe (YEE), a federation of 60 youth environmental organizations in 30 countries in Europe. She is also the international secretary of the Swedish organization Fältbiologerna (Nature and Youth Sweden) and active at the local level in the same organization.

Dmitri Tasmali (Turkey), born in 1987, is a member of the International Chain of Awareness (ICA), with whom he works to raise awareness about the major environmental issues, organize conferences for school students and ensure the implementation of decisions taken.

Gabriela Almeida Monteiro (Brazil), born in 1985, is a member of AIESEC, an International Student Association. She works in Salvador, Brazil, and has taken part in the Earth Charter Youth Initiative. She intends to initiate a project within AIESEC to raise environmental awareness among poor communities in her city and introduce the values and principles of the Earth Charter.

Handy Acosta Cuellar (Cuba), born in 1985, is a member of the biggest NGO in his country, ProNATURALEZA. He is also a member of the National Coordination Group of the Cuban Youth Environmental Network, where he promotes TUNZA and UNEP strategies and projects. He coordinates and belongs to the Clean up the World Campaign in Havana.

Caitlin MacLeod (Canada), born in 1986, is a member of the Quebec Public Interest Research Group(QPIRG), an organization focusing on social and environmental justice issues where she works as coordinator of the Campus Climate Challenge (CCC) in Montreal. She is also involved with the Sierra Youth Coalition, a national network engaging youth in working toward sustainability.

Thomas Christian (USA), born in 1987, is Regional Director for 2020 Vision, a non-profit organization that focuses on energy security, oil addiction and climate change in the United States, with whom he organizes events and raises awareness in Georgia and the Southeast.

Zainab Humdain (Bahrain), born in 1987, is the Vice President of Environmental Citizenship Program ECP in Manama, which communicates the values of the Earth Charter and works towards sustainable development by delivering workshops for schools, kindergartens and orphan care centres. She also organizes events and campaigns addressing several pressing environmental issues in Bahrain, such as reclaiming land from the ocean, climate change and other themes. Her favorite quote is "You must be the change you want to see in the world" by Mahatma Gandhi.

Jamal Alfalasi (United Arab Emirates), born in 1987, is an Environmental Awareness officer, working under the Environmental Education Project for the Knowledge and Human Development Authority, in Dubai. The Environmental Education Project aims to increase awareness about environmental issues facing Dubai, and help promote environmentally friendly living.

About the Tunza programme:

The Tunza programme, endorsed in 2003, is a comprehensive six-year strategy to promote the participation of children and youth in every part of the world in environmental activities. It focuses on four thematic areas: awareness building, capacity building, information exchange and facilitating the involvement of young people in environmental decision making.

Other activities of the Programme include regional and sub-regional seminars and workshops in Asia and the Pacific, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean, plus a quarterly magazine for and by young people entitled Tunza, an annual International Children's Painting Competition and an environmental illustrated series for children.

The event in Leverkusen follows conferences in Dubna, Russia, in 2003 and Bangalore, India, in 2005. It alternates every year with the Tunza International Children's Conference which took place last year in Putrajaya, Malaysia, and will be held in Stavanger, Norway, in June 2008.

Note to Editors:

For more information on the 2007 conference and the Tunza programme, please visit:

Tunza International Youth Conference Website: <http://www.tunza2007.unep.bayer>

UNEP Tunza International Youth Conference Website:
<http://www.unep.org/tunza/youthconference/>

Podcast by Mr. Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director: Young Environmentalists:
<http://www.unep.org/newscentre/default.asp?ct=podcast-list&l=en>

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September 2, 2007

Pope Benedict XVI leads 'eco-friendly' youth rally

Reuters
Sunday, September 2, 2007

LORETO, Italy: Pope Benedict XVI, leading the Catholic Church's first "eco-friendly" youth rally, told as many as half a million people Sunday that world leaders must make courageous decisions to save the planet "before it is too late."

"A decisive 'yes' is needed in decisions to safeguard creation as well as a strong commitment to reverse tendencies that risk leading to irreversible situations of degradation," the 80-year-old pope said.

Wearing green vestments, he spoke to a crowd of mostly young people sprawled over a hillside near the Adriatic city of Loreto on the day the Catholic Church in Italy observed its annual Save Creation Day.

More than 300,000 people had slept on blankets and in tents or prayed during the night. Organizers said they were joined by about 200,000 more who arrived from throughout Italy on Sunday.

"New generations will be entrusted with the future of the planet, which bears clear signs of a type of development that has not always protected nature's delicate equilibriums," the pope said, speaking from a white stage.

In one of his strongest environmental appeals, the pope said, "Courageous choices that can recreate a strong alliance between man and earth must be made before it is too late."

He closed the rally with a Sunday morning Mass.

It was the first environmentally friendly youth rally, a break from gatherings that have left tons of garbage.

Participants had backpacks made of recyclable material, flashlights operated by cranks instead of batteries, and color-coded trash bags so personal garbage could be easily recycled. Meals were served on biodegradable plates.

Tens of thousands of prayer books for the Mass were printed on recycled paper and trees will be planted to compensate for the carbon produced at the event, many in areas of southern Italy devastated by recent brush fires.

Under the pope and his predecessor John Paul, the Vatican has become progressively "green," installing solar cells on buildings to produce electricity and holding a scientific conference to discuss global warming and climate change.

September 3, 2007

Published: 09.03.2007

Faith goes green

By Stephanie Innes

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

With a belief that they must speak out for the silent, some people of faith in Tucson are giving a voice to Mother Nature.

Fueled by heightened media attention to global warming, worshippers and congregations are turning their attentions to the environment. They view protecting the Earth as a justice issue, infusing it with a passion that many historically devoted to ending racial, gender and economic inequality.

Nationally, the Sierra Club has ventured into religious communities for support of its environmental advocacy, and religious groups ranging from evangelical Christian to Zoroastrian are urging greater protection of the Earth and its endangered species to members of Congress and the United Nations.

Internationally, the Vatican declared in April that abuse of the environment is against God's will and urged the world's 1 billion Catholics to be more green. And in Tucson, some congregations are auditing their own energy use and pollution, and educating their worshippers about environmental threats unique to the region, including what they see as the precariousness of the local water supply.

"A river has a right not to be drained dry. The Earth has rights, and to care for the Earth we can't do it in the abstract," said the Rev. Stuart Taylor of St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Midtown, who is rereading the Old and New Testaments from an environmental perspective.

Taylor will give a series of sermons this fall, which he is calling "The Green Bible," based on what he believes the Bible says about protecting the environment. Some environmentalists, for

example, interpret the Bible as saying the Earth is God's body and that as humans we are assaulting our deity.

"We're looking at the Bible anew. The old interpretations have not served the Earth well," said Sylvia Thorson-Smith, a St. Mark's elder and a retired professor of sociology and religious studies. "Jesus was deeply rooted in the Earth."

Of a more practical nature, St. Mark's plans each week to give its 400 members "climate-change solutions" that they can do themselves. Those tips include replacing older heating and cooling systems with new, efficient models; cleaning the condenser coil on the refrigerator; turning off computers at night and putting them in a power-save mode; washing clothes in warm or cold water; and buying in bulk, which reduces packaging.

Other groups, including the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Northwest Tucson, sell compact fluorescent light bulbs as a way of encouraging worshippers to replace their incandescent bulbs with ones that last longer and use less energy.

The church also is considering banning non-vegetarian food from its premises.

"Eating beef is a huge pollutant of the Earth," said the church's minister, Susan Manker-Seale, who posts the menu of the local vegan restaurant Lovin' Spoonfuls on her church's walls and has the restaurant cater events. "We're not trying to force people to do anything, but we do want to inspire them to learn."

Manker-Seale's congregation recently voted to become a Green Sanctuary, part of a program within the Unitarian Universalist denomination that requires congregations to complete steps, including a community "green" project.

Vegetarianism is one of the less popular ways of going green, but Manker-Seale believes more people should be paying attention to damaging effects of the meat industry. Animal-welfare groups have recently begun promoting a United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization report that says the livestock business generates more greenhouse-gas emissions than all forms of transportation combined.

Other congregations have held electric-car demonstrations, switched to china and silverware instead of disposable plates and utensils, sponsored alternative gift fairs that included sales of reusable water bottles, and adopted villages harmed by global warming.

St. Philip's in the Hills, Tucson's largest Episcopal church, recently put together a "green team" of people aiming to infuse the congregation with more awareness of environmental stewardship. The church is performing an audit of its own energy consumption, and this month will begin a series of events focused on being green.

"We'd consider the Earth as the ground of all our being. It supports and sustains us and is one binding need we all have. It feeds us and it fuels us," said Greg Foraker, director of adult formation at St. Philip's. "The Earth is really central to Christian tradition, but the news we've been hearing lately reminds us that we can't let go of that core faith."

One of the upcoming speakers at the St. Philip's events will be Susan Kaplan of Tucson's Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life.

Kaplan publicly lectures anyone she sees drinking bottled water, explaining that most of the bottles end up in the landfill. Though she doesn't give faith-based reasons for her admonitions, she says the principles of her faith were a key motivator for her newfound passion.

She considers her environmentalism an extension of "tikkun olam" — a Jewish directive meaning "repair the world" — and has even written a rap song about her views that she performs to various Jewish groups.

"Remember those bad plagues we read about at Seder? Well today there are more, and they got greater and greater," the lyrics say. "Trash and rubbish, dirty air and dirty water. Waste and too much driving, The Earth is under slaughter."

Road cleanups, film screenings and education sessions about recycling are among activities that Kaplan's group sponsors.

Recently, the group helped the Tucson Hebrew Academy acquire a grant from Tucson Electric Power Co. to install solar panels on the school to generate electricity. Kaplan hopes to do more interfaith environmental projects in the future.

One local "green" interfaith initiative already in the works is a series of classes about Genesis sponsored by St. Mark's Presbyterian Church and Temple Emanu-El, a Reform Jewish congregation in Midtown. The classes begin Oct. 23.

When it comes to protecting the Earth, some would argue that Genesis appears to contradict itself. The first chapter talks about dominating the Earth, while the second chapter refers to stewardship. Environmental readings weigh on the side of stewardship, saying God would never have wanted the Earth desecrated.

Added interest in Jewish holidays that emphasize nature, like the harvest festival of Sukkot and the Jewish New Year for Trees, Tu B'Shevat, are signs that worshippers are paying more attention to the planet, Temple Emanu-El Rabbi Samuel M. Cohon said.

He noted that it was a young worshipper studying for his bar mitzvah a few years ago who got the synagogue to begin recycling the paper it uses.

"The environment is too important to be left just to politicians," said Cohon, whose synagogue has held workshops and field trips focusing on Tucson's water supply.

"Faith communities have a responsibility to educate in a variety of important areas — as rabbis, ministers, priests and imams, we need to look to the good of the whole community.

"Some of it is park cleanup, awareness of water usage; some of it is pushing people to recycle," Cohon said. "These are small things, but if everyone does them, they are not so small at all."

On StarNet: Read StarNet's "Desert Beliefs" blog for more coverage of faith and values at go.azstarnet.com/desertbeliefs.

'And God created humankind in God's image... having dominion* over the earth.' — Genesis 1

* Some theologians and religious leaders say the word 'dominion' should not be understood as a license to dominate and exploit nature, but rather as a vocation of stewardship of the Earth.

IF YOU GO

"The Green Bible," a theological and spiritual overview, will be offered by the Rev. Stuart Taylor at 9:45 a.m. on three consecutive Sundays, beginning Sept. 16, at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church, 3809 E. Third St.

A series titled "Greening Our Faith: Exploring the Wonder of Our World" begins at 12:30 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 30, in the East Gallery at St. Philip's in the Hills Episcopal Church, 4440 N. Campbell Ave., with a free showing of "The Great Warming." The film examines evidence that human activities are provoking an unprecedented era of atmospheric warming. A discussion will follow.

COMING UP

"Go Green," a special section on ideas for saving energy, money and the environment in our homes, workplaces and communities, runs Sept. 13 in the Star.

Going to the source

Some key passages for "Green Bible" interpretations:

"Ask the animals and they will tell you!" — Job 12:7. Some have interpreted this passage as poetic hyperbole. Others say it calls for a meaningful conversation with the animal world.

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now, and not only the creation but we ourselves groan inwardly." — Romans 8:22-23. Some religious leaders are reconsidering this passage as a call to examine how creation is "groaning" under the weight of environmental destruction.

"Your Will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven" — Matthew 6:10. From an environmental perspective, some say the words of the Lord's Prayer remind us that Jesus' message was about how we transform our life here on Earth.

- Contact reporter Stephanie Innes at 573-4134 or at sinnes@azstarnet.com.

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September 3, 2007

Vatican agrees to a carbon offset scheme

By Elisabeth Rosenthal
Monday, September 3, 2007
International Herald Tribune

TISZAKESZI, Hungary: This summer the cardinals at the Vatican accepted an unusual donation from a Hungarian start-up called Klimafa: The company said it would plant trees to restore an ancient forest on a denuded island by the Tizsa River to offset the Vatican's carbon emissions.

The young trees, on a 15-hectare, or 37-acre, tract of land that will be renamed the "Vatican Climate Forest" will in theory absorb as much carbon dioxide as the Vatican makes through its various activities in 2007: driving cars, heating offices, lighting St. Peter's Basilica at night.

In so doing, the Vatican announced, it would become the world's first carbon-neutral state.

"As the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, recently stated, the international community needs to respect and encourage a 'green culture,' " said Cardinal Paul Poupard, head of the Pontifical Council for Culture, who took part in a ceremony marking the event at the Vatican. "The Book of Genesis tell us of a beginning in which God placed man as guardian over the earth to make it fruitful."

In many respects, the scheme seems like a win-win-win proposition.

The Vatican, which has recently made an effort to go green on its own by installing solar panels, sought to set an example by offsetting its carbon emissions.

Hungary, whose government scientists are consulting on the project, will take over large swaths of environmentally degraded, abandoned land restored as a native forest. That will have a beneficial effect on the climate there, and provide jobs in a economically depressed area, as well.

Klimafa, an 18-month-old company, gets the Vatican's seal of approval and a lot of free publicity for its first project. In addition to the Vatican's 15 hectares, several European governments as well as Dell, the computer maker, have purchased carbon offsets, which will be backed by tree planting on the 225-hectare island.

"It seems so obvious, but no one was doing it," said David Gazdag, a former medical doctor who brokered the project, with backing from his San Francisco parent company, Planktos International.

But creating and selling carbon "offsets" or "credits" is still a novel concept for both business and science, and many controversies remain. The calculation for tree planting in particular is complicated.

Planting forests is only "a partial solution, and a temporary one," said Laszlo Galhidy, forestry officer for the environmental group WWF Hungary, although he praised the project as a useful step.

Young forests - dominated by growing trees - soak up lots of carbon dioxide, but once the forests mature, they absorb far less, he said.

Also, "carbon credits" are not a hard currency like a euro or a Hungarian forint, but something far more nebulous, like a stock market future. There is no scientific system for predicting the exact carbon absorbing capacity of a project like the Vatican Forest, whose trajectory depends on rainfall, temperature and how fast trees grow.

Finally, man increases his polluting activities faster than he can offset them.

"Planting forests will only compensate for a small fraction of emissions, even if you cover all of Hungary in young trees," Galhidy said.

Gazdag acknowledges that carbon offsetting is not an exact science. "People have only been thinking about offsetting for about 10 years," he said.

But he and others say that market mechanisms created by the Kyoto Protocol and the European Union at least force polluters to pay in some form for the emissions they create.

Kyoto and the European Union's Cap and Trade scheme set emissions targets for countries or large companies. Those that exceed their allowances - emitting too much carbon - need to purchase "carbon credits" from countries or companies that do not need their allotment or from companies like Klimafa that create credits through green projects like planting trees.

On the EU market, carbon credits are trading at about €21, or \$28; one credit counters one ton of emitted carbon dioxide. Klimafa says its donation to the Vatican is worth about €100,000.

Some U.S. companies, like Dell, voluntarily purchase credits as a sign of their environmental commitment even though there is currently no U.S. law that requires them to do so.

Within Europe, the EU scheme allows for a much needed transfer of money from the more developed countries of Western Europe to the new economies of the East. Countries and companies in the West tend to exceed their allowance, whereas Eastern countries tend to have excess credits to sell since so many polluting Communist-era factories have been shut.

Also, many of the former Eastern Bloc countries had to decommission farmland to join the European Union in accordance with EU agricultural policy. In Hungary, as in other new member states, huge tracts of marginal fields have been repurchased by the government from farmers and are readily available for reforestation.

The island that will host Klimafa's first eco-restoration project, originally called "Forest Island," was cleared in the Middle Ages, though it is on a flood plain and has always been risky to farm.

Klimafa is also negotiating for nine more projects in Hungary as well as others in Bulgaria and Romania.

The island is now a mix of tangled weeds, wetlands, a lake and a few fields of corn that farmers are planting illegally even though they no longer own the land. Much of the island is a jumble of goldenrod and *amorpha fruticosa* - a tree-like weed that grows like wildfire.

The plant "doesn't sequester much, and it is not stable since it has little biodiversity since it is mostly two or three species," said Gergely Torda, a plant biologist from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, who is consulting on the project. "It is deforested enough that you pretty much have to start from scratch to restore the native forest."

He scans the land as a blank canvas, describing plans for what will be planted where.

Later this year, Klimafa will begin clearing the weeds, using local labor, and then start environmentally sensitive planting of saplings that are native and will thrive in the local environment. These include willows, beeches, ash, certain poplars and oaks. The growing forest will absorb 10 times the carbon that the land currently absorbs, and will be self-sustaining, Torda said.

Klimafa has been given the right to restore the land by the Bukk National Park, which owns it; costs will be covered by carbon credit purchases.

Torda notes that it will take 50 to 150 years to produce a mature forest. Once that happens it will be less effective, since mature forests contain decaying trees that release CO₂, as well as growing trees that absorb it. Also, there are pitfalls that will need to be avoided. Too much plowing, for example, releases carbon from the soil, which reduces the beneficial effect.

In some carbon credit projects, for example in Indonesia, the draining and plowing of peatland to make way for tree planting released so much carbon (peat is rich in the element) that it canceled the effect of the later planting of palm trees, according to Wetlands International. But the soil on the Hungarian island now is dry and low in carbon.

The world of carbon credits is filled with untested projects. For example, Planktos, Klimafa's San Francisco-based parent company, plans to seed an area in the Pacific with iron to stimulate the growth of carbon-eating algae.

After the Vatican agreement was announced, Monsignor Melchor Sánchez de Toca Alameda, an official at the Vatican's Council for Culture, told the Catholic News Service that buying credits was like doing penance: "One can emit less CO₂ by not using heating and not driving a car or one can do penance by intervening to offset emissions, in this case by planting trees," he said.

But some critics derided the Vatican for planting trees rather than trying to rein in energy use in Rome. The Vatican did not have to pay anything for the Klimafa program, although the donation is only for 2007, and does not cover air travel.

Just last week, the Vatican began sponsoring low-cost flights for pilgrims from Rome to holy sites like Lourdes ("More convenient than a 22-hour train ride!" one priest said on Italian television.) Plane travel is hugely polluting.

September 5, 2007

Pope sounds new warning on global warming

VATICAN CITY, Sept 5, 2007 (AFP) - Pope Benedict XVI voiced renewed anxiety Wednesday about global warming and hailed greater awareness of the problem, in remarks at his weekly audience.

"Water resources and climate change are subjects of great importance for the whole human family," the pope said, calling for people to "pray and work for greater respect for the marvels of divine creation."

Benedict was addressing his remarks to participants at an international conference on the protection of the environment in the Arctic, which is to open in Greenland on Thursday.

It is to be chaired by the spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, the Istanbul-based Bartholomew I.

On Sunday the pope issued an appeal to save the threatened planet at a gathering of half-a-million young Italian Catholics at Loreto, in central Italy.

He urged them to "make courageous choices before it is too late," and attacked "development which has not always been able to protect the fragile balance of nature."

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September 7, 2007

Prayer to End Climate Change

Religious Leaders Join Scientists in Environmental Concerns on Greenland's Melting Glaciers
By CARRIE McGOURTY

Sept. 7, 2007 —

Religious leaders from all over the world met at the mouth of a melting glacier in Greenland today to say a silent prayer for the planet, appealing to mankind to address the impact that humanity is having on life on Earth.

A group of nearly 200 scientists, theologians and government officials sailed into the ice fields of the Illulissat Icefjord, the largest glacier in Greenland that is bearing the brunt of global warming.

Watch a video of Bill Blakemore's tour of the ice wonders of Greenland [here](#).

The pope delivered a message via video from the Vatican while religious leaders of Christian, Jewish and Islamic faiths prayed silently.

"We're all in awe of this spectacle," said Neal Ascherson, a spokesperson for Religion, Science and the Environment (RSE), the group coordinating the event.

Ascherson spoke to ABC News from the boat while the prayer began.

"We're in the engine room of the globe," he said. "This is where the world's climate has been created for thousands of years. And I think everybody is moved by the overwhelming importance and ominousness of what we're seeing. You can see (the glacier) facilitate to climate change."

In the Arctic, at the Hub of Change

The polar pilgrimage into the Arctic is part of a weeklong symposium put on by RSE, a non-governmental organization based in Greece.

Funded by private, corporate and Greek government donors, the event will bring together scientists and religious leaders to address major environmental issues, and ways in which humanity can deal with them, Ashcerson said. The seventh RSE symposium, this year's will focus on climate change in the Arctic.

"I think this will be a great moment," Cardinal Thomas McCarrick told ABC News about the prayer from Washington, D.C., on his way to Greenland.

McCarrick was sent by the Pope to represent the Catholic Church.

"Whatever denomination we are we will try to proclaim loud and clear that we should, we must pay attention to the water resources and climate change," he said.

Greenland is of particular concern to scientists because glaciers are melting at an alarming rate. About 9 percent of the world's fresh water and 21 feet of global sea level rise is locked in the country's ice sheet.

In addition to the Illulissat Icefjord, the Jakobshavn glacier is of particular concern. Known as the "galloping glacier," the volume of ice breaking off it has doubled in the last few years. Scientists say that ice holding enough water to supply all New York City for a year now races away from the glacier in a day.

The big question scientists are now asking, especially since the Jakobshavn glacier and others like it around the edge of Greenland have sped up so much in the past three years, is whether this is the beginning of what they call a "collapse" of the entire Greenland ice sheet. If it is, it has enormous implications for sea level rise around the world.

"The problem is that civilization developed with a stable sea level, and a large fraction of people live within several meters elevation of sea level," said James Hansen, the top climate scientist at

NASA. "We would be talking about hundreds of millions of people displaced if sea level goes up a few meters. So we really can't afford to go down that path."

Science and Religion in Agreement?

At a time when religion and science are often at odds -- from stem cell research to evolution -- many say the willingness for scientific and religious institutions to work together to bring about change in human behavior is unprecedented.

"I don't think we have any differences on this," McCarrick said. "Every religion realizes that this world is a gift from God and we have to reserve it."

The Roman Catholic Church, criticized in the past for its stance on man's use of nature, is especially concerned with how global warming will affect the world's poor.

The United Nations has predicted that land lost to rising sea levels, intensified storms and rising food prices due to droughts and floods caused by climate change will make the world's poor the most vulnerable.

"Global warming will be an enormous cost for them, and we have to make sure that this doesn't happen," McCarrick said.

Last year in the United States, 86 evangelical Christian leaders, including megachurch pastor Rick Warren, backed a major initiative to fight global warming. But they weren't met entirely with consensus.

In January 2006, some of the nation's top evangelical leaders sent a letter to the National Association of Evangelicals asking its members not to take a stance on global warming, The New York Times reported.

McCarrick will travel with leading scientists and religious leaders, including Bishop Sophie Peterson of the Danish National Church, Rabbi Soetendorp from the Netherlands, and a senior figure of the Orthodox patriarch, to meet with leading scientists who are experts on the subject of climate change. They will also meet with the government and indigenous people of Greenland to hear how global warming has already affected their way of life.

The symposium, organizers say, will produce recommendations from theologians that will be addressed at an environmental conference in December.

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September 8 2007

Catholic group exposes dirty side of Canadian mining operations TheStar.com - Ideas - Catholic group exposes dirty side of Canadian mining operations
September 08, 2007

Stephen Scharper

Is mining a religious issue? For many Canadian Christian organizations, the answer is a definitive yes.

One such group is the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP), the international development arm of Canada's Catholic bishops.

Last fall, CCODP launched a report entitled *Calling Canadian Mining to Account*, encouraging mining companies to adhere to the same environmental and human rights standards abroad that prevail at home. Collecting more than 150,000 letters, they also urged Ottawa to actively monitor Canadian mining operations, particularly in underdeveloped nations.

According to CCODP, Canadian mining companies have been implicated in documented cases of human rights violations and environmental tragedies around the world. These include toxic dumping, the despoiling of protected areas, forcible displacement of indigenous peoples, and threats and intimidation of local communities.

Christian activists contend that this is not a case of "a few bad apples": Canadian mining firms, they assert, have been involved in human rights abuses and environmental disasters in more than 30 countries.

For example, last May CCODP partnered with its British sister organization, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development and the Honduran church organization Caritas Tegucigalpa to ensure the responsible closing of an open pit gold mine in Honduras. The mine, in Honduras's Siria Valley, uses the controversial method of "heap leaching" in which cyanide is used to extract gold ore.

The Siria Valley communities charge that mine operations have polluted the local water supply and that the company, Goldcorp of Canada, has failed to provide adequate housing for families who have been relocated to make room for mining operations.

"Such mining operations always have a significant environmental impact. With the closure of the mine approaching, it is urgent that Goldcorp prepares and implements a full mine closure plan that addressed all the environmental and other concerns of local communities," according to Honduran Father German Calix, of Caritas Honduras.

This sentiment is echoed by Archbishop Roger Ebacher of Gatineau, Que., who reflected on the wider need for corporate social responsibility in a letter on this issue on Feb. 12. He commented: "We must move toward a vision of corporate social responsibility, which cannot be reduced to corporate voluntarism alone, but must be complemented by a social responsibility regulated by the state and national organizations."

After a series of discussions involving corporate, government, religious, and civil society groups during the past year, an 80-page agreement was reached.

It included more than two dozen recommendations to help foster a social justice and environmental framework for Canadian mining concerns around the world.

To facilitate this process, CCODP has just launched a postcard campaign, encouraging Prime Minister Stephen Harper to appoint an independent watchdog to oversee complaints about Canadian mining operations abroad.

According to CCODP, this would give poor communities a say when their human rights and ecological systems are jeopardized by Canadian mining companies.

The ombudsperson would refer to the standards suggested in the Roundtables Report to adjudicate complaints.

These standards would eventually become mandatory.

The mining initiative of these Canadian faith groups is a reminder that for many Christians, social justice and ecological integrity are profoundly interconnected.

These initiatives point to a deepening theological insight that spiritual well-being in Canada is critically bound up with the material and environmental well-being of those that our lives — and our corporations — touch and tether around the world.

September 11, 2007

From: UNEP

Published September 11, 2007 07:56 AM

Global campaign tackling greatest environmental challenge: climate change

Community-based action on climate change involving an estimated 35 million people across the planet in 2007 will culminate in the Clean Up the World Weekend on 14-16 September.

More than 650 non-government organisations, community groups, local councils and other agencies in 115 countries are currently working on projects in 2007 to improve the health of the environment.

The focus of many community activities around the world has been on limiting the impacts of climate change through activities such as waste reduction and recycling, water and energy conservation, and revegetation.

On Clean Up the World Weekend, organisations will engage volunteers to take part in activities designed to clean up, fix up and conserve their local environment.

The Australian founder and chairman of Clean Up the World, Ian Kiernan AO* said communities in many countries are demonstrating that simple actions can make a real and lasting difference.

"Millions of people simply conserving water, and recycling waste adds up to a huge environmental benefit for the planet.

"Our aim is to encourage individuals to take responsibility for the environment through a range of affordable actions. What is inspiring is the variety of activities that participating organisations have initiated in their countries in response to this challenge."

Among those undertaking activities as part of the weekend, Our Earth Foundation in Poland and the Tonga Solid Waste Management Project in the Pacific are conducting nationwide clean ups and Programa TV Na Praia in Brazil is coordinating a day of activities to launch their anti-litter campaign.

The Clean Up the World campaign is in its 15th year and has the support of the United Nation's Environment Programme (UNEP). The 2007 theme 'Our Climate, Our Actions, Our Future' channels community action towards addressing the causes of climate change.

Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP praised the efforts of organisations across the world that are involved in Clean Up the World.

"Climate change and other environmental challenges impact every corner and community on the planet. Our generation is witnessing the early stirrings of extreme weather events, melting ice and other climatic manifestations, and it is truly impressive to see so many communities responding to the challenge with grassroots enthusiasm and commitment. In this context, Clean Up the World is playing a leadership role by providing practical action and this is exactly how the world will start making a difference", he said.

Mr. Steiner added: "This week, we are celebrating not only the 15th anniversary of Clean of the World, but we are also celebrating the Montreal Protocol which was ratified 20 years ago with the aim to eliminate the production and consumption of ozone-depleting chemicals. These two environmental endeavours show that the departure point for success must be a joint effort with participation from all realms of society: governments, private sector and civil society."

Details of organisations participating in Clean Up the World in 2007 can be found at www.cleantotheworld.org

* AO Order of Australia awarded for distinguished service of a high degree to Australia or to humanity at large.

Next in Climate: Top polluters to discuss hard climate goals
Previous in Climate: Oil Prices Near \$78 Ahead of OPEC Meet

September 12, 2007

from the September 12, 2007 edition - <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0912/p06s01-woeu.html>
In Greenland, an interfaith rally for climate change

Patriarch Bartholomew is leading an interfaith shipboard symposium down the coast of Greenland to improve cooperation between religious and political leaders.

By Colin Woodard | Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

Ilulissat, Greenland

Standing on the bow of a passenger ship before the fast-melting Ilulissat glacier, religious leaders from around the world lowered their heads in a silent prayer for the future of the planet.

Surrounded by icebergs, Sunni, Shiite, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Christian, and Shinto leaders committed themselves last Friday to leave the planet "in all its wisdom and beauty to the generations to come." They included the Grand Rabbi of Paris, René-Samuel Sirat, Bishop Sofie Petersen of Greenland, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Washington, and the Rev. Jim Ball, founder of the Evangelical Environmental Network.

They are in Greenland for a six-day tour on the invitation of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the senior-most figure in Orthodox Christianity, widely known as the Green Patriarch for his efforts to mobilize religious leaders to protect the environment.

Patriarch Bartholomew, who is based in Istanbul, Turkey, has traveled to many of the world's environmental hotspots including the Black Sea, the Danube, and the Amazon, usually as part of a series of shipboard symposiums between religious, scientific, and political leaders.

Now he is taking on climate change, traveling down the Greenland coast by ship in the company of Princess Irene of Denmark, Greenland foreign minister Aleqa Hammond, and over 100 dignitaries, scientists, clergy, and journalists. The onboard forum is designed to focus global attention on climate change, whose effects can be seen most dramatically in Greenland, most scientists agree.

"Preservation of the environment, promotion of sustainable development, and particular attention to climate change are matters of grave concern for the entire human family," said Bartholomew at the conference's opening.

Mending schisms

Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club, says the event was indicative of the progress that was being made bridging the divide between environmentalism and faith.

"Environmentalism is really the intersection of science and ethical principles," he says. "I was part of the generation that made the choice – the horrendous strategic blunder – of situating ourselves outside the institutions of faith. Now we have a chance to repent for and reform from that error."

Religious leaders also signaled the need to work together.

"It is very, very key for as many voices from as many fields as possible to come together to present a common effort," Cardinal McCarrick, Pope Benedict XVI's official representative, told

the Monitor. Failure to address climate change, he said, "will mean the terrible suffering of millions of people."

Mr. Ball, an influential Baptist minister, said the event had considerable symbolic importance. "The image of all the religious leaders on the boat with the Ecumenical Patriarch says that we recognize this and that it's time for us to get busy, and for all hands to get on deck," he said.

Bartholomew, the head of the ancient "mother church" in Constantinople (now Istanbul), is the leader of a faith with a centuries-old reputation for avoiding involvement in politics and other worldly affairs. But over the past decade, he has led his sometimes reluctant church back onto the world stage.

He has declared the destruction of nature a sin, and built relationships with other religious and political leaders engaged in environmental causes. In 2002, he signed a joint declaration on the environment with the late Pope John Paul II, helping ease centuries of tension between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches since the Great Schism of 1054.

Glacial melting triple that of '02

The Ilulissat glacier in west-central Greenland, 155 miles above the Arctic Circle, was a poignant choice of settings. The glacier, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is massive: three miles wide and nearly one mile tall. It is also disappearing at a remarkable rate, having receded by nine miles over the past four years. Its ice is flowing at a rate of nearly seven feet an hour, nearly three times the rate of just five years ago.

"The amount of ice that comes into the ocean in a day could provide the water supply for any of the largest cities in the world for an entire year," says Robert Corell, director of the global change program at the H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics, and the Environment in Washington who has studied Greenland's glaciers for decades.

Some scientists argue that increased snowfall over parts of Greenland could compensate for the melting, but Dr. Corell, the head of the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, says that data show Greenland's overall ice mass to be shrinking rapidly.

Global sea-level rise estimates in the latest report of the International Panel on Climate Change were based on data from 2005 and predicted a rise of eight to 24 inches over the century, says Corell. But more recent data has made it clear that Greenland's massive ice cap is collapsing much faster, and that sea levels will rise roughly three feet as a result. "The rate of melting is just phenomenal," he says.

Greenland is a self-governing territory of Denmark whose indigenous Inuit inhabitants aspire to independence. The Patriarch's ship sailed to the capital, Nuuk, over the weekend. Today he is at sea en route to southern Greenland, where he plans to conduct a Byzantine prayer service on the site of the first Christian church in the New World, built in AD 1000.

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September 12, 2007

from the September 12, 2007 edition - <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0912/p09s01-coop.html>
Give the earth a Sabbath day

If we all reduced our driving, shopping, and business by one-seventh, we'd pollute that much less.

By Christopher D. Ringwald

Albany, N.y.

As religious leaders and their congregations go green, they've neglected one Judeo-Christian teaching that could cut energy consumption and pollution by 14.2857 percent.

That's one-seventh, just as the Sabbath halts work one day out of the weekly seven.

The day of rest – long considered a gift from God – is meant to create a joyful, liberating respite from worldly concerns such as work and consumption, activities that both use the earth's resources.

So renewed observance of the Sabbath could also be a gift to the air, land, and water that we consume the other six days of the week.

"Six days you shall labor and do all your work," Yahweh told the Israelites at Sinai, "but the seventh is a sabbath of the Lord your God; you shall not do any work."

Jews have interpreted the Fourth Commandment to mean that they cease creative labor or work on the seventh day, or Saturday, just as God created the world in six days and then stopped. They leave nature alone for the day.

Even starting a fire is banned, so many Jews, mostly Orthodox, don't drive – since that involves combustion – and live within walking distance of their synagogue. In the same spirit, Yahweh told the Israelites to leave fallow their farm fields during the sabbatical year, an ancient form of rejuvenating soil.

The early Christians switched their attention to Sunday, when Jesus rose from the dead. Like the Jews, some Christians consider the day itself to be holy and, traditionally, avoid anything that detracts from its divine nature: work, business, and shopping. Though their primary obligation is to attend services, they also imported the Sabbath spirit of rest and joy.

For Muslims, Friday is holy. They don't sanctify this "day of assembly," or Juma, with rest since God does not need rest. In the Koran, Allah directs Muslims to attend congregational prayers at midday but they can then return to work. But Friday is a day off in many Islamic countries, and Muslims consider Juma a time for charity, family, and quiet enjoyment.

Each religion's teaching makes a powerful case for calling it quits one day a week. Many nonreligious people take a weekly rest as well. If we all reduced our driving, shopping, business, and energy consumption by one-seventh, we'd pollute that much less. We'd have to avoid energy-guzzling leisure activities, so maybe nix the long drives or movie marathons. Still, even if we left out the work and traffic that must go on – hospitals, police, utilities – the environmental boon would still be significant.

Religious leaders have joined to battle global warming and preserve God's creation. But in their rush to recycle, reduce, and reuse, they have neglected the pollution-reducing potential of a full-day work stoppage.

The Evangelical Climate Initiative, launched last year by 86 leaders, calls for international action but also directs concerned Christians to "keep your tires properly inflated" and "walk or bike more." Why not invoke the Sabbath and suggest that people live near their church and keep Sunday holy by not shopping or working? Then they could skip all driving one day a week.

In a national campaign, hundreds of Jewish synagogues are installing compact fluorescent light bulbs. A good start, but by traditional rules, Jews would not turn on any electrical appliance on Shabbat, a much greater savings.

In its "Shrinking the Footprint" campaign, the Church of England also singled out bulb-replacement, as well as switching off parish photocopiers at night. How little to ask, compared with the Sundays of 100 years ago when all commerce halted on wharf and factory alike.

Global warming has united the monotheistic faiths despite their other frictions. In the past week, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and other religious leaders from around the world have convened yet again for a symposium on the environment, this time in Greenland in part to focus on a melting glacier there.

Together they could do much more by hewing to one of the oldest practices in their common tradition.

- Christopher D. Ringwald is the author of "A Day Apart: How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Find Faith, Freedom, and Joy on the Sabbath."

[Full HTML version of this story which may include photos, graphics, and related links](#)

September 13, 2007

Ozone Treaty's Role in Combating Climate Change Tops Environment Ministers Meeting in Canada

13 September 2007

Two Decades of Success and Future Years of Achievement Take Centre Stage at 20th Anniversary Celebrations of Montreal Protocol

An accelerated freeze and phase-out of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs), chemicals that were used to replace more ozone-damaging substances known as CFCs, is to be considered by governments at an international meeting in Montreal, Canada.

New science and technical assessments indicate that speeding up a freeze and phase-out of HCFCs and their related by-products could not only assist in the recovery of the ozone layer.

An acceleration could also play an important role in addressing another key environmental challenge namely climate change.

A record nine countries-developed and developing- have submitted six different proposals which will be on the table when up to 191 parties or governments meet in the Canadian city between 17 and 21 September. The negotiations will occur during the 20th Anniversary celebration of the world's ozone treaty, the Montreal Protocol.

The Protocol was negotiated in response to growing international concern over the emergence of a hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica from the use of ozone-depleting chemicals in products from hair sprays to fire fighting equipment.

HCFCs, promoted over a decade ago as less damaging replacements for the older CFCs, have now become widespread in products such as refrigeration systems, air conditioning units and foams.

Under the Montreal Protocol, the United Nations ozone layer protection treaty which was adopted in 1987, use of HCFCs is set to cease in developed countries in 2030 and in developing ones in 2040.

However, scientists and many governments are now studying a range of options for a more rapid freeze on consumption and production of these replacements and the bringing forward of the final phase-out by around 10 years.

It follows research indicating that acceleration could, over the coming decades deliver cumulative emission reductions over the equivalent to perhaps 18 to 25 billion metric tonnes of carbon dioxide (18 gigatonnes-25 gigatonnes) depending on the success of governments in encouraging new ozone and climate-friendly alternatives.

Annually, it could represent a cut equal to over 3.5 per cent of all the world's current greenhouse emissions.

In contrast the Kyoto Protocol, the main greenhouse gas emission reduction treaty, was agreed with the aim of reducing developed country emissions by just over five per cent by 2012.

The final benefits of an accelerated freeze and phase-out of HCFCs may prove to be even higher than the 18 to 25 billion metric tonnes, according to a just-released report from the Montreal Protocol's Technology and Economic Assessment Panel that is designed to inform the negotiations at the international meeting in Canada.

Close to the equivalent of 38 billion tonnes (38 gigatonnes) of carbon dioxide if the acceleration is accompanied by the recovery and destruction of old equipment and insulating foam and improvements in energy efficiency, says the Panel.

For example a faster switch to alternatives to HCFCs may well stimulate technological innovation including a more rapid introduction of energy efficient equipment that in turn will assist in reducing greenhouse gas emissions even further.

The ozone layer and human health too will benefit. Under some of the accelerated phase-out scenarios, ozone levels could return to healthy pre-1980 levels a few years earlier than current scientific predictions.

Benefits would include a reduction in skin cancer, cataracts, and harm to the human immune system alongside reduced damage to agricultural and natural ecosystems.

Achim Steiner, UN Undersecretary General and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) which is responsible for the Montreal Protocol, said: "The Montreal Protocol is without doubt one of the most successful multilateral treaties ever and I look forward to celebrating, in mid-September, two decades of achievement in the Canadian city where it was born".

"The phase out of CFCs has not only put the ozone layer on the road to recovery. New research, published in March this year by Dutch and American scientists, also shows that the CFC phase-out has assisted in combating climate change. But the treaty's success story is far from over with new and wide ranging chapters still to be written. Indeed if governments adopt accelerated action on HCFCs, we can look forward to not only a faster recovery of the ozone layer, but a further important contribution to the climate change challenge," he said.

Mr Steiner added: "In doing so the treaty will also underline the often overlooked fact that multilateral environment agreements like the Montreal Protocol and the Kyoto Protocol have far wider environmental, social and economic benefits than perhaps are fully recognized when they are initially agreed. In short, treaties working together can do far more, more rapidly and at a lower cost".

The Honourable John Baird, Canada's Environment Minister, said "The original Montreal Protocol stands as a model of the tremendous results that can be achieved when the international community works together to tackle environmental problems. As the proud host country of this meeting, Canada believes that more can be done, and so we support an accelerated phase out of HCFCs. We will work with the countries who have signed the protocol to help make this happen, and we will be pushing the international community to build on the success story that began here 20 years ago."

The meeting comes in advance of a Heads of State event on climate change being hosted by the UN Secretary General, Mr Ban Ki-Moon. This event, scheduled to take place at UN Headquarters in New York on 24 September, is aimed at building consensus at the highest level

on the need for climate action and a global emission reduction agreement to come into force when the Kyoto Protocol expires in five years time.

An accelerated freeze and phase out of HCFCs might offer governments 'quick wins' in addressing climate change and build confidence that a new international regime on greenhouse gas emissions can be agreed before the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012, UNEP suggests.

September 16, 2007

International Herald Tribune

“Pope presses environment campaign, urging greater cooperation to fight ozone-depletion”

The Associated Press

Sunday, September 16, 2007

CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy: Pope Benedict XVI pressed his new environment campaign Sunday, urging greater international cooperation to fight ozone depletion.

Benedict noted that Sunday marked the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Montreal Protocol, which calls for reducing the production and consumption of ozone-thinning chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs.

"In the last two decades, thanks to an exemplary collaboration in the international community among politics, science and economics, important results have been obtained with positive results for current and future generations," Benedict said.

"On behalf of all, I hope that this cooperation is intensified so that the common good, development and the safeguarding of creation is promoted, strengthening the alliance between man and the environment," he said.

Benedict was speaking to the faithful gathered for his weekly Sunday blessing in the courtyard of the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, in the hills south of Rome.

In other comments, Benedict also noted the passing of the Sept. 11 anniversary, saying the "tragic" attacks on New York and Washington had "darkened the dawn of the Third Millennium."

He quoted Pope John Paul II, who in response to the attacks urged Christians and others to believe that God's mercy was "stronger than every bad, and that only on the cross of Christ is the world's salvation found."

Benedict has been on an eco-friendly campaign of late, presiding most recently over a pro-environment youth rally in the central Italian shrine town of Loreto. In addition, the Vatican has installed photovoltaic cells on the roof of its main auditorium to convert sunlight into electricity and has joined a reforestation project aimed at offsetting its CO2 emissions.

The Montreal Protocol was adopted in 1987 following the 1985 discovery of the growing hole in the ozone layer over the Antarctic. Thinning in the ozone layer — largely due to the CFC chemical compounds leaked from refrigerators, air conditioners and other devices — exposes Earth to harmful solar rays.

The protocol calls for the reduction of the production and consumption of CFCs. It also calls on signatories to bar the export or import of CFC producing items to countries that have not signed or ratified the deal.

The ozone layer keeps out ultraviolet radiation, which is dangerous to humans and animals. Less protection could increase risks of skin cancer and cataracts and affect biodiversity, scientists say.

September 17, 2007

September 17, 2007

Tiszakeszi Journal

Vatican Penance: Forgive Us Our Carbon Output

By ELISABETH ROSENTHAL

TISZAKESZI, Hungary — This summer the cardinals at the Vatican accepted an unusual donation from a Hungarian start-up called Klimafa: The company said it would plant trees to restore an ancient forest on a denuded stretch of land by the Tisza River to offset the Vatican's carbon emissions.

The trees, on a 37-acre tract of land that will be renamed the Vatican climate forest, will in theory absorb as much carbon dioxide as the Vatican will produce in 2007: driving cars, heating offices, lighting St. Peter's Basilica at night.

In so doing, the Vatican announced, it would become the world's first carbon-neutral state.

“As the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, recently stated, the international community needs to respect and encourage a ‘green culture,’ ” said Cardinal Paul Poupard, leader of the Pontifical Council for Culture, who took part in a ceremony marking the event at the Vatican. “The Book of Genesis tells us of a beginning in which God placed man as guardian over the earth to make it fruitful.”

In many respects, the program seems like a win-win-win proposition. The Vatican, which has recently made an effort to go green on its own by installing solar panels, sought to set an example by offsetting its carbon emissions.

Hungary, whose government scientists are consulting on the project, will take over large swaths of environmentally degraded, abandoned land restored as a native forest. That will have a beneficial effect on the climate here, and provide jobs in an economically depressed area.

Klimafa, an 18-month-old company, gets the Vatican's seal of approval and free publicity for its first project. In addition to the Vatican, several European governments, as well as Dell, the computer maker, have bought carbon offsets that will be backed by planting trees on the land.

"It seems so obvious, but no one was doing it," said David Gazdag of Klimafa, who brokered the project with backing from his San Francisco parent company, Planktos International, which specializes in ecosystem restoration. But creating and selling carbon "offsets" or "credits" is still a novel idea for business and science, and much debate remains. The calculation for planting trees is especially complicated.

Planting forests is only "a partial solution, and a temporary one," said Laszlo Galhidy, a forestry officer for the environmental group WWF Hungary, although he praised the project as useful. Young forests — dominated by growing trees — soak up a lot of carbon dioxide, but once the forests mature, they absorb far less, he said. Also, he said, there is no scientific system for predicting the exact carbon-absorbing capacity of a project like the Vatican forest, whose trajectory depends on rainfall, temperature and how fast the trees grow.

The Kyoto Protocol and the European Union's cap and trade program set emissions targets for countries or large companies. Those that exceed their allowances by emitting too much carbon need to purchase carbon credits from countries or companies that do not need their allotment, or from companies like Klimafa that create credits through green projects like planting trees.

On the European Union market, carbon credits are trading at about \$28, with one credit countering one ton of emitted carbon dioxide. Klimafa says its donation to the Vatican is worth about \$130,000. The European Union program allows for a much-needed transfer of money from the more developed countries of Western Europe to the new economies of the East.

Countries and companies in the West tend to exceed their allowances, whereas Eastern countries tend to have excess credits to sell because so many polluting Communist-era factories have been shut. Also, many of the former Eastern bloc countries had to decommission farmland to join the European Union in accordance with its agricultural policy. In Hungary, as in other new member states, huge tracts of marginal fields have been bought by the government from farmers and are available for reforestation.

The land that will hold Klimafa's first eco-restoration project, originally called Forest Island, was cleared in the Middle Ages, though it is on a flood plain and has always been risky to farm.

The area is a mix of weeds, wetlands, a lake and a few fields of corn that farmers are planting illegally even though they no longer own the land. Much of the land is a jumble of goldenrod and *amorpha fruticosa*, a weed that grows like wildfire.

Gergely Torda, a plant biologist from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences who is consulting on the project, scans the land as a blank canvas, describing plans for what will be planted where. Later this year, Klimafa will begin clearing the weeds, using local labor, and then start environmentally sensitive planting of native saplings like willows, beeches, ash, certain poplars

and oaks. The growing forest will absorb 10 times the carbon that the land currently absorbs, and will be self-sustaining, Mr. Torda said.

Klimafa has been given the right to restore the land by the Bukk National Park, which owns it; costs will be covered by carbon credit purchases. Mr. Torda said it would take 50 to 150 years to produce a mature forest.

After the Vatican agreement was announced, Msgr. Melchor Sánchez de Toca Alameda, an official at the Council for Culture at the Vatican, told the Catholic News Service that buying credits was like doing penance. "One can emit less CO2 by not using heating and not driving a car, or one can do penance by intervening to offset emissions, in this case by planting trees," he said.

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September 18, 2007

Plan for Sea Canal Puts Hindu Belief In Sharp Relief
Some Indians See Controversial Route As Threat to Divinely Created Shoals
By Rama Lakshmi
Washington Post Foreign Service
Tuesday, September 18, 2007; A13

ADAM'S BRIDGE, India -- In the emerald waters separating India and Sri Lanka lies a long chain of sand-capped rocky formations. Devout Hindus believe the god Ram built the shoals before a battle with a demon king. Fishermen along India's coast believe the shoals saved them from a tsunami three years ago. And environmentalists treasure them for their patch reefs, sea fans, sponges and pearl oysters.

Now, however, the shoals -- which form what is known as Adam's Bridge -- are being threatened by the construction of a massive sea canal.

The Indian government began dredging the shallow ocean bed two years ago and is now poised to break apart Adam's Bridge, whose demolition is necessary to allow ships to traverse a direct route between the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. But the project has become entangled in a complex web of resistance from environmentalists, fishermen, political parties and Hindu activists.

Opposition to huge industrial projects is common in India, but the controversy over Adam's Bridge, or Ram Sethu, marks one of the first times religion has become an obstacle to major development. Thousands of Hindu protesters have rallied in the streets since last week, blocking traffic and chanting, "We will save Ram Sethu, we will save Hindu heritage!"

"Millions of Hindus believe that Ram built that bridge across the sea. Our scriptures and epics mention it," said Surendra Jain, a leader of the World Hindu Council, a hard-line Hindu group. "We will not let them destroy our religious heritage."

An ambitious project with an estimated cost of more than \$500 million, the Sethusamudram Shipping Canal was originally envisioned in 1860, and at least 14 proposals have been abandoned over the years because India lacked the financial resources to build it.

Ships coming from the Arabian Sea currently go around Sri Lanka to reach India's east coast and Bangladesh. With the proposed channel, 13 yards deep and 328 yards wide, ships are expected to be able to pass straight through India's territorial waters. That would mean more revenue for India's ports.

"The ships will save about 30 hours in navigation time," said Rakesh Srivastava, a senior official at the Shipping Ministry in New Delhi. "More than 3,000 ships will use this channel every year. This is a very prestigious project for India and would lead to the economic transformation of the ports and the coastal people."

While many critics have petitioned the Supreme Court in a bid to have the project scrapped, the Hindu activists support the sea canal as long as it can be built in a way that would avoid damage to Adam's Bridge. Some activists have proposed dredging to the west of the bridge to make way for a canal.

Government officials have said that approach would be misguided. And they contend the bridge isn't important in Hinduism.

"People have mixed religion with reality," Srivastava said. The shoals were formed from calcium deposits and natural sedimentation over millions of years."

In court, the government contended that the Hindu god Ram was a mythical character, an argument that only further enraged Hindus opposed to the current project. The Hindu nationalist political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, called the statement a blasphemous insult, and the government hurriedly withdrew it.

Hindu opposition to the project is only the most recent hindrance to the canal's completion. Naval experts have questioned assertions that the canal would save ships 30 hours in travel time, as well as the economic viability of the project. Fishermen's unions have staged sit-ins, blocked rail traffic and petitioned the court.

Umayavel Tharakudiyar, a 55-year-old fisherman in the village of Ramakrishnapuram on the coast of Tamil Nadu state, said the dredging of sand has already reduced the number of fish he and others catch. He explained his fears by drawing a map of his village and the canal route in the sand.

"We will lose our freedom. For different kinds of fish, we go out at various times of the day. Once the ships start sailing, we will be assigned special times of the day for fishing. They will deny us entry with our boats and nets in some areas," he said as he sat on the sandy ground outside his thatched-roof home.

His wife, Tamilarasi, said Adam's Bridge has shielded the area during cyclones and other natural

disasters. "The bridge protected us from the tsunami," she said. "Once that goes, our villages may disappear in the next cyclone."

Although the government has received formal environmental clearance for the canal, there are lingering concerns about the impact it would have on a marine biosphere reserve 12 miles west of the area to be dredged. A row of 21 islands rich in coral reefs, sea turtles, dolphins and sea cows, the reserve is one of the most biologically diverse areas in South Asia.

A recent government report said the canal could "drastically alter the dynamics of the ecosystems" in the biosphere.

"Sea animals communicate through waves, and the dredging work disturbs them. In the last six months, sea cows are losing their way and are seen closer to the shore," said Rakesh Kumar Jagenia, the wildlife warden at the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve. "It will get worse once the ships start sailing, with the high noise levels and thermal pollution."

Environmental activists and fishermen complain that despite their long struggle, it is the religious claim to Adam's Bridge that has provoked the most public interest and drawn a reaction from the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, ecologists and fishermen's groups are reluctant to build alliances with the Hindu nationalist organizations.

"People are debating nonissues," said T.S.S. Mani, an activist fisherman opposed to the canal. "This is a battle for environment, people's lives and livelihoods, but unfortunately it has acquired a religious branding."

September 22, 2007

Religion and ecology

Faith upon the earth

Sep 22nd 2007 | DELHI AND ILULISSAT, GREENLAND

From The Economist print edition

Religious groups and scientists team up

Daniel Heaf

"THERE was a functioning bridge until 1470 AD," says Praveen Togadia, a Hindu fundamentalist, smoothing out his dhoti. "Due to natural calamities, it was disturbed, and parts went into the sea." To modern, secular eyes, at least, the "bridge" is a 30-mile (48km) chain of sandy shoals across the Palk Strait between India and Sri Lanka. But millions of Hindus see the shoals as physical proof of their beliefs. The Ramayana, a Hindu text, says a bridge was built by monkeys at the behest of a Hindu god, Ram—who duly crossed over to wrest his wife Sita from a Sri Lankan demon. The shoals are known in India as "Ram Setu", or "Ram's Bridge".

Now take a deep breath and consider the conflict over a plan by India's Congress-led government to dredge the strait for a shipping canal. While Hindus loathe the project on spiritual grounds, ecologists have different objections. At the junction of the deep, cold Indian Ocean and the shallow, temperate Arabian Sea, the strait is an ecological prize. So far, 377 endemic species have been found in nearby waters.

On this issue at least, the devoutly religious and the greens are on the same side. But the former, it seems, have more clout than the latter. On September 12th the government told the Supreme Court that the Ramayana was not proof of the existence of Lord Ram; and that science suggested the shoals were made by sedimentation, not monkeys. On the same day, the World Hindu Council, headed by Dr Togadia, staged protests across the country. On September 14th the government, at the behest of Sonia Gandhi, the (Catholic) leader of Congress, put the canal plan on hold: a setback for a government which wanted to save ships from a 24-hour loop round Sri Lanka. With elections due next year, Congress feared giving its Hindu foes in the Bharatiya Janata Party a new slogan.

India's greens have little love for their accidental allies. "I'm not protesting against this project for religious reasons but for environmental ones," says Kushal Pal Singh Yadav, of the Centre for Science and the Environment, a Delhi think-tank.

In many other parts of the world, secular greens and religious people find themselves on the same side of public debates: sometimes hesitantly, sometimes tactically, and sometimes fired by a sense that they have deep things in common.

One more case from India: ornithologists who want to save three species of vulture (endangered because cattle carcasses are tainted by chemicals) see their best ally as the Parsees, who on religious grounds use vultures to dispose of human corpses.

In China, organised religion is much weaker and conservationists also feel more lonely. But Pan Yue, the best-known advocate of green concerns within the Chinese government, says ancient creeds, like Taoism, offer the best hope of making people treat the earth more kindly.

Other tie-ups between faith and ecology are less obvious. In Sweden, the national Lutheran Church, working with Japanese Shintos, recently held a multi-faith meeting on forestry. They agreed to set a new standard for the care of forests owned or managed by religious bodies—in other words, they said, 5% of the world's woods.

This month, representatives of many faiths, including a local Lutheran bishop and a shivering Buddhist monk gathered in Greenland to talk to scientists and ecologists. Patriarch Bartholomew, the senior bishop of the Orthodox Church, led his impressively robed guests in a silent supplication for the planet.

The terms of the transaction between faith and ecology vary a lot. In places like Scandinavia, where religion is weakish, a cleric who "goes green" may reach a wider audience; in countries like India, where faith is powerful, spiritual messages touch more hearts than secular ones do. That doesn't stop some environmental scientists from saying they are being hijacked by clerics in

search of relevance. But Mary Evelyn Tucker, of America's Yale University, says secular greens badly need their spiritual allies: "Religions provide a cultural integrity, a spiritual depth and moral force which secular approaches lack."

Martin Palmer, of the British-based Alliance of Religions and Conservation, says faiths often have the clearest view of the social and economic aspects of an environmental problem. In Newfoundland, he notes, conservationists put curbs on cod fishing—and left the churches to care for families whose living was ruined.

Still, one selling point often used by the religious in their dialogue with science—the fact that faith encourages people to think long-term—may be a mixed blessing. The most pessimistic scientists say mankind has a decade at most to curb greenhouse gases and fend off disastrous global warming; that doesn't leave much time to settle the finer points of metaphysics.

September 22, 2007

Pope to make climate action a moral obligation

Source: Copyright 2007, Independent (UK)

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Byline: James Macintyre

The Pope is expected to use his first address to the United Nations to deliver a powerful warning over climate change in a move to adopt protection of the environment as a "moral" cause for the Catholic Church and its billion-strong following.

The New York speech is likely to contain an appeal for sustainable development, and it will follow an unprecedented Encyclical (a message to the wider church) on the subject, senior diplomatic sources have told The Independent.

It will act as the centrepiece of a US visit scheduled for next April – the first by Benedict XVI, and the first Papal visit since 1999 – and round off an environmental blitz at the Vatican, in which the Pope has personally led moves to emphasise green issues based on the belief that climate change is affecting the poorest people on the planet, and the principle that believers have a duty to "protect creation".

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, head of the Catholic Church in the UK, said last night: "This is a crucial issue both today and for all future generations. We are the stewards of creation and we need to take that responsibility seriously and co-operate to care for the created world."

A Papal tour of America will be particularly potent during election year in the US, where Catholics number around 73 million, and is being discussed in Rome after Pope Benedict accepted an invitation from the UN secretary general, Ban Ki-moon. For the Pope to take his climate-change message to the high-profile UN platform will be considered hugely influential to

the fifth of the world's population who are Catholics, and will act as a rallying call for action in Africa and Asia, which have seen a rise in Catholics in recent years.

News of the speech comes as Vatican City has become the first fully carbon-neutral state in the world, after announcing it is offsetting its carbon footprint by planting a forest in Hungary and installing solar panels on the roof of St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

It also follows a series of interventions by the Pope on the environment. On 2 September he told a 300,000 youth audience: "Before it is too late, it is necessary to make courageous decisions that reflect knowing how to re-create a strong alliance between man and the earth." On 7 September, he said there was a "pressing need for science and religion to work together to safeguard the gifts of nature and to promote responsible stewardship".

UK diplomats have held a number of behind-the-scenes meetings with Vatican officials on the environment. A Whitehall source said last night: "Benedict is the spiritual head of 19 per cent of the world's population and a highly respected figure. If the Pope's words are taken on board by his community that is one big constituency for change and could well turn the tide on climate change and environmental degradation."

September 22, 2007

Combating Climate Change Given Big Confidence Boost in Canada
 Governments Agree to Accelerated 'Freeze and Phase-out' of Ozone and Climate-Damaging Chemicals at Montreal Protocol's 20th Anniversary Celebrations
 Montreal/Nairobi, 22 September 2007 - An historic agreement to tackle the twin challenges of protecting the ozone layer and combating climate change has been agreed by governments.

Nations signed up to an accelerated freeze and phase out of substances known as hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) under the 20 year-old Montreal Protocol- the UNEP treaty established in 1987 to protect the Earth's ozone layer from chemical attack.

The decision, including an agreement that sufficient funding will be made available to achieve the strategy, follows mounting evidence that HCFCs contribute to global warming.

HCFCs emerged as replacement chemicals in the 1990s for in air conditioning, some forms of refrigeration equipment and foams following an earlier decision to phase-out older and more ozone-damaging chemicals known as CFCs or chlorofluorocarbons.

Governments meeting in the Canadian city agreed at the close to freeze production of HCFCs in 2013 and bring forward the final phase-out date of these chemicals by ten years.

The acceleration may also assist in restoring the health of the ozone layer?the high flying gas that filters out damaging levels of ultra violet light?by a few years too.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, praised the decision taken at the 20th anniversary celebrations of the Montreal Protocol calling it an 'important and quick win' for combating climate change.

"Historic is an often over-used word but not in the case of this agreement made in Montreal. Governments had a golden opportunity to deal with the twin challenges of climate change and protecting the ozone layer?and governments took it. The precise and final savings in terms of greenhouse gas emissions could amount to several billions of tonnes illustrating the complementarities of international environmental agreements," he said.

Mr Steiner also congratulated the government of Canada and John Baird, the Canadian Environment Minister, for hosting a successful meeting.

He said the spotlight now moves to New York where, on 24 September, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon is hosting a Heads of State meeting on climate change.

The meeting will help to build confidence in the run up to the UN climate convention negotiations scheduled in Bali, Indonesia, in December. Here nations need to get down in earnest to negotiate an international greenhouse gas emissions reductions agreement to kick in post-2012.

Mr Steiner said:" I believe the agreement and the spirit of Montreal can build confidence in the United Nations as a platform for negotiating effective agreements for addressing the environmental challenges of our time".

"Montreal underlines that when nations are united they can achieve a great deal and on multiple fronts. It also underlines how international treaties?in this case the UN's Montreal Protocol and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change?can deliver far more when we build on the scientific consensus and mobilize the technological and economic means to act," he added.

John Baird, Canada's Environment Minister, added: "The Montreal Protocol, already considered the most successful environmental agreement to date, delivers once again, to protect the ozone layer as well as the most pressing issue of our time?climate change. Today's announcement demonstrates the kind of concrete action citizens around the world are demanding".

The Agreement on HCFCs

HCFCs, which also damage the ozone layer but less than CFCs, were always planned as interim substitutes and were due to be phased out in 2030 by developed countries and in 2040 by developing ones.

However in recent years and months mounting evidence has emerged on the growth in HCFCs and the potentially significant benefits arising in terms of combating climate change and ozone loss if an accelerated freeze and accelerated phase-out could be achieved.

Experts estimate that without this week's agreement, production and consumption of HCFCs may have doubled by 2015 adding to the dual challenges of ozone depletion and climate change.

Here in Montreal six proposals were put before governments from both developed and developing countries. They represented a variety of options including the freeze dates; reduction steps towards a final and accelerated phase out.

Industry experts had indicated that, should an agreement be taken this week in Montreal, this would send a strong signal resulting in the rapid development of replacement chemicals and technologies.

The final agreement is a combination of the various options proposed by Argentina and Brazil; Norway and Switzerland; the United States; Mauritania, Mauritius and the Federated States of Micronesia. Under the agreement, productions of HCFCs are to be frozen at the average production levels in 2009-2010 in 2013.

Developed countries have agreed to reduce production and consumption by 2010 by 75 per cent and by 90 per cent by 2015 with final phase out in 2020.

Developing countries have agreed to cut production and consumption by 10 per cent in 2015; by 35 per cent by 2020 and by 67.5 per cent by 2025 with a final phase-out in 2030.

It was also agreed that a small percentage of the original base line amounting to 2.5 per cent will be allowed in developing countries during the period 2030-2040 for 'servicing' purposes.

September 25, 2007

Climate change int'l concern, a moral imperative to protect environment, Vatican states

9/25/2007
Catholic Online

UNITED NATIONS (Catholic Online) – Climate change is a serious concern for the international community and an inescapable responsibility for scientists, political and governmental leaders and all other sectors of human society, a high-ranking Vatican official told the member countries of the United Nations.

In a Sept. 24 statement to the U.N. General Assembly session on climate change entitled “The future is in our hands: Addressing the leadership challenge of climate change,” Msgr. Piero Parolin, Vatican undersecretary for relations with states, stressed that, despite various interpretations, the “best scientific assessments” have established a clear link between human activity and global warming, which requires the adoption of a “coordinated, effective and prompt international political strategy.”

Yet, he cautioned that interpretation of scientific data should not be “exaggerated nor minimized” for political or ideological gain.

The issue of climate change is a “complex question,” he said, noting that “no country alone can solve the problems related to our common environment.”

The Vatican sees an “underlying moral imperative that all, without exception, have a grave responsibility to protect the environment,” Msgr. Parolin said.

He called “fundamentally reckless” the belief that the world’s resources should be fully exploited.

Yet he also pointed to “the other extreme” of “those who hold up the earth as the only good and would characterize humanity as an irredeemable threat to the earth.” “We strongly believe,” he said of the Vatican U.N. delegation, “that such assertions would place human beings and their needs at the service of an inhuman ecology.”

These and other similar, though less extreme positions, he said, are impediments to efforts to take action to reduce the extent of global warming, to minimize its effects and to “safeguarding of our common future.”

A coordinated effort should identify ways and means that are “economically accessible, enhance sustainable development and foster a healthy environment,” Msgr. Parolin. He added that special account needs to be taken for developing nations and their people that “are particularly vulnerable to the adverse consequences of climate change.”

Target young people through educational efforts, he urged, “to change inbred, selfish attitudes towards consumption and exploitation of natural resources.”

Governmental policy should be directed, he stressed to giving economic incentives to encourage the further development of “more environmentally friendly technologies,” such as those involved in energy production and efficiency.

He criticized the pace of implementation of international agreements. “Unless our words are matched with effective action and accountability, we would do little to avert a bleak future and may find ourselves gathering again not too long from now to lament another collective failure.”

The Vatican believes that the U.N. needs to live up to its commitment on climate change. U.N. member “states have a shared ‘responsibility to protect’ the world’s climate” and “our planet and ensure that present and future generations be able to live in a healthy and safe environment.”

In an May 10 statement to the U.N. Economic and Social Council’s Commission on Sustainable Development on “Turning Political Commitments into Action, Working together in Partnership,” Archbishop Celestino Migliore, apostolic nuncio of the Holy See’s permanent mission to the U.N., the world community must address the threat posed by global warming and build more sustainable economies or face the continued drift toward tensions, conflicts and a crisis in the very existence of peoples.

He stressed that the scientific evidence for global warming and mankind’s role in the increase of greenhouse gasses “becomes ever more unimpeachable” and its effects already impacting the world community.

“The consequences of climate change are being felt not only in the environment, but in the entire socio-economic system, Archbishop Migliore said, noting that “such activity has a profound relevance, not just for the environment, but in ethical, economic, social and political terms as well.”

Global warming, he said, “will impact first and foremost the poorest and weakest who, even if they are among the least responsible for global warming, are the most vulnerable because they have limited resources or live in areas at greater risk.”

The issues surrounding climate change are far-reaching, the Vatican nuncio said, pointing to the connection between it and the drive to acquire and consume energy and water resources and protecting human health and the environment.

“The earth is our common heritage and we have a grave and far-reaching responsibility to ourselves and to future generations,” he said.

The international community, Archbishop Migliore said, must come to terms to establish a “common, global, long-term energy strategy, capable of satisfying legitimate short- and medium-term energy requirements, ensuring energy security, protecting human health and the environment and establishing precise commitments to address the question of climate change.”

The nuncio spoke with some urgency, noting that the U.N. Security Council recently dealt with the relationship of energy, security and climate change.

“We are already witnessing struggles for the control of strategic resources such as oil and fresh water, both of which are becoming ever scarcer,” he said.

“If we refuse to build sustainable economies now, we will continue to drift towards more tensions and conflicts over resources,” Archbishop Migliore warned, pointing to “many of the most vulnerable societies already facing energy problems” “and to the threatened “very existence of coastal peoples and small island states.”

To meet the “double challenge” of climate change and the need for “ever greater energy resources, the nuncio called for the world community to embrace more sustainable development in which there is a much closer link between “natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology.”

“We will have to change our present model from one of the heedless pursuit of economic growth in the name of development, towards a model which heeds the consequences of its actions and is more respectful towards the creation we hold in common, coupled with an integral human development for present and future generations,” he said.

“Experience shows that disregard for the environment harms human coexistence,” the archbishop said, adding that the international community must make the connection between making “peace with creation and peace among nations.”

He stressed the importance of technology and education to build a more sustainable economy.

“Economic growth does not have to mean greater consumption,” Archbishop Migliore said. “It does however mean that we will need technology, ingenuity, determined political will and common sense.”

He added that it will also mean the transference of technology to developing countries “to the benefit of the entire global community.”

But beyond the development of technology and the “political will” to collaborate internationally, education at the level of each nation is required to ensure that the mankind “approach our daily patterns of consumption and production in a very different way.”

“Through such education, states can help their citizens grasp the urgency of what must be done, teaching them in turn to expect and demand a very different approach to their own consumption and that around them,” he said.

He noted that “we cannot simply uninvent the modern world,” but that there is the chance to remedy the “worldwide, unprecedented ecological changes” already taking place.

“None of us can foresee fully the consequences of man’s industrial activity over the recent centuries,” he noted. “But there is still time to use technology and education to promote universally sustainable development before it is too late.”

September 27, 2007

September 27, 2007

Op-Ed Contributor

Our Moral Footprint

By VACLAV HAVEL

Prague

OVER the past few years the questions have been asked ever more forcefully whether global climate changes occur in natural cycles or not, to what degree we humans contribute to them, what threats stem from them and what can be done to prevent them. Scientific studies demonstrate that any changes in temperature and energy cycles on a planetary scale could mean danger for all people on all continents.

It is also obvious from published research that human activity is a cause of change; we just don’t know how big its contribution is. Is it necessary to know that to the last percentage point, though? By waiting for incontrovertible precision, aren’t we simply wasting time when we could be taking measures that are relatively painless compared to those we would have to adopt after further delays?

Maybe we should start considering our sojourn on earth as a loan. There can be no doubt that for the past hundred years at least, Europe and the United States have been running up a debt, and now other parts of the world are following their example. Nature is issuing warnings that we must not only stop the debt from growing but start to pay it back. There is little point in asking whether we have borrowed too much or what would happen if we postponed the repayments. Anyone with a mortgage or a bank loan can easily imagine the answer.

The effects of possible climate changes are hard to estimate. Our planet has never been in a state of balance from which it could deviate through human or other influence and then, in time, return to its original state. The climate is not like a pendulum that will return to its original position after a certain period. It has evolved turbulently over billions of years into a gigantic complex of networks, and of networks within networks, where everything is interlinked in diverse ways.

Its structures will never return to precisely the same state they were in 50 or 5,000 years ago. They will only change into a new state, which, so long as the change is slight, need not mean any threat to life.

Larger changes, however, could have unforeseeable effects within the global ecosystem. In that case, we would have to ask ourselves whether human life would be possible. Because so much uncertainty still reigns, a great deal of humility and circumspection is called for.

We can’t endlessly fool ourselves that nothing is wrong and that we can go on cheerfully

pursuing our wasteful lifestyles, ignoring the climate threats and postponing a solution. Maybe there will be no major catastrophe in the coming years or decades. Who knows? But that doesn't relieve us of responsibility toward future generations.

I don't agree with those whose reaction is to warn against restricting civil freedoms. Were the forecasts of certain climatologists to come true, our freedoms would be tantamount to those of someone hanging from a 20th-story parapet.

Whenever I reflect on the problems of today's world, whether they concern the economy, society, culture, security, ecology or civilization in general, I always end up confronting the moral question: what action is responsible or acceptable? The moral order, our conscience and human rights — these are the most important issues at the beginning of the third millennium.

We must return again and again to the roots of human existence and consider our prospects in centuries to come. We must analyze everything open-mindedly, soberly, unideologically and unobsessively, and project our knowledge into practical policies. Maybe it is no longer a matter of simply promoting energy-saving technologies, but chiefly of introducing ecologically clean technologies, of diversifying resources and of not relying on just one invention as a panacea.

I'm skeptical that a problem as complex as climate change can be solved by any single branch of science. Technological measures and regulations are important, but equally important is support for education, ecological training and ethics — a consciousness of the commonality of all living beings and an emphasis on shared responsibility.

Either we will achieve an awareness of our place in the living and life-giving organism of our planet, or we will face the threat that our evolutionary journey may be set back thousands or even millions of years. That is why we must see this issue as a challenge to behave responsibly and not as a harbinger of the end of the world.

The end of the world has been anticipated many times and has never come, of course. And it won't come this time either. We need not fear for our planet. It was here before us and most likely will be here after us. But that doesn't mean that the human race is not at serious risk. As a result of our endeavors and our irresponsibility our climate might leave no place for us. If we drag our feet, the scope for decision-making — and hence for our individual freedom — could be considerably reduced.

Vaclav Havel is the former president of the Czech Republic. This article was translated by Gerald Turner from the Czech.

Essentially this means that some equipment, coming towards the end of its life such as office block air conditioning units, could continue to run on HCFCs for a few more years if needed.

The 191 Parties to the Montreal Protocol?190 countries plus the European Commission?also made an agreement on financing.

The Protocol's financial arm?the Multilateral Fund?which to date has spent over \$2 billion to

assist developing country reductions comes up for replenishment next year. The new agreement takes into account the need for 'stable and sufficient' funds and the fact that there may be 'incremental costs' for developing countries under the accelerated HCFC freeze and phase out.

Governments agreed here to commission a short study by experts to fully assess the likely costs of the acceleration. They will report back early in 2008 and inform parties on the suggested sums required for the new replenishment.

Marco Gonzalez, Executive Secretary of UNEP's Ozone Secretariat, said: "The progress achieved over 20 years and continued this week demonstrates to the world that developed and developing countries can work together to meet global challenges. Here this week numerous nations including China, India, the United States and the European Union, demonstrated the art of the possible and solidarity in advancing the international environmental agenda on both ozone and now increasingly on climate change".

Other Important Decisions Taken at the 19th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol

Methyl bromide, a pesticide and ozone depleting substance, was meant to be fully phased-out by developed countries in 2005.

But 'critical use exemptions' have been granted because some farmers producing products such as strawberries and cucumbers to tomatoes and eggplants argue that alternatives are either not ready or cost effective for all circumstances.

In 2005, over 16,000 tonnes of methyl bromide were approved under the Montreal Protocol and in 2007 over 9,100 tonnes were permitted.

Here in Montreal, governments approved just over 4,600 tonnes continuing the downward trend in critical use exemptions for developed countries.

Notes to Editors

20th Anniversary Montreal Protocol web site <http://www.unep.org/themes/climatechange/ozone/>
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September 27, 2007

World

Fight against climate change: Projects from South Africa and Bangladesh share prestigious environment award

Author: United Nations Environment Programme
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Ms. Jeunesse Park of South Africa and Bangladeshi NGO Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha are the co-winners of the UNEP Sasakawa Prize 2007, a \$200,000 prize awarded yearly to individuals or institutions who have made a substantial contribution to the protection and management of the environment.

Commenting on this announcement, Ms. Park, who has been working on climate change since 1990, said that "it has been rewarding to recently see the growing interest in this crucial global crisis and to know that we have played a small part in facilitating action in South Africa".

For his part, Abul Hasanat Mohammed Rezwan, Shidhulai Executive Director, noted that the prize will help his organization "provide clean solar-powered lighting and educate thousands of people on literacy, sustainable farming and climate change", as well as promote "self-reliance for hundreds of villages in Bangladesh".

The four-member jury chose the co-winners, at a meeting at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, and the award ceremony will be held on 27 October 2007 at the Museum of Natural History, Rose Center for Earth and Space, in New York, USA.

The UNEP Sasakawa Prize acts as an incentive for environmental efforts that are sustainable and replicable in the long-term. It recognizes innovation, groundbreaking research and ideas, and extraordinary grassroots initiatives from around the world. The candidates' scope of activities is associated with the environmental theme of the year, which in 2007 is climate change.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, said: "Leadership is urgently needed if the international community is to rise to the challenge of climate change- leadership from the United Nations; governments, scientists; business and cities, but also leadership from individuals and civil society organizations working on the ground".

"These two outstanding winners of the Sasakawa Prize 2007 embody leadership in its finest form - namely creative and determined action that demonstrates real and tangible difference to the people and communities they serve. In doing so our award winners are proving that combating climate change is not only do-able but links to the wider environmental, social and economic aims enshrined in targets such as the Millennium Development Goals," he added.

The Winners

Ms. Jeunesse Park is the founder and CEO of Food and Trees for Africa (FTFA), South Africa's only national greening and food gardening NGO which promotes greening, sustainable natural resource use and management and food security, through three key programs: Trees for Homes, EduPlant, and the Urban Greening Forum.

Ms. Park initiated the design of the first carbon calculator in South Africa, using the global Greenhouse Gas Reporting Protocol and launched the Carbon Standard in 2006 to make it easy and affordable for government, institutions and communities to offset carbon emissions. The calculator evaluates carbon emitted by a range of activities such as energy consumption, land and air travel, and paper usage. It then calculates how many trees one would need to plant to absorb the carbon generated through the process of photosynthesis. The calculator and associated action are instrumental in creating political and social awareness on means of addressing the effects of climate change on communities and the environment.

She has played a significant role in the introduction of the concept of urban forestry. Taking note that over 66% of South Africa's population lives in degraded urban areas, she initiated the Urban Greening Forum. With support from various international and local environmental entities, she began working with national and local authorities and communities in the barren townships of South Africa to develop parks, nurseries, street trees and other greening projects. Her work has provided a model for several municipalities such as Soweto, Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni, Port Elizabeth and Kimberley.

As for Trees for Homes, with the slogan "a house is not a home without a tree", it aims to improve the quality of life of the under-privileged by providing plant material, environmental awareness, some short term employment and education for those living in low-cost housing developments, whilst offsetting carbon emissions.

"FTFA aims for sustainability and replication and, in the past few years, it has been encouraging to see the government and the private sector in South Africa approach us for assistance in addressing greening and climate change. We feel that over the past 18 years we have sown the seeds of awareness and they are now germinating and growing to ensure sustainable development for our emerging democracy", said Ms. Park.

Instead of waiting around for the limelight to spur her into action, she has been working for 18 years with her NGO on accomplishments that could fill several books, and she intends on continuing.

"The prize money would be used to develop climate change awareness and education materials and assist in networking and presentations on climate change to government, business and the disadvantaged and underserved communities of South Africa," assured Ms Park.

"Since we are currently lobbying big business in this country, the award would assist us with highlighting the importance of climate change, and options for addressing this, amongst the larger carbon emitters of South Africa," she added.

Thanks to the education and support programs offered by FTFA, hundreds of people in South Africa are hard at work planting, reaping, creating and selling their homegrown or recycled wares.

Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha was founded in 1998 to help poor and marginalized people from the remote Chalanbeel region and to combat the effects of climate change in Bangladesh, particularly devastating floods and rising water levels.

The Shidhulai has achieved this target by building 40 flat-bottomed boats from locally available materials, which make their way through the rivers and shallow canals of the Chalanbeel to bring a range of educational services and renewable energy supplies to 88,000 families each year.

"Climate change has increased flooding in recent years – now we have floods two to three times a year. Over the next 8-10 years, ten per cent of our land will be lost to the sea because of climate change - issues like this need local solution by local people. Shidhulai as a local organization is proving that it is possible to deal with this climate change, to tackle pollution, and at the same time, to lift people out of poverty. We hope our work in using boats to adapt and cope with climate change and improve the quality of life will serve as an inspiration," said Mr. Rezwana.

Shidhulai uses Bangladesh's extensive river network to spread environmental education. Boats have been outfitted to travel from farm to farm bringing new technologies, information, strategies, and tools. Villagers have learned and implemented ways to avoid problems such as soil erosion, ground and water contamination, over-fishing, and habitat destruction. Access to this information has resulted in higher income which has enabled residents to send their children to school, gain access to better healthcare, and improve living conditions.

The boats, which anchor at remote villages, rely on solar energy and cellular network for Internet access. With the help of volunteers, Shidhulai educates men, women, and children on issues ranging from agricultural practices to micro enterprise and literacy. Farmers learn about strategies for productive and sustainable farming and the ecological hazards of pesticides. Throughout the year, they are able to connect with educators via onboard e-mail and video conference, and check current farm prices online to remain competitive in the local market.

Students, who would otherwise be unable to attend school during the monsoon season, continue their education using the libraries' onboard field staff. With illiteracy rates in Bangladesh at nearly 60%, Shidhulai is making a significant impact on educating young people, especially girls. In fact, over 70 percent of the program's beneficiaries are women.

The four member of UNEP Sasakawa Prize jury are: Pr. Wangari Maathai, 2004 Nobel Peace Laureate; Ms. Angela Cropper, Senator for Trinidad and Tobago; Ms. Wakako Hironaka, former Minister of the Environment of Japan; and Mr. Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director.

The UNEP Sasakawa Prize is sponsored by the Japan-based Nippon Foundation, an independent, non-profit grant-making organization that supports both domestic and international philanthropic projects. The UNEP Sasakawa Prize was originally established in 1982 by the late Ryoichi Sasakawa. The Prize was re-launched in its current format in 2005, and is currently chaired by Mr. Sasakawa's son, Yohei Sasakawa.

Ms. Park, SHIDHULAI and Ms. Omana T.K, a woman who has brought climate-friendly rice production, rainwater harvesting and bio gas power to thousands of villagers in rural India, were short-listed in June 2007 by Daniel Schrag, Director of Harvard University's Center for the Environment; Richard Ottinger, Pace University Law School, Zamba Batjargal, former minister of the Environment for Mongolia and Eric Falt, Director, Division of Communications and Public Information, United Nations Environment Programme.

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September 28, 2007

HEATED DEBATE

Split Over Global Warming Widens Among Evangelicals; Texas Christians Cite Conflicting Scripture; Staying 'On Mission'

By ANDREW HIGGINS

September 28, 2007; Page A1

WACO, Texas -- Suzii Paynter, director of the public policy arm of Texas's biggest group of Baptist churches, traveled to central Texas early this year to talk to a local preacher about a pressing "moral, biblical and theological" issue. She wanted to discuss coal.

Christians have a biblical mandate to be "good stewards of God's creation," Ms. Paynter says she told the Rev. Frank Brown, pastor of the Bellmead First Baptist Church here in the county where President Bush has his ranch. So, Texas Baptists should demand that controversial plans to build a slew of coal-fired power plants be put on hold.

Mr. Brown was not impressed. God, the pastor said, is "sovereign over his creation" and no amount of coal-burning will alter by a "millisecond" his divine plan for the world. Fighting environmental damage is "like chasing rabbits," he recalls telling her. It just distracts from core Christian duties to spread the faith and protect the unborn.

Ms. Paynter and Mr. Brown, devout Baptists both, stand at opposite ends of a debate over the environment that has been roiling America's potent but often fractious community of evangelicals. Christians have been arguing about coal in Texas, oil drilling in Alaska and hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico. The most charged issue of all is climate change, a focus of world attention this week with conferences at the United Nations and in Washington, D.C. America's Christians are divided on basic questions: How serious is it, what causes it, and what should mankind do about it?

All sides cite the Bible. Ms. Paynter points to a New Testament passage that says the good shepherd does not exploit his sheep and to a psalm that declares "the earth is the Lord's and all its fullness." Mr. Brown quotes an Old Testament verse promising that "while the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease."

Behind the theological disputation, however, is a struggle grounded in the here and now. Who speaks for American evangelicals, and on what issues? Evangelicals in the U.S. share a cluster of core principles: belief in the authority of the Bible, a determination to spread the faith and a commitment to salvation through Jesus. But defining the group beyond that is difficult. They also have a long history of quarrels over their agenda and tension over leadership, particularly since the rise in the 1970s of the formidable political force known as the "religious right."

The dispute over the environment has gained urgency in the run-up to next year's presidential election. Liberal Christians have long championed green issues. Some of their more conservative brethren, particularly in Washington, then joined them in that cause. Now, as anxiety over the environment seeps into the evangelical heartland of the South, pastors and ordinary believers are also wrestling with what was long scorned as a left-wing fetish. A look at how the struggle is playing out in Texas shows the different forces at work -- and suggests its outcome is unlikely to be resolved soon.

"Global warming is a proxy battle," says the Rev. Jim Ball, a graduate of Baylor University, a Baptist college in Waco, and now head of the Evangelical Environmental Network, a group set up in 1994. The combatants are "those moving forward on a broader agenda, and those who want to keep evangelicals focused on just three things -- abortion, judges and gay marriage."

The split is also a struggle between generations, says the Rev. Benjamin Cole, a 31-year-old Baptist preacher from Texas. A blogger on Southern Baptist affairs, Mr. Cole says some younger evangelicals are tiring of lock-step loyalty to the Republican Party. "We wake up each morning and see an elephant on the pillow next to us," he says.

But many veteran leaders of the religious right regard the green movement as a dangerous distraction. Shortly before his death in May, Virginia Baptist preacher the Rev. Jerry Falwell denounced the clamor over global warming as "Satan's attempt to redirect the church's primary focus."

Evangelical Christians have been the Republican Party's most-loyal constituency in recent years. In 2004, 78% of white evangelicals voted for George W. Bush, according to exit polls. Democrats are working hard to dent this alliance. Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, a churchgoing Roman Catholic, frequently refers to scripture to support her calls for action against global warming.

"They've really got traction going when it comes to planting trees and reducing greenhouse gases," says Paul Weyrich, an early pioneer of Republican outreach to conservative Christians who heads the Free Congress Foundation, a Washington think tank.

An episode this spring brought national attention to the brewing dispute. Mr. Weyrich joined two dozen other conservative Christian leaders in warning that global warming "is dividing and demoralizing" evangelicals. In a letter to the National Association of Evangelicals, they denounced the umbrella group's Washington-based vice president for governmental affairs, Richard Cizik, an outspoken champion of action against global warming. They demanded that he shut up or resign.

The NAE's board backed Mr. Cizik, who has continued to speak out. Combating climate change, says Mr. Cizik, is no longer just for "latte-sipping, endive-eating elitists from Harvard" but a core issue for all Christians.

How many evangelicals share this view is hard to assess. Each side has its own poll results. A summer survey commissioned by the Evangelical Climate Initiative, group of prominent Christians alarmed by rising temperatures, found that 70% think climate change will pose a "serious threat" to future generations and 64% want immediate action to curb it. The unpublished survey, due to be released next month, was carried out by Ellison Research, a private company. A separate poll carried out around the same time by Barna Group, a conservative Christian research outfit, used a narrower definition of evangelicals and found that only 33% consider global warming a "major problem."

Splits among Baptists in the South are particularly pronounced. Former Vice President Al Gore, a churchgoing Baptist from Tennessee, has become the nation's best-known campaigner against global warming. But the Southern Baptist Convention, which claims more than 16 million members, stands with skeptics. "We don't believe in global warming," said a veteran preacher at the convention's annual meeting this June in San Antonio, Texas. The meeting passed a resolution that dismissed as "very dangerous" proposals to regulate carbon-dioxide emissions and asserted that scientists disagree on the cause of rising temperatures.

Earlier this year, an international panel of hundreds of scientists concluded that human activity is "very likely" the main driver of global warming.

David Gushee, a Southern Baptist professor of Christian ethics, denounced the San Antonio resolution as akin to the organization's previous refusal to combat racism. Mr. Gushee, who helped draft a Southern Baptist Convention apology for past racism in 1995, says, "I don't want to be writing another resolution of regret in 50 years time" about the environment.

American evangelicals are a vast community with sometimes widely divergent views. They are generally thought to number upwards of 100 million people but estimates vary widely depending on how they are defined. In the 19th century, evangelicals split on the issue of slavery. The civil-rights movement in the 1960s caused further splintering, as did a host of theological and personal squabbles. The 1960s also saw wrangling over the environment.

In speeches at Wheaton College in 1968, Francis Schaeffer, a hugely influential evangelical intellectual who died in 1984, criticized fellow Christians for neglecting "God's creation." Though a conservative, he hailed "hippies" for their attacks on "the poverty of modern man's concept of nature." His remarks were collected in a 1970 book, "Pollution and the Death of Man."

But Mr. Schaeffer's call to arms over the environment was soon drowned out by another cause he championed: the war on abortion. He became a fiery leader of pro-life Christians following the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing the procedure.

"Suddenly, abortion was a litmus test for everything," recalls Mr. Schaeffer's son, Frank, who followed in his father's footsteps but has now broken with conservative evangelicals. Frank Schaeffer, who has just written a memoir called "Crazy for God," says the late Mr. Falwell and others "deformed and distorted" his father's legacy. He is rooting for those who want to widen the evangelical agenda to include action on global warming.

Francis Schaeffer's role as both a pioneer of the pro-life movement and an early environmentalist underscores the varied strands of the conservative evangelical movement. Those strands are on full display in Texas.

One fan of the late Mr. Schaeffer is the Rev. Jack Graham, chief pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church, a stadiumlike house of worship in Plano, Texas, that seats 7,000 faithful. Mr. Graham, a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, is a big supporter of President Bush, but says he is happy to challenge stereotypes about evangelicals. "We don't believe the Earth is flat," he says.

Yet his skepticism about science runs deep. Prestonwood's bookshop stocks a host of books seeking to debunk the theory of evolution, and its parking lot is packed each Sunday with gas-guzzling sports-utility vehicles. "I have a lot more people asking, 'How can I get through the week?' than about the future of the planet," says Mr. Graham. Christians, he says, have to be careful not to "worship creation instead of the Creator."

Nonetheless, he says, they must not abuse nature, either. Mr. Graham is agnostic on the main cause of global warming but thinks science is "tilting towards human activity as contributing to the state of the world."

Prestonwood last year began a drive to save energy and, in December, was named America's "best green church" at a Dallas conference of church builders, suppliers and managers. It recently installed a computerized system to control its outdoor sprinklers and cut down on wasteful watering of its 140-acre grounds. The church has throttled back on air conditioning, started switching to environmentally friendly fluorescent light bulbs and taken lights out of many vending machines. A full-time "energy manager" prowls the premises after hours, leaving admonishing notes for staff who neglect to turn off lights and computers.

One big motive for all this is money. Prestonwood, which has its own school, TV station, five basketball courts and eight sports fields, has cut its utility bills by \$1.1 million since summer last year, when it hired Dallas-based Energy Education Inc. to advise it on how to save energy. But, says Mr. Graham, another reason is the Bible. "Biblical Christianity," he says, quoting Francis Schaeffer, "has a real answer to the ecological crisis."

Other Texas Christians are also trying to conserve energy, including Ms. Paynter, who heads the Christian Life Commission, the public-policy branch of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, a group that Mr. Graham views as insufficiently conservative. Ms. Paynter's Baptist church in Austin, pastored by her husband, teaches "creation care" at summer Bible camp, gets a portion of its power from a renewable-energy grid and has set up recycling bins.

But unlike Mr. Graham, Ms. Paynter is in no doubt about man's role in global warming and considers air quality and other environmental issues as matters of urgent concern. She says her interest was sparked when, at an event for children, she noticed that about 10 of 35 kids present had asthma inhalers.

In poorer, more rural parts of Texas, however, green issues still struggle for a hearing from believers infused with "end times" theology, the conviction that the world will inevitably come to a cataclysmic end and that nothing can or should be done to delay this.

After his discussion with Mrs. Paynter, Mr. Brown, the Baptist preacher in Bellmead near Waco, wrote a lengthy blog entry denouncing environmentalism as a red herring. "Our concern is not to spend hours and hours on how to keep the globe from warming; that is the enemy of hope," he wrote. "Our command is that...we storm the gates of Hell and keep the enemy on the run by the grace of GOD!"

When Ms. Paynter urged Baptists to join the coal power-station debate, she got angry phone calls and messages from outraged preachers and ordinary Baptists. "I do hope our tithes and offerings are not supporting this type of activity," read one email. "Let's stay on mission and keep proclaiming the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

But other Baptists cheered. Mary Darden, a deacon of a big Baptist church next to Waco's Baylor University, organized a group called "Keep Waco Green." Though a firm Democrat, she rallied both liberals and conservatives in opposition to plans by TXU Corp. and another utility to create what environmentalists called a "ring of fire" around Waco with plans to build four coal-fired power plants in the region.

The Waco region's Baptist association helped out by informing members about a public meeting to protest the plants.

In March, opponents of the plants declared victory after investors announced a buyout of TXU and promised to scale back on their expansion plans. Ms. Darden organized a celebratory dinner and dance. The "Coal Plant Victory Bash" was attended by secular environmentalists, a conservative state legislator and Christians of all political stripes. Among them was John Wessler, a conservative Christian and a "Keep Waco Green" activist. "God created a balance and we were about to go way out of balance in Waco," he says.

Mr. Wessler, a health-care adviser, says he got involved out of fear that the plants might spew toxins such as mercury and hurt the health of his family. His daughter has asthma. Now he says he's paying more attention to global warming, too, and thinks it "logical" that man is to blame. He's thought about buying a Toyota Prius hybrid car to replace an old Mercedes. But, he says, "I'm not there yet."

Write to Andrew Higgins at andrew.higgins@wsj.com.

September 28, 2007

THE SEVENTEENTH INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S PAINTING COMPETITION ON THE ENVIRONMENT

UNEP has launched the 17th International children's painting competition. The Competition is organized annually by the UNEP and the Japan-based Foundation for Global Peace and Environment (FGPE), Bayer and Nikon Corporation. It has been held since 1991 and has received over 190,000 entries from children in over 100 countries.

This year's Competition will focus on Climate Change: Actions we can take now.

The selection process will be in two stages; the regional selection which will be done by UNEP Regional Offices and their partners, and the global selection which will be done by UNEP and its partners, Foundation for Global peace and Environment (FGPE), Bayer and Nikon Corporation.

For more details on the Competition please visit: <http://www.unep.org/Tunza/paintcomp/>>

October 1, 2007

Kick the Habit - World Environment Day 2008 to be Hosted by New Zealand with Focus on Fostering Low-Carbon Economies

Nairobi/Wellington, 1 October 2007 - New Zealand, one of the first countries to pledge a carbon-neutral future, will be the main host of World Environment Day 2008, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) announced today.

The challenge of climate change and threats to polar regions and beyond were spotlighted in Norway as part of World Environment Day (WED) 2007.

The focus of the global 2008 celebrations hosted in New Zealand will be on the solutions and the opportunities for countries, companies and communities to "Kick the habit" and de-carbonize their economies and life-styles.

Measures include greater energy efficiency in buildings and appliances, including light bulbs, up to a switch towards cleaner and renewable forms of electricity generation and transport systems.

The focus will also be put on the role of forests in countering rises in greenhouse gases. An estimated 20 per cent of emissions contributing to climate change globally are a result of deforestation.

New Zealand, where forestry is an important industry and conservation of forests is a high priority, plans to use WED to highlight the role technologies and forestry management can play in achieving domestic and international climate goals.

"As part of New Zealand's drive for greater environmental sustainability, we've made a commitment to reduce our emissions. But to overcome the challenge of climate change, kicking the carbon habit must be a truly global goal. During next year's World Environment Day events I look forward to learning about how other nations are addressing this challenge," said Prime Minister Helen Clark.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, said: "New Zealand is among a pioneer group of countries committed to accelerating a transition to a low carbon and carbon-neutral economy. We are therefore delighted to be holding the main WED 2008 celebrations in Wellington and in communities across this South Pacific nation".

He said developed and developing countries stood to benefit environmentally, economically and socially from more efficient low-carbon technologies and strategies.

"What we need is action to slow, stop and then to reverse the growth of global greenhouse gas emissions. A transition to a low carbon economy is essential to achieving this," said Mr. Steiner.

"Along the way we will see more rapid and widespread access to cleaner and greener energy, new job opportunities and reductions in unhealthy urban and in-door pollution. WED is about positive perspectives on change, and this is what we hope to highlight in New Zealand," he added.

Notes to Editors

World Environment Day was established by the UN General Assembly in 1972 to mark the opening of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. Another resolution, adopted by the General Assembly the same day, led to the creation of UNEP.

WED is commemorated each year on 5 June in a different city. It is one of the principal vehicles through which the United Nations stimulates worldwide awareness of the environment and enhances political attention and action.

The day's agenda is to give a human face to environmental issues; empower people to become active agents of sustainable and equitable development; promote an understanding that communities are pivotal to changing attitudes towards environmental issues; and advocate

partnership which will ensure all nations and peoples enjoy a safer and more prosperous future. World Environment Day is also a popular event with colourful activities such as street rallies, bicycle parades, green concerts, essay and poster competitions in schools, tree planting, as well as recycling and cleaning-up campaigns.

On that particular day, heads of State, Prime Ministers and Ministers of Environment deliver statements and commit themselves to care for the Earth. Pledges are made which lead to the establishment of permanent governmental structures dealing with environmental management. It also provides an opportunity to sign or ratify international environmental conventions.

Last year, the main WED event was held in Norway, with the theme Melting Ice ? a Hot Topic?, and focused on the effects that climate change is having on polar ecosystems and communities, and the ensuing consequences around the world.

For more information, please see the website <http://www.unep.org/wed/2008> or contact

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UNEP News Release 2007/29

October 4, 2007

"Think globally, clean locally"

UNEP and Google Put International Cleanup Weekend onto Millions of Computers across the World

Nairobi , 4 October 2007 - People across the planet will be cleaning up their area and sharing the result with millions of people on the internet thanks to a new campaign by Google and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

During International Cleanup Weekend on 13 and 14 October, community groups and individuals on every continent will be heading out in small groups with friends and family to clean up their local parks, beaches, streets and neighbourhoods.

Under this new initiative, their activities and results will make history by being posted as photos and videos onto Google Map ? giving a global platform to every local initiative.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP's Executive Director, said: "The power of local community action is being matched by the power of the World Wide Web. This should

make a formidable partnership uniting and empowering groups from Bangalore to Bermuda and Berlin to Beijing in common cause."

"Let us hope this global Google community's effort may go further and persist beyond the International Cleanup Weekend. It may evolve into a new forum and network for ideas sharing on a wide range of challenges from local cleanups to community-based solutions to such pressing issues as climate change," he added.

Notes to Editors

UNEP and Google encourage everyone to plan their own cleanup close to home, wherever they think there is the biggest need for it. To get started, go to:
<http://maps.google.com/help/maps/cleanup/>

Joint action on the International Cleanup Weekend is part of a series of projects between UNEP and Google Inc. Last year, Google Earth featured "UNEP: Atlas of our Changing Environment", offering satellite images of 100 environmental hotspots from around the world and showing the dangers facing them.

This is the latest of many UNEP-partnered events which reach out to local communities. Every year, World Environment Day mobilises people around the world to focus on the environment. During 2007, the UNEP-led Billion Tree Campaign has attracted tree-planting pledges from all regions of the world.

The annual "Clean Up the World Weekend", organised on 14-16 September by UNEP, has inspired around 35 million volunteers to fix and conserve their local environment since its launch in 1993. It is led by Sydney-based Ian Kiernan, who set out to clean up Sydney Harbour after a yacht race which left him appalled by the amount of rubbish choking the world's oceans.

For More Information Please Contact Nick Nuttall or Anne-France White.

October 4, 2007

UN member states begin dialogue on intercultural, interreligious understanding

The Associated Press
 Thursday, October 4, 2007

UNITED NATIONS: Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told a high-level U.N. meeting Thursday that there is an urgent need to address rising cultural and religious tensions by promoting diversity and dialogue.

"It is time to promote the idea that diversity is a virtue, not a threat," he said during the U.N. General Assembly's first high-level dialogue on intercultural and interreligious understanding and cooperation for peace.

Ban said that while traveling the globe since taking office on Jan. 1, he has too often found that people are longing for peace but suffering from prejudice because of their ethnicity, skin color, cultural or linguistic background and "above all" their religion.

"It is time to explain that different religions, belief systems and cultural backgrounds are essential to the richness of the human experience," Ban said.

The General Assembly, with its 192 member states, provides a unique forum for exchange among countries, religions and cultures, he said.

General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim opened the two-day session stressing the U.N.'s "crucial role" in promoting talks and "advancing the fundamental freedom that we must all respect others' religions and beliefs."

"To make peace, some people believe that you need to forget," he said. "From my own experience, I would suggest that reconciliation is a fair compromise between remembering and forgetting."

Kerim was foreign minister of Macedonia, one of the independent countries formed after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia.

Kerim said what is needed is intensive dialogue at the political, cultural and social levels. He also suggested that governments adopt educational curriculums that instill values of peace and tolerance.

"Children are not born with prejudice, it is learned," Kerim said.

Karen Hughes, the U.S. undersecretary of state for public diplomacy, said, "Faith is foundational in many people's lives, and world leaders would not be wise to ignore its power or cede its discussion to extremists."

She said that she believes the vast majority of people of every faith and culture share the same human dreams: "education and health care, a safe neighborhood, a good job, and most people want their lives to make a difference."

"Yet, we live in a world where misunderstanding and mistrust are being inflamed by rhetoric of hate and acts of terror," she said.

Philippines Vice President Manuel de Castro Jr. said his country has "had its share of problems related to diverse ethnic and religious minority populations," but did not mention continuing clashes between Philippine troops and suspected Muslim militants on southern islands

De Castro called on U.N. member states to adopt a common plan of action with "policies and programs to promote and protect the rights of indigenous peoples, and encourage interfaith centers in schools."

Pakistan's U.N. Ambassador Munir Akram said that "misunderstanding and friction between cultures and civilizations are not the result of religious differences. They arise from divergent political perspectives on some important issues such as the crises in the Middle East."

Akram said there are perceptions in the West about Islam, "which is seen as a faith propagating terrorism and extremism and bent upon striking at Western values."

"Islam is not a threat to the Western civilization," he said, suggesting that in order to combat such perceptions, each country should promote conscious action to counter extremism within its society.

At the international level, Akram called for equitable economic development and an end to the exploitation of the natural resources of developing countries.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's Foreign Minister Sven Alkalaj said people today "are fully aware that there is no prosperous future without a true reconciliation, tolerance, mutual respect and understanding."

Bosnia has been divided into two mini-states — one for Christian Orthodox Serbs and the other shared by Muslims and Roman Catholic Croats — since the 1992-95 war.

Alkalaj emphasized the importance of teaching children everywhere to be tolerant and to respect and appreciate diverse cultures and religions.

"But teaching our children will mean nothing if we don't lead by example," Alkalaj said.

October 6, 2007

Faiths may hold the key to green China

October 06, 2007

Stephen Scharper

Can traditional Chinese religions help contemporary China clean up its environmental mess? A top Chinese official seems to think so.

Pan Yue, deputy director of China's environmental protection agency, suggests an aggressive Western style of development, while powering China to the vaulted but smoggy heights of economic superpower, has come at a deleteriously high ecological price.

In a recent article in *The Western Confucian*, Pan Yue argues that all traditional Chinese belief systems accent the need for harmony and balance between humanity and nature.

"Whether it is the Confucian idea of (humanity) and nature becoming one, the Daoist view of the Dao reflecting nature, or the Buddhist belief that all living things are equal," Pan Yue says, "Chinese philosophy has helped our culture to survive for thousands of years."

“It can be a powerful weapon in preventing an environmental crisis and building a harmonious society.” Pan Yue says ancient philosophical and religious systems, such as Confucianism and Taoism, may hold the key to a more sustainable human-earth relationship and help China balance its impressive economic might with its massive ecological plight.

Surprising thoughts from the pen of a highly placed Communist official? Sure. Yet, for Pan Yue such sentiments are not new. In 2001, for example, Pan Yue wrote that Karl Marx’s famous dictum, “religion is the opium of the people,” had been misinterpreted by atheistic Communist commentators.

Marx, he asserted, was not necessarily suggesting that religion was a negative societal force, but rather that religion can serve as a type of antidote to despair. He also suggested that religion might help provide social stability in certain quarters.

Not all of Pan Yue’s government colleagues were convinced. But the fact that he has been allowed to continue to advance his unorthodox views is an indication, some observers believe, of an emerging openness to religious views in officially atheistic Beijing.

Pan Yue’s environmental turn to religion, while unusual in a Chinese Communist context, actually mirrors a wider turn to world religions by scientists, policymakers, and politicians.

Ever since 32 renowned scientists, including Harvard’s E. O. Wilson and the late Carl Sagan, penned “An Open Letter to the Religions Community” in 1990, exhorting faith leaders to take the environment seriously, a growing nexus between secular and religious environmentalists has emerged.

One of the leaders of this development is Yale University’s Mary Evelyn Tucker, a Confucian scholar, who helped establish the Forum on Religion and Ecology. Based at Harvard, the forum is a multireligious, international project exploring religious worldviews, texts, and ethical traditions in the hope of dealing constructively with environmental concerns.

The forum, through its conferences and networks, has produced an impressive series on world religious traditions and ecology, and has interfaced with political and spiritual leaders on finding pragmatic solutions to ecological woes.

According to Tucker, “Religions provide a cultural integrity, a spiritual depth and moral force, which secular approaches lack.”

Whether Pan Yue succeeds in his quest to have China embrace its religious traditions in order to fashion a more sustainable future, he is not alone in his quest to infuse religious sensibilities into environmental policy debates.

October 8, 2007

NAIROBI - 8 October 2007 - 410 words

Kenya: church appeals to UN over toxic dumpsite in Nairobi

Francis Njuguna

A Catholic community on Friday made a passionate appeal to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to pressurize the Kenyan government to remove Dandora Waste Dumping site, situated near a crowded slum.

"Our cry as inter-religious leaders serving in these slums areas of Korogocho and Dandora in Nairobi's densely populated eastern region to the Government over the issue-removal of dump site has gone unheard; hence we now appeal to you, UNEP to come to our rescue", said Comboni Father Daniel Moschetti, priest in charge of Saint John's Catholic Parish.

Addressing a huge gathering in the parish hall, which included the UN Under Secretary and UNEP executive Director, Mr Achim Steiner, Fr Daniel observed that "many times we have been given many promises but no actual action has been taken over this life-threatening issue-the removal of the dumpsite".

The UNEP team, which was joined by scores of human rights and church leaders had gathered there to release a UNEP/St John Catholic Church, Korogocho study report on: Environmental Pollution and Impact on public Health: Implications of the Dandora Municipal Dumping Site in Nairobi, Kenya .

The report has concluded among other things, that about 50% of children examined who live and school near the dumping site has respiratory ailments and blood lead levels equal to or exceeding internationally accepted toxic levels (10ug/dl of blood), while 30% had the size and staining abnormalities of their red blood cells, confirming high exposure to heavy metal poisoning.

Doctor Njoroge Kimani, who led the team of medical doctors on the study, said 400 people, among them 40 children, were incorporated in the study and whose blood/urine was examined.

Father Daniel said that St John's Catholic Church and school, which are located near the dump site, had treated more than 9,000 people a year for the last three years, for respiratory problems at its dispensary.

In his address, Mr Steiner said: "the children of Dandora, Kenya and Africa and the world deserve better than this. We can no longer afford rubbish solutions to the waste management crisis faced in far too many cities especially in the developing world."

"It is clear that urgent action is needed to reduce the health and environmental hazards so that children and adults can go about their daily lives without fear of being poisoned and without damage to nearby river systems", added the UNEP official.

The Dandora site may pose some special challenges for the city of Nairobi and Kenya as a nation. But it is also a mirror to the condition of rubbish sites across many parts of Africa and other urban centres of the developing world, Mr. Steiner said.

Observing that many of the local people depended on the dumpsite for their daily livelihood, Dr Njoroge said the challenge is to minimize indeed to halt the level of hazardous materials coming to the tip in the first place and better treatment of toxic and medical wastes before they arrive.

"We also need to deliver safe and sustainable conditions for the people working on, and living near, the site," he said.

"For the foreseeable future, growing amounts of waste may be inevitable but we should learn how to better assist poor people, who depend on this waste and promote the recycling and reuse of this waste as a safer economic opportunity," he said.

The 30-acre Dandora dumping site receives an estimated 2,000 tonnes of rubbish every day, including plastics, rubber and lead paint-treated wood, generated by some 4.5 million people living in Nairobi, the report states.

The study has also found evidence of the presence of hazardous waste, such as chemical and hospital waste, on the dump site.

Every day scores of people, including children, from the nearby slums and low-income residential areas use the dump to find food, recyclables and other valuables they can sell as a source of income, at the same time inhaling noxious fumes from routine waste burning and methane fires.

The waste from the dump site often also finds its way into the Nairobi River that runs just metres away from the dumpsite, polluting water use by local residents and farmers downstream, the church/UNEP study has also revealed.

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October 12 2007

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Al Gore Jointly Win the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize

Statement by Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), in Response to Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Al Gore Jointly Winning the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize

Nairobi, 12 October 2007—The Nobel Peace Prize Committee has today made it clear that combating climate change is a central peace and security policy for the 21st century.

The two winners –the IPCC and former US Vice-President Al Gore- have contributed significantly to elevating public attention on the issue of global warming while outlining the enormous risks but also the enormous opportunities confronting the world.

In doing so, the IPCC and Mr Gore have contributed to the unprecedented momentum on the climate change challenge in 2007.

This now needs to be translated into negotiations on a decisive, post 2012 emissions reduction agreement, when governments gather in December in Bali for the UN climate convention meeting.

Established in the late 1980s by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organisation of the UN, the IPCC and its more than 2,000 scientists and experts has grappled with the science; the likely impacts of climate change and the economics.

2007 has seen the publication of the IPCC's fourth assessment report.

The IPCC, under the leadership of its chair Dr Rajendra Pachuri, have put a full stop behind the science—climate change is happening.

It has also outlined the impacts, from the melting off glaciers in the Himalayas to more frequent and devastating floods in New York to Bangladesh—impacts, not in some far away future but in the life-time of people reading and hearing the announcement off the Peace Prize Committee.

The IPCC has also calculated the price of peace and stability on this planet—perhaps 0.1 per cent of global GDP a year for 30 years for combating climate change and avoiding instability, rising tensions and conflict.

The IPCC, in validating the climate science, represents one of the most important contributions the UN has made in its history to humanity and its current and future choices.

UNEP has also recognized the importance of Mr Gore's contributions to environmental stability with our own more modest accolade.

This year Mr Gore was named a UNEP Champions of the Earth for "making environmental protection a pillar of his public service and for educating the world on the dangers posed by rising greenhouse gas emissions".

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For more information on IPCC, see www.ipcc.ch

For more information on UNEP's work on climate change, see www.unep.org/themes/climatechange

October 12 2007

baltimoresun.com

W.Va. Churches Slam Proposed Mining Rule

By LAWRENCE MESSINA

Associated Press Writer

10:24 PM EDT, October 11, 2007

CHARLESTON, W.Va.

A coalition of West Virginia churches on Thursday sharply criticized a Bush administration-backed proposal to relax restrictions preventing mining activity near waterways, on the grounds it would be an affront to God's creation.

The West Virginia Council of Churches said it objected to exempting valley fills -- in which rubble from mountaintop removal mining is dumped in nearby valleys -- from the 20-year-old rule restricting mining activity near streams.

"This is a deeply moral position, and one based on scripture," retired United Methodist Bishop William Boyd Grove, a council leader, told reporters outside the Capitol.

Current policy says land within 100 feet of a stream cannot be disturbed by mining unless a company can prove it will not affect the water's quality and quantity. The new regulation would allow mining that would alter a stream's flow as long as any damage to the environment is repaired later.

The U.S. Office of Surface Mining proposed the change saying the existing rule has been subject to varying interpretations by the courts.

C. Stephen Allred, assistant secretary of interior for land and minerals management, said in a news release Wednesday that the change would make it clear "what mining activities can and cannot be conducted near bodies of water."

The West Virginia Coal Association believes the proposed change would clarify the original intent of the buffer zone rule. The industry also advocates scrapping the rule entirely.

While changes to the policy would apply nationwide, critics argue they would most affect the areas around the mountainous coalfields of southern West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, southwestern Virginia and Tennessee.

October 12, 2007

October 12, 2007 9:04AM

UN Leader Woos Evangelicals

My birthday dinner with Ban Ki-moon.

David Neff

To celebrate my 60th birthday yesterday, I had dinner with the Secretary General of the United Nations. The Washington Post's Dana Milbank covered the event in his puckish (my wife called it "snarky") style.

Okay, so I had dinner with Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and 300 other people. And the Washington Post didn't even mention me. Secretary General Ban and I were only sitting at adjacent tables. But I did get a grip-and-grin photo op with him before the banquet, and after his speech I was one of three evangelical leaders invited to give a brief response.

The banquet itself was a joint effort of the National Association of Evangelicals and the Micah Challenge. It was the closing event of the NAE's semi-annual board meeting and the opening event of the Global Leaders Forum. Organizations involved in the Forum (beyond the NAE and Micah Challenge) included Bread for the World, World Relief, Frontiers, The Salvation Army, Tearfund, the Evangelical Environmental Network, the Korean Church Coalition, and the UN Foundation and the UN Millennium Campaign.

Attendees at the sold-out event got this message loud and clear:

The UN needs evangelicals to help them hold governments to their promised support for the Millennium Development Goals. One hundred ninety-two nations signed on to the MDG's in 2000 and we are now half-way to the target date of 2015, but without the progress we should have seen by this point, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Some nations have been slow in paying their share of the costs.

The MDG's are all good: ensuring universal primary education, fighting hunger and poverty, reducing child mortality and improving maternal health, empowering women, fighting specific diseases like malaria and HIV/AIDS, working for environmental sustainability and a global partnership for development.

Many of these things have already engaged evangelicals, and Secretary General Ban reminded us of that. He also reminded us of the UN's desire to work with faith-based groups. From its beginning in 1945, the UN was engaged with the faith community. Forty-two faith-based non-governmental organizations were involved in founding the organization. Today, 400 religious NGOs are accredited to the UN.

He also quoted Isaiah 58:10 to much applause. "If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday."

In a sense, last night's banquet and today's issue-oriented discussions are really less about evangelicals fighting disease and poverty and more about evangelicals working in partnerships--partnerships between Western evangelicals and those in the developing world and partnerships with non-evangelicals.

We cautiously engaged those of other shades of Christian faith and even other religions in the mid-90s when we threw tremendous weight behind the effort to pass the International Religious Freedom Act and the creation of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom. We then enlarged the circle of cooperation to work on legislation to fight sex trafficking and, later, human-rights abuses in North Korea. The circle has expanded yet again as many evangelical leaders are partnering on issues of climate change.

Partnerships give evangelicals a sense of participation and empowerment. It gives us the chance to take on really big issues. That's a strange feeling for a movement whose consciousness is rooted in old-style fundamentalism. Fundamentalism was about being the few and the proud--I mean, the pure. The evangelicalism that emerged in the 1940s hoped for a new engagement with society while maintaining doctrinal and ethical integrity. Its leaders, like first CT editor Carl F. H. Henry and first CT board chair Harold John Ockenga preached a strong social justice message. But the old fundamentalist consciousness still lurks, and these partnerships stretch the evangelical sense of identity.

Despite the uneasiness of some, leaders like Northland Church's Joel Hunter and the NAE's Rich Cizik are plunging ahead with big grins on their faces. I predict we'll see a continuing expansion of these alliances as we move to tackle an increasing number of the really big problems facing God's world.

October 15, 2007

God trusted us to care for environment, Obama says

October 15, 2007

JENNIFER HUNTER jhunter@suntimes.com

DES MOINES -- Climate change is not just a scientific or an environmental issue, says Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama. It is an issue of morals and of faith.

Men and women of faith have always waded into issues that impact society in profound ways: prison reform, temperance, abolition, women's rights, Obama reminded the group crowded into the public library on a rainy Sunday in Iowa's capital.

Climate change should also become one of those moral imperatives.

Obama was speaking the day after former Vice President Al Gore received a Nobel Prize for his efforts to promote awareness of the dangers of climate change.

"When God created the Earth he entrusted us to take responsibility to take care of that Earth," Obama says, and we are not living up to our responsibility to ensure our children's future.

Fierce storms, raging forest fires and periods of drought are increasing and shrinking "polar ice caps are melting faster than anyone could have predicted," Obama says, noting that this will lead to hunger and an increase in illnesses such as asthma. Already one-third of children's asthma is caused by air pollution, he notes.

Drought is dislocating people around the world, he says, and 250 million could be forced from their homes by 2050.

"We cannot afford to let another year go by without taking bold action on climate change because the politics are too hard and too risky," Obama claimed. "I don't believe climate change is just a convenient issue to bring up in a campaign. It is one of the greatest challenges" that not only America, but the world, faces.

Obama says if he is elected president he will reach out to leaders of the biggest carbon-emitting nations to develop a new global energy carbon forum. Global protocols would be established through the forum.

"As we develop new forms of energy we will share our technology and innovations with other countries in the world," he said.

Meeting the threats of global change will not happen easily or overnight, he warned. It is a challenge that will take time and sacrifice.

Obama has a plan that would reduce carbon emissions by 80 percent by 2050.

He would require polluters pay for pollution they create. "No business will be allowed to emit any greenhouse gases for free," he says.

And an Obama administration would invest \$150 billion over 10 years in clean, renewable energy with the goal to make the country 50 percent more energy efficient by 2030.

In answer to a question about China, which has become a huge polluter, Obama said that we cannot expect the Chinese to make sacrifices and "bear the costs when we are just profligate and wasteful." We have to set an example. "That's why it's important for America to lead," he concluded.

October 15, 2007

In the Philippines, Religion and Nature Collide

Jane Greenhalgh, NPR

Morning Edition, October 15, 2007 · This is a story about what happens when the heavens and the earth collide — and who gets blamed.

Last November, a typhoon slammed into the Philippines near the city of Legazpi. The wind and rain were so intense they sheared away the slopes of an 8,000-foot volcano.

Charlito Valderrama, who was living in a village below the volcano, described it as a "big bomb."

Torrents of water, volcanic mud and boulders as big as cars crashed down toward the ocean. Valderrama says his family was running for higher ground when they were swept away. Only three of nine family members survived.

"It was two days before they found my wife," Valderrama says. "They found her body in Santo Domingo."

Acts of God

Nearly a thousand people died in the typhoon. Valderrama seems sure he knows why the disaster occurred.

"It was the will of God," Valderrama says. "It was not because of man."

Many Catholics in the Philippines, who make up more than 80 percent of the population, believe that God is responsible for natural phenomena. But it's a sentiment the church is trying to change — and not just in the Philippines.

The Vatican has become very interested in climate change. This year, Pope Benedict XVI hosted a conference on global warming. And he has announced plans to preserve forests, install solar cells, and make Vatican City a carbon-neutral state.

The Vatican considers global warming a pressing issue — in part because there is evidence that man is contributing to the problem, and in part because the effects will be felt most intensely by the poor.

Not only poor, the Philippines also is vulnerable to extreme weather. In a warmer world, these islands are likely to see more flooding and more intense typhoons. As a result, Catholic leaders are asking people to do more to protect themselves — and their planet. It is a message that challenges some long-standing views about man's dominion over the earth.

One member of the clergy who has been especially vocal is Lucilo Quiambao, 75, the auxiliary Bishop of Legazpi.

During the typhoon, Quiambao was in his church, caring for people. He remembers watching the pews come loose from the floor as the waters rose toward the stained-glass windows.

"All those benches were floating," Quiambao says, walking through the sanctuary of St. Raphael Church. "You see the blessed sacrament there. Just around two inches from that line was the water."

He saved the organ by raising it up onto the altar. But many records of baptisms, marriages and deaths just floated away.

Firm Believers

The typhoon struck on a Thursday. At Mass on Sunday, Quiambao was surprised to see that the church was full.

"I thought people would be angry with God so they would not come," Quiambao says. "But no. They came — most of them would say, in thanksgiving, because at least we are alive."

But he says that many of them misunderstood God's role in the disaster. So he gave an unusual sermon.

"I enlightened the people," Quiambo says. He told the worshippers that it was God who brought order to all of creation. "But it is man who disordered everything and we are suffering the consequences of this."

Quiambao says it is also people's responsibility to fix the problem, and the church is helping them.

Stewardship of the Earth

In the Philippines, the task of caring for the earth often falls to younger members of the clergy — like Father Jovic Lobrigo, a Franciscan. Jovic, whose church overlooks an area devastated by a mudslide, likes to remind people that St. Francis is the patron saint of the environment.

So it makes sense that he often speaks about what the church calls "stewardship of the earth."

"Yes, you are a primary creation," Jovic tells parishioners, "and you have superiority of all beings. But with it is responsibility of taking care of creation itself."

Otherwise, he says, the Philippines will eventually have fewer trees and more typhoons.

He tells people that truly understanding stewardship requires a long spiritual journey.

On a recent day, though, he takes his parishioners on a physical journey.

His congregation is helping to carry a statue of Mary from the ruins of an ancient church near the foot of the volcano to Father Jovic's church on the hill. Only the steeple of the old church remains above ground. Lava buried the rest, nearly two centuries ago.

Father Jovic says he understands why people blame God for volcanoes and typhoons.

"This is the simplest way of rationalizing what happened," Jovic says. "Because if you do that, then you don't blame anybody else but God." That thinking also absolves the individual him or herself from responsibility, Jovic says.

In Genesis, God gives man dominion over the earth. Jovic says many Christians have interpreted that to mean people can use the earth any way they like. He says people in the Philippines have abused their power less than the residents of many other countries but that, even so, they need to do more for the earth. And he sees signs that it's happening.

A New Start

The procession of Father Jovic's parishioners winds up past a camp for people who lost their homes in the typhoon. It's the last place you would expect to find anyone worrying about their impact on the environment. And yet, some of them are.

A woman named Josephina Baliktau has spent most of the past year living in a plywood shed covered with a tarp. But she is praising God, because soon she'll have a new house made out of cement blocks.

"Little house," Baliktau says over and over as she admires her half-finished residence.

But building new houses like this one has taken a toll on the environment.

"When we came here, there were many coconut trees," says Sister Merceline Galeshia. "And since we cannot build with the trees, the trees were cut down."

Since then, she says, residents of the camp have decided to plant a new tree for each one lost.

"We had cut down 80 coconut trees and were saying, 'Oh, it is something we have to replace or we'll be feeling the consequences of our decisions,'" she says.

The new trees, she says, are a way to help make peace between the heavens and the earth.

Radio piece produced by Jane Greenhalgh.

October 15, 2007

SECRETARY-GENERAL, IN ADDRESS TO EVANGELICALS, STRESSES MORAL IMPERATIVE OF ENSURING PEACEKEEPING, DEVELOPMENT, CLIMATE GOALS ARE IMPLEMENTED

Following is the text of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's address to the National Association of Evangelicals in Washington, D.C., on 11 October:

I thank you very much for your warm welcome. It is a pleasure to be here this evening, and an honour to be with you -- you who contribute so much to causes close to our hearts: peace, good works and prosperity for all.

I would like to speak with you about basic principles -- justice, conscience and, most important, consciousness. Consciousness of the community of humanity and all living things, and consciousness of our sacred duty to them.

This is what brought me to the United Nations, and to this place with you tonight. From my earliest days as a boy in South Korea, I dreamed of working for the United Nations. I wanted to make a difference in the world.

Like you, I believe in moral passion -- grounded in concrete action. I believe the measure of men is their deeds, not their words, however fine they might sound. As Secretary-General, I would like to be remembered as one who did things, who tried in small ways to the best of his ability to make the world a better place, to help people.

You are well aware that the United Nations is a secular institution, composed of 192 nations. We have six official languages, but no official religion. We do not have a chapel -- though we do have a meditation room.

One of my predecessors, Dag Hammarskjöld, put it well: "The United Nations stands outside -- necessarily outside -- all confessions. But it is, nevertheless, an instrument of faith. It is inspired by what unites, not by what divides, the great religions of the world."

Faith has always been at the heart of the United Nations. Faith in good works, undertaken in unity. We are a little younger than the National Association of Evangelicals. At our founding in 1945, 42 non-governmental organizations were involved in the creation of the new United Nations. Fourteen of those were faith-based. Today, 4,000 non-governmental organizations are accredited to the United Nations -- 400 of them faith-based.

This should be no surprise, considering the nature of our common cause. The United Nations is dedicated to ending war and building peace -- to making swords into ploughshares, if you will. We are dedicated to helping the poor. To aiding the victims of conflict, famine, disease and disaster. To protecting human rights and promoting the rule of law.

"If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday."

So reads Isaiah 58:10. You find similar passages in every sacred text.

If you ask the people who work for the United Nations what motivates them -- whether they are building peace in Timor-Leste, fighting human trafficking in Eastern Europe, or battling AIDS in Africa -- many reply in a language of faith. They see what they do as a mission, not just a job.

There are three pillars of the United Nations Charter: peace and security, development and human rights. Among these, I regard development as key. This is at the core of what you invited me to discuss tonight -- the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs.

There are eight of them, set forth in the Millennium Declaration signed by world leaders in September 2000. They range from eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, to promoting universal primary education and empowering women, to combating HIV/AIDS and creating a global partnership for development.

I know you are familiar with this work. Christian evangelicals have pursued a similar calling for more years than the United Nations has existed. Your mission statement reads partly “to work to relieve human suffering, poverty and hunger worldwide”.

Everyday, you work towards the Millennium Development Goals by delivering aid and humanitarian services across the world. You are leaders of the Jubilee Campaign to cancel debts to more than 30 developing countries. You fight HIV/AIDS in Africa. You have pushed to create the President’s Emergency Programme for AIDS Relief, and helped make the United States the world’s single largest donor to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

And in the truest spirit of the Millennium campaign, you have mounted the Micah Challenge as a moral compact between rich and poor. I emphasize this word. Development, as enshrined in the MDGs, is indeed a moral calling.

Too often, we forget how intimately all people and nations on this planet are bound together. We in the developed world have a responsibility to help those in the developing countries. This cannot come merely as humanitarian aid. We must help them develop, so that they can share in the world’s bounty.

“Give me a fish, and I will eat. Teach me to fish, and I will never go hungry.”

We are at the midpoint of our MDG campaign. Across the world, millions of people are lifting themselves out of poverty. More children than ever are going to school. Child mortality has declined.

And yet, we have far to go. In Africa, we are not nearly on track to reach the goal of reducing poverty by half by 2015, our target deadline. It is intolerable that half a million women die each year from treatable complications of pregnancy and childbirth. It is intolerable that HIV/AIDS continues as a modern-day scourge. It is intolerable that 10 million children die each year before their fifth birthday, mostly from such preventable diseases as malaria. It is a moral scar on our conscience.

As I see it, 2008 should be a year of new directions. The United Nations can, and must, do better. That is why I recently established the MDG Africa Steering Group -- to generate fresh thinking and mobilize the political will to effect real change.

We cannot do it alone. We need good allies, such as you here this evening. More than ever, we need the National Association of Evangelicals, the Micah Challenge and others in the faith community to help give voice to the voiceless.

Your engagement can push Governments to follow through on their commitments. You know that at Gleneagles two years ago the world's rich countries pledged to increase aid by \$50 billion by 2010 – half of it to Africa. You also know that very little of that money has been delivered.

You know that rich countries' trade policies continue to deny poor nations an even playing field in the global economy. You also know that poor countries need equitable trading opportunities if they are to develop and grow. As British Prime Minister Gordon Brown rightly says, a world with a billion people living on less than \$1 a day can neither be just nor stable.

We see that in such places as Darfur. We cannot rest until the killing stops and the seeds of normal life are planted. At the United Nations, we are pressing ahead with peace talks, to take place in Libya late this month. We are laying the foundations for a major deployment of peacekeepers, even as we continue our massive humanitarian aid effort under difficult conditions.

And ultimately, we all recognize that there can be no enduring peace in Darfur that does not go to the basic core of our MDG campaign -- economic development. Security and development go hand in hand. They, too, are human rights, essential to true justice.

Let me close by talking about yet another key element of the MDGs and our war against global poverty. That's climate change -- yet another moral imperative and a defining issue of our era.

We hear about it every day: the melting of Arctic ice, the growing deserts of the Sahara and the Gobi. Several weeks ago, just before the annual gathering of the United Nations General Assembly, I called together a high-level meeting on climate change. It was the largest such event ever held, with more than 80 Heads of State.

Something remarkable happened -- transformative, even. Speaker after speaker stood and agreed. The science is clear, they said. Global warming is real; we are the primary cause. Its impact is being felt worldwide and we must act, now. All agreed that the United Nations must take the lead. And they also called for justice.

Climate change affects us all, but it does not affect us all equally. Those who are least able to cope are being hardest hit. Those who have done the least to cause the problem bear the gravest consequences.

An estimated 70 per cent of the population of sub-Saharan Africa survives by subsistence agriculture; their livelihoods depend on rain, and climate change makes the rains fail. Hundreds of millions of people in Asia and the Americas depend on mountain snow and glaciers for their water. We have seen how climate change threatens these communities with flooding as the ice and snow melt. But once they are gone, these poor communities will struggle with drought.

We have an ethical obligation to right this injustice. We have a duty to protect the most vulnerable. Without a strong global effort against global warming, we will fail in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the implicit human right to economic justice and development.

Without a strong global effort against global warming, humankind could even be wiped out, along with other species. Our Earth is God's creation. We are its custodians. We can no longer look the other way.

The good news is that people and institutions of faith all over the world agree. This gives me great hope.

I commend those of you who have signed the Evangelical Climate Initiative, including many on your board of directors. All of you can make contributions, from doing the right thing in your communities and making responsible consumer choices to calling for the local and national policies that will help solve our global problem. Do not underestimate your power.

When the world's Governments go to Bali in December, I hope that friends like you will remind them of the sacred trust we have invested in them.

Please, join me in this great cause. With faith and will, we can make the difference.

October 25, 2007

Planet's Tougher Problems Persist, UN Report Warns

Nairobi/New York, 25 October: The United Nations Environment Programme says that major threats to the planet such as climate change, the rate of extinction of species, and the challenge of feeding a growing population are among the many that remain unresolved, and all of them put humanity at risk.

The warning comes in UNEP's Global Environment Outlook: environment for development (GEO-4) report published 20 years after the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) produced its seminal report, Our Common Future.

GEO-4, the latest in UNEP's series of flagship reports, assesses the current state of the global atmosphere, land, water and biodiversity, describes the changes since 1987, and identifies priorities for action. GEO-4 is the most comprehensive UN report on the environment, prepared by about 390 experts and reviewed by more than 1 000 others across the world.

It salutes the world's progress in tackling some relatively straightforward problems, with the environment now much closer to mainstream politics everywhere. But despite these advances, there remain the harder-to-manage issues, the "persistent" problems. Here, GEO-4 says: "There are no major issues raised in Our Common Future for which the foreseeable trends are favourable."

Failure to address these persistent problems, UNEP says, may undo all the achievements so far on the simpler issues, and may threaten humanity's survival. But it insists: "The objective is not to present a dark and gloomy scenario, but an urgent call for action."

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, said: "The international community's response to the Brundtland Commission has in some cases been courageous and inspiring. But all too often it has been slow and at a pace and scale that fails to respond to or recognize the magnitude of the challenges facing the people and the environment of the planet".

"Over the past 20 years, the international community has cut, by 95 per cent, the production of ozone-layer damaging chemicals; created a greenhouse gas emission reduction treaty along with innovative carbon trading and carbon offset markets; supported a rise in terrestrial protected areas to cover roughly 12 per cent of the Earth and devised numerous important instruments covering issues from biodiversity and desertification to the trade in hazardous wastes and living modified organisms," he added.

"But, as GEO-4 points out, there continue to be 'persistent' and intractable problems unresolved and unaddressed. Past issues remain and new ones are emerging?from the rapid rise of oxygen 'dead zones' in the oceans to the resurgence of new and old diseases linked in part with environmental degradation. Meanwhile, institutions like UNEP, established to counter the root causes, remain under-resourced and weak," said Mr Steiner.

On climate change the report says the threat is now so urgent that large cuts in greenhouse gases by mid-century are needed. Negotiations are due to start in December on a treaty to replace the Kyoto Protocol, the international climate agreement which

obligates countries to control anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. Although it exempts all developing countries from emission reduction commitments, there is growing pressure for some rapidly-industrializing countries, now substantial emitters themselves, to agree to emission reductions.

GEO-4 also warns that we are living far beyond our means. The human population is now so large that "the amount of resources needed to sustain it exceeds what is available... humanity's footprint [its environmental demand] is 21.9 hectares per person while the Earth's biological capacity is, on average, only 15.7 ha/person...".

And it says the well-being of billions of people in the developing world is at risk, because of a failure to remedy the relatively simple problems which have been successfully tackled elsewhere.

GEO-4 recalls the Brundtland Commission's statement that the world does not face separate crises - the "environmental crisis", "development crisis", and "energy crisis" are all one. This crisis includes not just climate change, extinction rates and hunger, but other problems driven by growing human numbers, the rising consumption of the rich and the desperation of the poor.

Examples are:

- decline of fish stocks;
- loss of fertile land through degradation;
- unsustainable pressure on resources;
- dwindling amount of fresh water available for humans and other creatures to share; and
- risk that environmental damage could pass unknown points of no return.

GEO-4 says climate change is a "global priority", demanding political will and leadership. Yet it finds "a remarkable lack of urgency", and a "woefully inadequate" global response.

Several highly-polluting countries have refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. GEO-4 says: "... some industrial sectors that were unfavourable to the... Protocol managed successfully to undermine the political will to ratify it." It says: "Fundamental changes in social and economic structures, including lifestyle changes, are crucial if rapid progress is to be achieved."

Among the other critical points it identifies are:

Water: Irrigation already takes about 70 per cent of available water, yet meeting the Millennium Development Goal on hunger will mean doubling food production by 2050. Fresh water is declining: by 2025, water use is predicted to have risen by 50 per cent in developing countries and by 18 per cent in the developed world. GEO-4 says: "The escalating burden of water demand will become intolerable in water-scarce countries."

Water quality is declining too, polluted by microbial pathogens and excessive nutrients. Globally, contaminated water remains the greatest single cause of human disease and death.

Fish: Consumption more than tripled from 1961 to 2001. Catches have stagnated or slowly declined since the 1980s. Subsidies have created excess fishing capacity, estimated at 250 per cent more than is needed to catch the oceans' sustainable production.

Biodiversity: Current biodiversity changes are the fastest in human history. Species are becoming extinct a hundred times faster than the rate shown in the fossil record. The Congo Basin's bushmeat trade is thought to be six times the sustainable rate. Of the major vertebrate groups that have been assessed comprehensively, over 30 per cent of amphibians, 23 per cent of mammals and 12 per cent of birds are threatened.

The intrusion of invasive alien species is a growing problem. The comb jellyfish, accidentally introduced in 1982 by US ships, has taken over the entire marine ecosystem of the Black Sea, and had destroyed 26 commercial fisheries by 1992.

A sixth major extinction is under way, this time caused by human behaviour. Yet to meet our growing demand for food will mean either intensified agriculture (using more chemicals, energy and water, and more efficient breeds and crops) or cultivating more land. Either way, biodiversity suffers.

One sign of progress is the steady increase in protected areas. But they must be effectively managed and properly enforced. And biodiversity (of all sorts, not just the "charismatic megafauna" like tigers and elephants) will increasingly need conserving outside protected areas as well.

Regional Pressures: This is the first GEO report in which all seven of the world's regions emphasize the potential impacts of climate change. In Africa, land degradation and even desertification are threats; per capita food production has declined by 12 per cent since 1981. Unfair agricultural subsidies in developed regions continue to hinder progress towards increasing yields. Priorities for Asia and the Pacific include urban air quality, fresh water stress, degraded ecosystems, agricultural land use and increased waste. Drinking water provision has made remarkable progress in the last decade, but the illegal traffic in electronic and hazardous waste is a new challenge. Europe's rising incomes and growing numbers of households are leading to unsustainable production and consumption, higher energy use, poor urban air quality, and transport problems. The region's other priorities are biodiversity loss, land-use change and freshwater stresses.

Latin America and the Caribbean face urban growth, biodiversity threats, coastal damage and marine pollution, and vulnerability to climate change. But protected areas now cover about 12 per cent of the land, and annual deforestation rates in the Amazon are falling. North America is struggling to address climate change, to which energy use, urban sprawl and freshwater stresses

are all linked. Energy efficiency gains have been countered by the use of larger vehicles, low fuel economy standards, and increases in car numbers and distances travelled. For West Asia the priorities are freshwater stresses, degradation of land, coasts and marine ecosystems, urban management, and peace and security. Water-borne diseases and the sharing of international water resources are also concerns. The Polar Regions are already feeling the impacts of

climate change. The food security and health of indigenous peoples are at risk from increasing mercury and persistent organic pollutants in the environment. The ozone layer is expected to take another half-century to recover.

The Future

GEO-4 acknowledges that technology can help to reduce people's vulnerability to environmental stresses, but says there is sometimes a need "to correct the technology-centred development paradigm". It explores how current trends may unfold by 2050 in four scenarios.

The real future will be largely determined by the decisions individuals and society make now, GEO-4 says: "Our common future depends on our actions today, not tomorrow or some time in the future."

For some of the persistent problems the damage may already be irreversible. GEO-4 warns that tackling the underlying causes of environmental pressures often affects the vested interests of powerful groups able to influence policy decisions. The only way to address these harder problems requires moving the environment from the periphery to the core of decision-making: environment for development, not development to the detriment of environment.

"There have been enough wake-up calls since Brundtland. I sincerely hope GEO-4 is the final one. The systematic destruction of the Earth's natural and nature-based resources has reached a point where the economic viability of economies is being challenged and where the bill we hand on to our children may prove impossible to pay," said Mr Steiner.

The GEO-4 report concludes that "while governments are expected to take the lead, other stakeholders are just as important to ensure success in achieving sustainable development. The need couldn't be more urgent and the time couldn't be more opportune, with our enhanced understanding of the challenges we face, to act now to safeguard our own survival and that of future generations" ends.

Notes to Editors

The Global Environment Outlook (GEO) is UNEP's flagship assessment process and report series. The fourth report in the series, GEO-4 provides an overview of the global and regional environmental, social and economic state-and-trends over the past two decades. It highlights the interlinkages, challenges and opportunities which the environment provides for development and human well-being. The report also presents an outlook, using four scenarios to explore plausible futures to the year 2050, as well as policy options to address present and emerging environmental issues.

GEO-4 is produced and published by the Division of Early Warning and Assessment of the United Nations Environment Programme. It is available from www.unep.org/geo/geo/

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Key facts from the report

Atmosphere

There is now "visible and unequivocal" evidence of the impacts of climate change, and consensus that human activities have been decisive in this change: global average temperatures have risen by about 0.7 °C since 1906. A best estimate for this century's rise is expected to be between a further 1.8°C and 2°C. Some scientists believe a 2°C increase in the global mean temperature above pre-industrial levels is a threshold beyond which the threat of major and irreversible damage becomes more plausible.

Ice cores show that the levels of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane are now far outside their ranges of natural variability over the last 500 000 years: the Earth's climate has entered a state unparalleled in recent prehistory. The average temperatures in the Arctic are rising twice as rapidly as in the rest of the world.

Sea-level rise caused by thermal expansion of water and the melting of glaciers and ice sheets will continue for the foreseeable future, with potentially huge consequences: over 60 per cent of the population worldwide lives within 100 kilometres of the coast.

Growing ocean acidification and warmer temperatures will probably also affect global food security. Diarrhoea and malaria will become more widespread.

Present trends do not favour greenhouse gas stabilisation. Aviation saw an 80 per cent increase in miles flown between 1990 and 2003, while shipping rose from billion tonnes of goods loaded in 1990 to 7.1 billion tonnes in 2005: each sector makes huge and increasing energy demands.

Some greenhouse gases may persist in the atmosphere for up to 50 000 years.

Despite "impressive" success in phasing out ozone-depleting substances, the spring "hole" in the stratospheric ozone layer over the Antarctic is now larger than ever, allowing harmful ultraviolet solar radiation to reach the Earth.

Acid rain is now much less of a problem in Europe and North America ("one of the success stories of recent decades"), but more challenging in countries like Mexico, India and China.

Pollution

More than 50 000 compounds are used commercially, hundreds more are added annually, and global chemical production is projected to increase by 85 per cent over the next 20 years.

Environmental exposure causes almost a quarter of all diseases. More than two million people worldwide are estimated to die prematurely every year from indoor and outdoor air pollution.

Some of the progress achieved in reducing pollution in developed countries has been at the expense of the developing world, where industrial production and its impacts are now being exported.

Food

Losses in total global farm production, due to insect pests, have been estimated at about 1 per cent.

Since 1987 the expansion of cropland has slackened, but land use intensity has increased dramatically. Annually on average, a farmer then produced one tonne: output is now 1.8 tonnes. A hectare of cropland, which then yielded on average 1.8 tonnes, now produces 2.5 tonnes.

Unsustainable land use is causing degradation, a threat as serious as climate change and biodiversity loss. It affects up to a third of the world's people, through pollution, soil erosion, nutrient depletion, water scarcity, salinity, and disruption of biological cycles.

The food security of two-thirds of the world's people depends on fertilisers, especially nitrogen.

Population growth, over-consumption and the continued shift from cereal to meat consumption mean food demand will increase to 2.5-3.5 times the present figure.

By 2030 developing countries will probably need 120 million more hectares to feed themselves.

The loss of genetic diversity may threaten food security: 1 animal species make up 90 per cent of all livestock, and 30 crops dominate agriculture, providing an estimated 90 per cent of the world's calories.

Biodiversity

About 60 per cent of the ecosystem services that have been assessed are degraded or used unsustainably; populations of freshwater vertebrates declined on average by nearly 50 per cent from 1987 to 2003, much faster than terrestrial or marine species.

Over half the world's 6 000 languages are endangered, and some believe up to 90 per cent of all languages may not survive this century.

Water

Of the world's major rivers, 10 per cent fail to reach the sea for part of each year because of irrigation demands.

In developing countries some 3 million people die annually from water-borne diseases, most of them under-five-year-olds. An estimated 2.6 billion people lack improved sanitation services. By 2025, water withdrawals are predicted to have risen by 50 per cent in developing countries and by 18 per cent in the developed world.

There is rising concern about the potential impacts on aquatic ecosystems, of personal-care products and pharmaceuticals such as painkillers and antibiotics.

The Unequal World

The world has changed radically since 1987, economically, socially and politically. Population has increased by almost 3 per cent, trade is almost three times greater, and average income per head has gone up by about 0 per cent.

Consumption has been growing faster than population, but unequally: the total annual income of nearly 1 billion people, the population of the richest countries, is almost 15 times that of the 2.3 billion people in the poorest countries.

There are fewer resources to share: the amount of land per capita is about a quarter of what it was a century ago, and is expected to fall to about one-fifth of the 1900 level by 2050.

Urbanization is a significant pressure: by 2025 coastal populations alone are expected to reach six billion. The year 2007 is the first in human history when more than half of all people live in cities.

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Customer enquiries can be directed to: customerservice@earthprint.com

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SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/national/1153AP_Global_Warming_Churches.html

Last updated October 31, 2007 6:43 p.m. PT

Religious leaders act on climate change

By H. JOSEF HEBERT
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON -- A coalition of religious leaders urged Congress on Wednesday to ensure that the poor and most vulnerable are protected from the effects of climate change.

The appeals comes as lawmakers in the coming months plan to consider legislation that would combat global warming.

The representatives from groups such as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, National Association of Evangelicals, National Council of Churches and the Union for Reform Judaism said Congress should require a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

A compromise bill proposed by Sens. Joe Lieberman, a Connecticut independent, and John Warner, R-Va., was expected to advance from a Senate Environment and Public Works subcommittee on Thursday.

The religious leaders planned to press the bill's sponsors "to strengthen and improve protections for the poor and vulnerable as (the) legislation moves forward," said Paul Gorman, executive director of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment.

The church leaders, in a conference call with reporters, outlined their priorities for the legislation. They include helping low-income families deal with the impact of higher energy prices that result from new climate policies and making sure that vulnerable people are shielded from the environmental effects of global warming.

The group said it will seek to have 40 percent of the emissions-related revenues from climate change legislation directed to help such people. The Lieberman-Warner bill calls for a 5 percent allocation for such purposes.

"While not all of us agree on much," said the Rev. Michael Livingston, president of the National Council of Churches, "we do agree on the need to protect God's creation. It has become clear that global warming will have devastating impact on those in poverty around the world."

The Rev. Richard Cizik, vice president for governmental affairs for the National Association of Evangelicals, said 84 percent of evangelicals support mandatory limits on greenhouse gases. He said it is not a matter of political persuasion but "of moral leadership."

Added Bishop Thomas Wenksi of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: "Those who contribute least to the problem are likely to suffer the most."

November 1, 2007

Faith leaders urged to spread green message

David Adam

Thursday November 1 2007

The world's religious leaders must do more to spread the green message to their followers, a UK government agency has said.

According to an Environment Agency wishlist of action to save the planet, an ecological coalition of faith leaders could be more effective than a new Kyoto protocol-style agreement to regulate emissions.

The agency placed such a "leap of faith" at No2 in its list of 50 things that will save the planet, above more established ideas such as flying less, an expansion of solar and renewable power, and the introduction of green taxes. A dramatic improvement in the energy-efficient electrical goods was top of the list.

Nick Reeves, the executive director of the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management, who helped the agency to draw up the list, said: "The world's faith groups have been silent for too long on the environment. It is time they fulfilled their rightful collective role in reminding us that we have a duty to restore and maintain the ecological balance of the planet."

This summer, the leaders of six of the world's religions met in the Arctic to pray for the planet. The Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I, the leader of 250 million Orthodox Christians, was joined by Christian bishops and a cardinal, the Grand Rabbi of Paris, Sunni and Shia scholars, and by Hindu, Shinto and Zen Buddhist leaders on a Norwegian cruise ship a few hundred yards from the Sermeq Kujalleq glacier.

The Patriarch said they had prayed "for the planet and for the Earth, for salvation of life and heart, for the coming generation, and for Creation". Pope Benedict XVI sent a message of support.

Mr Reeves said: "Most faith groups do have environmental policies and there is a lot going on in the background, but they need to be more vociferous in getting their message across because they speak for millions and millions of people. There needs to be a stronger campaigning aspect to their work."

November 5, 2007

Edwards Calls Global Warming Moral Test

Nov 4 03:58 AM US/Eastern

By CAIN BURDEAU
Associated Press Writer

NEW ORLEANS (AP) - Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards on Saturday called reversing global warming a "great moral test" and said the next president needs to stand up to industries resisting change.

"This is the great moral test of our generation. Are we actually going to leave this planet and America better for our children than we found it?" Edwards said at an environmental rally in New Orleans.

"Why have we not addressed the issue of climate change and global warming?" Edwards said. "I'll tell you why, no question about it: oil companies, gas companies, power companies and the lobbyists in Washington, D.C. We have to have a president who will stand up to these people."

Last month Edwards picked up an endorsement from the national environmental group Friends of the Earth Action.

He has become a frequent visitor to New Orleans. On Saturday, he spent time at a Habitat for Humanity site where homes are being built for displaced musicians.

He kicked off his presidential campaign last December in New Orleans and he's made the botched recovery from Hurricane Katrina and the social ills the storm exposed themes in his campaign.

Edwards said his campaign has "developed momentum" since Tuesday's televised debate, which he called a pivotal moment in his campaign. He said voters now have clear choices.

"From my perspective, the choices are between the status quo and change," he said. "And we need change in the worst kind of way in America."

Edwards has recently increased the intensity of his criticism of fellow Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton, who has a big lead in national polls. During Tuesday's debate Edwards sharply challenged Clinton, saying she "defends a broken system that's corrupt in Washington, D.C."

On Saturday, the Edwards campaign issued a statement from Kate Michelman, the former head of NARAL Pro-Choice America and an Edwards backer, charging that Clinton is using her gender "as a shield when the questions get too hot."

During the debate Tuesday, Clinton's six male rivals challenged her character, electability and apparent unwillingness to answer tough questions.

Clinton's campaign characterized the debate as "piling on." At a speech at Wellesley College on Thursday, Clinton referred to the "all boys club of presidential politics."

In her statement, Michelman said: "When unchallenged, in a comfortable, controlled situation, Senator Clinton embraces her political elevation into the 'boys club.'

"But when she's challenged, when legitimate questions are asked, she is just as quick to raise the white flag and look for a change in the rules. She then calls questioning, 'attacking'; she calls debate among her peers, 'piling on.'"

On Saturday, Phil Singer, a Clinton spokesman, said Clinton is not running for president "because she's a woman" but because "she's the best person for the job."

"She's leading in the polls so it's no surprise to see her opponents pile on," he said.

Earlier Saturday, Edwards attended a fundraiser for South Carolina state Senate candidate Bill Clyburn. He is the cousin of Rep. Jim Clyburn, South Carolina's only black congressman.

Associated Press writer Katrina A. Goggins in Columbia, S.C., contributed to this report.

November 5, 2007

Churches Speak Out on Global Warming and Development

Catholic Information Service for Africa (Nairobi)

NEWS

5 November 2007

Posted to the web 5 November 2007

Nairobi

Full text of a call from All Africa Conference of Churches to the UN Climate Change Conference:

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) is an ecumenical fellowship that represents more than 120 million Christians, with a membership of 169 national churches and regional Christian councils in 39 African countries. As a continental faith-based network, AACC speaks and stands for justice and the rights and survival of African communities, particularly the poor and the marginalized.

The survival of African communities is threatened by the destructive consequences of climate change attributed largely to industrial pollution of the atmosphere by the industrialized countries.

The Fourth Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concludes that climate change is happening now, and that it is man-made with the consequences already being felt, particularly in the poorest and most vulnerable communities.

The current ecological crisis is primarily spiritual and ethical. As human beings we have failed to appreciate the intrinsic worth of ourselves, other humans, other species and future generations.

We have failed to acknowledge the fact that the earth sustains life because of the harmonious balance of the elements and all the creatures within it. Our pursuit of happiness and high quality of life need not endanger other peoples, nations, communities, species and future generations that are also entitled to survival and happiness. Ecological sustenance can be assured only through the principle of being mindful of the welfare of others while we mind our own. Our survival is inextricably woven with that of others. In the long term, we cannot survive while others perish.

Since the United Nations Conference on Environment (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992, there has been much debate and many international deliberations on the global environmental crisis. The Kyoto Protocol, one of the outcomes of these deliberations, has been signed and ratified by most nations.

The current environmental crisis cannot be overcome through voluntary action, but through a legally binding commitment of all nations, particularly those responsible for the emissions which precipitated this crisis. The Kyoto Protocol was designed to ensure that all Annex I (industrialized) countries would commit themselves to legally binding emissions reductions to 1990 levels. Since then, none of these countries have met this target, but have instead continued to increase their emissions, with the disastrous consequences which are now being experienced, particularly in Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP).

The AACC therefore calls upon all the industrialized countries to implement all provisions of the Kyoto Protocol as an initial step, and that after its expiry in 2012, that this is followed by new and higher commitments based on historic responsibility and development equity.

The AACC calls for global responsible leadership - both in the North and in the South, in the support for a real and actual reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, while at the same time preserving the right of all people to reach a dignified level of sustainable development. Governments of the industrialized nations must keep the promise that they made in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. The world is rapidly approaching the point of "dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system."

The AACC calls on the industrialized countries to urgently do the following:

Make binding commitments to support adaptation measures in the countries of Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) in accordance with the targets agreed in the Kyoto Protocol, and establish frameworks and mechanisms to deliver sufficient and accessible adaptation funds and support, particularly to the most vulnerable populations. The funds and support for adaptation measures must be integrated within development processes in ACP, but must be in addition to, and separate from, current commitments on official development assistance (ODA).

Promote the role of the civil society in order to adequately respond to the global efforts to reverse the adverse consequences of climate change.

Support the efforts of the ACP countries to secure reliable and affordable energy necessary for poverty eradication in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals.

Support the innovation, contextualisation and development of technologies for industrial development in ACP, and give priority to the promotion of endogenous inventions and innovations.

Avail more financial resources for investment in energy efficiency and support new renewable energy options in developing countries, without proscribing conventional options or inhibiting the process of industrialization in the short term.

Ensure that bio-fuel production shall not be implemented at the expense of staple food production in developing countries.

The AACC calls upon the leaders of African countries to urgently do the following:

Make legislative and financial commitments to support adaptation measures at community, national and regional levels, whilst tapping into indigenous knowledge and practices and building upon existing adaptation efforts.

Promote the role of civil society in order to adequately respond to local efforts to reverse the adverse consequences of climate change - particularly at community levels.

Develop appropriate legislative measures and support local efforts to secure reliable and affordable energy necessary for poverty eradication in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals.

Define appropriate policy frameworks to support the innovation, contextualization and development of technologies for industrial development in their respective countries, giving priority to the promotion of endogenous inventions and innovations.

Mainstream investment in energy efficiency and support new renewable energy options in their respective countries without proscribing conventional options or inhibiting the process of industrialization in the short term.

Ensure that bio-fuel production shall not be implemented at the expense of staple food production in developing countries.

The following are some of the Provisions which a new Protocol should include:

Protocol to be effective after ratification by a simple majority of the Parties to the UNFCCC.

Protocol to be mandatory on all UNFCCC Parties, irrespective of whether or not they ratify the Protocol. This is seen as important since they continue to contribute to global warming, even without having signed or ratified the Protocol.

Annex I countries to allocate Adaptation Funds and Mitigation Funds for contribution to Greenhouse Gas Emissions and historical emissions respectively, calculated on the basis of their respective proportional contribution to Greenhouse Gas Emissions at 1990 levels. These funds to be administered through bilateral protocols separate from Official Development Assistance (ODA) allocations.

Emphasis on local technological initiatives in response to the adverse consequences of human related climate change, as confirmed by the Fourth Report of the IPCC (2007).

Civil society organizations should be accorded a significant role in the mobilization of community initiatives to reverse global warming.

November 7, 2007

More evangelicals concluding God is green
Traditionally conservative movement moving to embrace ‘creation care’
By Alex Johnson
Reporter
MSNBC
updated 4:11 p.m. PT, Tues., Nov. 6, 2007

The evangelical awakening to climate change is still a work in progress, but as the politically powerful movement becomes more active in environmentalism, political leaders will have to take notice or risk losing their jobs, a prominent evangelical leader said Tuesday.

Since President Bush’s re-election in 2004, a movement called “creation care,” which asserts that Christians are the stewards of God’s creation, has rapidly been gathering momentum, said the Rev. Richard Cizik, vice president of government relations for the National Association of Evangelicals, or NAE.

“What is really happening is that American evangelicals are becoming, well, green, if you will,” Cizik said in an interview with MSNBC-TV’s Joe Scarborough.

The American evangelical community is in the midst of a wrenching shift in thinking on the environment. As recently as this spring, politically influential evangelicals were locked in a showdown over climate change, when 25 conservative evangelical leaders demanded that the NAE fire Cizik for his environmental advocacy.

The association’s refusal — rebuffing such influential conservative figures as James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family; former Republican presidential candidate Gary Bauer; and Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council — marked a turning point for green evangelicals, emboldening them to take creation care into the political arena.

“This is going to be an issue which evangelicals are going to look at when they cast their ballots,” Cizik said.

“I think it should be on par with all the other issues,” like abortion and same-sex marriage, he said. “When you think about it ... hundreds of millions of people around the globe are already being impacted by climate change.”

‘New day’ as conservative elders fade

For most of the movement’s history, American evangelicals as a rule steered clear of politics, heeding leaders who preached against risking contamination by secular culture.

But in the 1970s, a generation of deeply conservative activists attracted by the open courting of Ronald Reagan, who was preparing his successful run for president, broke with tradition and began talking about reforming that secular culture. That movement provided the foundation for the rise to prominence of conservative political pastors like the Rev. Jerry Falwell, the Rev. Pat Robertson and a coalition of dissidents who seized control of the Southern Baptist Convention in the early 1980s.

Those conservative evangelical leaders largely rejected the environmental movement, both because of its liberal heritage and because of the biblical injunction that Christians should worship the creator, not his creation. With their focus on conservative social issues like abortion, they kept environmentalism marginalized as an evangelical issue.

In a sermon shortly before his death in May, Falwell criticized “naive Christian leaders” for being “duped” by environmentalism, which he told his congregation at Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Va., was “Satan’s attempt to redirect the church’s primary focus” from evangelism.

Since the re-election of President Bush in 2004, however, and especially in the past two years — as awareness of climate change and disenchantment with the war in Iraq have crystallized — moderate and liberal evangelicals have been willing to step out of the shadows and confront the conservative leaders most Americans identify with evangelicalism.

Majority of evangelicals back action

In a poll last month by Ellison Research, 70 percent of self-described evangelicals said they believed global warming would have an impact on future generations, and 64 percent said action should begin immediately.

More than half — 54 percent — said they would be more likely to support candidates who worked to curb global warming.

“We’re putting it in a biblical context,” Cizik said. “We’re saying whatever the past was, it’s a new day. It’s the 21st century, and we are the new evangelicals, and we have a broad agenda. And caring for the Earth is one of those things.”

Climate change has emerged as a significant issue in the presidential campaign, and many of the candidates, Republican and Democratic alike, have sought to seize the environmentalist mantle. But only Republican former Gov. Mike Huckabee of Arkansas — otherwise considered among

the more conservative candidates in the race — has explicitly aligned himself with the creation care movement.

“My own personal faith reminds me that ‘the earth is the Lord’s’ and that we are not its owners; merely its caretakers,” Huckabee, a Southern Baptist minister, wrote in his 2007 autobiography, “From Hope to Higher Ground.”

As Huckabee has won favor among evangelicals in Iowa, where he has risen to second in recent Republican polls and assuaged some evangelicals’ concerns that he cannot win, he has begun picking up endorsements from evangelicals who stress his environmental position.

“I would suggest that as stewards of God resources, there needs to be a fresh look at this issue,” Rick Scarborough, head of Vision America, a prominent conservative evangelical group, wrote Thursday. “... Huckabee is forcing Republicans to discuss this issue, and that is healthy.”

Randy Thomas, vice president of Exodus International, an evangelical ministry, wrote last month that “I have decided to vote for Huckabee. Yes, it is because he is unabashedly Christian, but it is also that he does care for the environment.”

And also last month, Don Bosch, an environmental scientist and founder of the Evangelical Ecologist Web site, posted a prominent endorsement of Huckabee.

EPA, evangelicals join forces

Cizik was in Minnesota on Tuesday to publicize the NEA’s partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency’s Energy Star for Congregations program, which seeks to persuade churches to become more energy-efficient.

“We are asking all 45,000 churches associated with NAE to, if you will, go green,” he said.

Cizik cited EPA statistics projecting that if all of the estimated 300,000 houses of worship in the United States — “that’s Protestant, Catholic, Muslim mosques, everybody” — were to sign on, “we would save \$200 million annually” for core ministerial purposes.

The issue remains contentious among evangelicals, however, and a debate over climate change at the Values Voters Summit last month in Washington demonstrated that divisions are still deep.

“Climate change threatens human lives, and the environment is clearly on the mainstream of the evangelical agenda,” the Rev. Jim Wallis, president of the liberal evangelical group Sojourners/Call to Renewal, told the assembly.

The Rev. Richard Land, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, countered with the conservative evangelical philosophy that God created the world to support humanity, saying: “The Bible says the Earth is for human betterment.”

But “why shouldn’t the churches be leading this?” Cizik asked. “Of course they should be, because that’s God’s mandate to us. ... God said in his own word in Genesis 2:15, ‘Care and protect it.’

“And have we been doing that? I don’t think so.”

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November 9, 2007

Churches go green, and cite scripture for it

Reporter: Jason Wheeler
 Email: jwheeler@keyetv.com
 Last Update: 11/08 11:20 pm

(cbs 42)

As Central Texans gather to worship these days, increasingly they're focusing on saving their souls, while also sparing God's green Earth.

"It's broadening out and becoming more mainstream in all the traditions. It's not just one little congregation in San Francisco that cares about it," says Bee Moorehead, executive director of Texas Impact, a group that describes itself as advancing state public policies that are consistent with universally-held social principles of the Abrahamic traditions.

"Going green is a no-brainer," exclaims Kristina Carter of The Rock United Methodist Church. She is not your typical pastor. "I have a degree in engineering chemistry and a PhD in applied chemistry."

Her background has helped put environmentalism in the foreground at her Cedar Park church where they adhere to Earth-friendly values rather religiously. Their sanctuary, surrounded by trees and native grasses instead of a sprawling parking lot, boasts rain collection pillars, carpet-free floors, less toxic paint, fluorescent light bulbs, low flow toilets, ceramic coffee mugs instead of Styrofoam cups, an altar made from discarded wooden pallets, a church logo that incorporates the recycling symbol, even a crucifix adorned with materials saved from the trash heap.

Rev. Carter says the recycled components on that cross are "a reminder again that God can redeem anything, and we need to be mindful of that."

Reverend Carter believes the inspiration to go green comes straight from the black and white text in the Bible.

"God says where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" Carter asks. Citing scripture, she says it's clear that we have a mandate to take care of the planet.

Rev. Carter: "Genesis Chapter 9... I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and all flesh."

Carter also believes it would be a sin to ignore global environmental problems and just expect God to fix it all.

Rev. Carter: "Paul says God's grace is bigger than any sin, but that doesn't mean we should sin all the more so that God's grace can be demonstrated."

Of course, like many aspects of worship, though, having a green church requires sacrifice.

Belle Zars, Friends Meeting of Austin: "How do we keep from being the pigs at the trough in our privileged western world?"

The Friends of Austin, a Quaker community, believe so strongly that they need to be better friends of the Earth that they're willing to greatly reduce the balance of their savings account so they can reduce their reliance on electricity.

"We're putting up a 20 kilowatt system that will go on these two roofs that face south. Our annual budget is about 50 thousand dollars, this is costing us about 70 thousand dollars," says Zars.

But the lofty effort, they know, is just one part of truly practicing what they preach.

Zars: "We're not just going to come here on Sunday and say ha ha, we have this beautiful place, and we're not using any energy, so turn down the thermostat. We have to go home and say did you drive to meeting, and what's your temperature set at home and are you recycling."

These are all valid concerns, agrees Pastor Joseph Parker of the David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church. But, he says, "I have not felt compelled to set aside a whole sermon for that."

He just feels there are more pressing matters that require his attention as a clergyman. "I'm more concerned about the peace of the city, the shalom of the city...where there is well-being, health and prosperity," says Pastor Parker.

In some cases, differences in dogma on this subject are causing a spirited debate about the church's place in environmental activism. Still, some experts say more and more, it appears the green movement in the name of God is becoming more evergreen.

November 11, 2007

11/11/2007 06:30:35

Rich must bear climate change costs - report

(Release at 0001 GMT, Monday Nov 12)

By Jeremy Lovell

LONDON, Nov 12 (Reuters) - The rich caused the problem and must therefore pay the price of fixing the global climate change crisis, a new report said on Monday.

Christian Aid, an agency of British and Irish churches, said industrialised nations were historically responsible and therefore morally liable to foot the multi-billion dollar cost of tackling the problem of man-made emissions of carbon gases.

"Nations that have grown rich in part by polluting without facing the costs of doing so must now repay their carbon debt to the developing world," said Andrew Pendleton, author of "Truly Inconvenient - tackling poverty and climate change at once".

It is an argument that will appeal to the developing nations which have used it regularly, but will probably meet diplomatic foot-dragging in the industrialised world whose economies are being threatened by surging oil prices.

Based on the Greenhouse Development Rights framework -- an equation allocating responsibility for emissions of greenhouse gases -- the United States should shoulder 34.3 percent of the annual bill, with the European Union on 26.6 percent.

India and China, both rapidly industrialising but still way behind their developed world counterparts, should bear 0.3 percent and 7.0 percent of the bill respectively.

Based on the calculation a year ago by British economist Nicholas Stern that acting now would cost one percent of gross world product a year, Washington's bill would be \$212 billion a year while Brussels' would be \$164 billion, the report said.

The report is aimed directly at a meeting next month of United Nations' environment ministers on the Indonesian island of Bali which environmentalists want to agree to open urgent talks on a new global climate protocol.

The Kyoto Protocol requires industrialised nations to cut carbon gases by five percent on average below 1990 levels in the period 2008-2012 when it expires, with as yet nothing in prospect to replace it.

But the United States rejected it in 2002 as being economic suicide and it is not binding on developing countries such as China which is building a coal-fired power station a week to feed its booming economy.

(Reporting by Jeremy Lovell; Editing by Giles Elgood)

^REUTERS@ Reut06:29 11-11-07

November 14, 2007

SECRETARY-GENERAL, IN MESSAGE TO ORTHODOX PRAYER SERVICE, SAYS REVERSING GLOBAL

WARMING IS CHALLENGE THAT REQUIRES PARTICIPATION OF MEN AND WOMEN OF FAITH

Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message to the United Nations Orthodox prayer service, 13 November:

I send sincere greeting to this annual prayer service for the United Nations.

This evening finds me far from New York in the heart of the Amazon rainforest. I have travelled to Latin America to see for myself the terrible toll environmental degradation and climate change are already inflicting on the planet and its people.

I am heartened that all of you have gathered to devote this year's service to the theme of climate change. By now, the basic facts of global warming are incontestable. But, up close, its effects are doubly unnerving. Last week, I visited Punta Arenas, the southernmost city in South America. It is near the centre of the famous "ozone hole" in the Earth's atmosphere. This time of year, children have to wear protective clothing against ultraviolet radiation at all times. There are days when parents don't let them play outside, or even go to school.

Antarctica was another stop on my fact-finding tour. The message of scientists studying that vast expanse was chillingly simple: the continent is melting. The ice shelves off the area I visited -- King George Island -- have started to break up. For now, no one expects the worst but, if all of Antarctica's ice were to melt, sea levels could rise by catastrophic amounts.

Slowing, indeed reversing, these trends have emerged as the defining challenge of our age. It requires both your prayers and your participation. Indeed, success in the fight against climate change is hard to contemplate without the input and energy of men and women of faith.

All of you can help inspire millions of people around the world to become better stewards of our planet. You can guide them towards healthier, more sustainable lifestyles. You can encourage them to conserve more, and to want less. And you can reinforce the belief, fundamental to all religions, that we have a sacred obligation to leave the world a better place for those who will follow.

So, dear friends, let us pray for our world and for its well-being.

And let me leave you with my own gratitude for your continued prayers in support of the United Nations, and its worldwide work for peace.

November 19, 2007

UNEP and WMO Panel Puts Final Full Stop Behind Risks and Rewards of Combating Climate Change
Pocket Guide for Policy Makers Agreed by IPCC in Run Up to Bali Conference

Valencia, 17 November 2007 - The challenges and opportunities facing the world as a result of climate change have been distilled into a concise and sobering guide by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The guide, launched today after five days of discussions in the Spanish city of Valencia, will be essential reading for delegates attending the upcoming UN climate convention meeting in Bali, Indonesia.

The guide, officially known as the Summary for Policy Makers, underlines the urgency to act to reduce greenhouse gas emissions alongside the economic costs of a transition to a low carbon society.

It also argues strongly in favour of stepping up support and action on adaptation.

"Neither adaptation nor mitigation alone can avoid all climate change impacts. However, they can complement each other and together can significantly reduce the risks of climate change," says the report by the IPCC, a panel jointly established by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO).

It also highlights five "reasons for concern" which are now stronger than before. This is because scientists now conclude that they may happen at lower increases in temperature or because the risks may be larger than had previously been supposed.

These include the impacts on species and biodiversity hotspots as temperatures rise including polar and high mountain communities and ecosystems.

- The report says that around 20 per cent to 30 per cent of the plant and animal species assessed are likely to be at increased risk of extinction if global average temperatures exceed 1.5 degree C to 2.5 degree C over late 20th century levels.

- The report also points to the likelihood of "irreversible" impacts. For example if temperature increases exceed about 3.5 degrees C, between 40 per cent and 70 per cent of the species assessed might be at increased risk of extinction.

- Increases in sea surface temperatures of about one-three degrees C are projected to result in more "frequent coral bleaching events and widespread mortality".

- There is also concern over the oceans and seas becoming more acidic as they absorb rising levels of carbon dioxide and the impacts on "marine shell-forming organisms" like coral reefs.

Other reasons for concern focus on the risks of extreme weather events with higher confidence in the projected increases in droughts, heatwaves and floods as well as their adverse impacts.

The report also flags up concern that the poor and the elderly in low-latitude and less-developed areas including those in dry areas and living on mega-deltas are likely to suffer most.

- There is high confidence that by mid-century "many semi-arid areas, for example the Mediterranean basin, western United States, southern Africa and northeast Brazil, will suffer a decrease in water resources due to climate change".

The IPCC summary also expresses concern that any benefits linked with climate change will be gone after more modest temperature rises.

Concern is also raised that new observations linked with the Greenland and possibly Antarctic ice sheets may mean that the rate of ice loss will increase above previous forecasts.

Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director, said today: "This is perhaps the most essential reading for every person on the planet who cares about the future. In this Summary, the hard science has been distilled along with evidence of the social and economic consequences of global warming but also the economic rationale and opportunities for action now".

"While the science will continue to evolve and be refined, we now have the compelling blueprint for action and in many ways the price tag for failure—from increasing acidification of the oceans to the likely extinctions of economically important biodiversity".

"The momentum on climate change in 2007 has been nothing short of breathtaking and in no small measure due to the series of assessments from the IPCC. Today's final synthesis report translates the complex science into a lingua-franca so that governments meeting in Bali can not only understand the challenge but be empowered to act collectively on a decisive post 2012 emission reductions regime," he added.

"This pocket guide for policymakers is also more than that. It is also a citizens guide for engaging political leaders, their members of parliament, local authority officials the chief executive officers of national corporations in a public debate on what needs to happen next," added Mr Steiner.

Michel Jarraud, Secretary-General of the WMO, said: "The science of climate change has been finally and forever heard in 2007 as a result of the painstaking and transparent assessments of the IPCC. Agreement on the climate assessments should stimulate action to protect lives and property against natural hazards and to reduce risks of economic setbacks and conflicts over water, food and energy".

"Now that the issue of climate change is established and recognized, observational and research efforts should be increased, rather than reduced. Because societies need more detailed information about anticipated impacts at regional and local levels for responding and adapting to climate change," he said.

"Individuals, enterprises and civil society cannot adapt autonomously without reliable information and projections, especially since they should make some of their investment choices well before the effects of climate change are fully visible. They should have access to scientifically credible and adequate information on climate, from prediction on the likely timing,

extent and effects of climate change, to knowledge of drought and flood resistant crops and new crop planting techniques," said Mr Jarraud.

The summary makes a strong link between climate change and the wider challenges facing in particular developing countries a result of issues like poverty, unequal access to resources, conflict and disease.

On an optimistic note, the summary point out that combating climate change does not have to damage or derail economies.

"There is high agreement and much evidence of substantial economic potential for the mitigation of global greenhouse gas emissions over the coming decades" if governments adopt the right policies and incentives, it says.

Bringing down global carbon dioxide emissions to 2005 levels by 2030 will require a big shift of investment patterns- "although the net additional investment required ranges from negligible to five to 10 per cent," concludes the report.

The IPCC estimates that biggest prospect for emissions cuts comes from buildings, followed by industry and energy supply, agriculture and forestry under a variety scenarios based on the market price of carbon.

Notes for Editors

UNEP and the WMO established the IPCC in 1988. Today's Summary for Policy Makers and a longer version of the synthesis report will be made available at www.ipcc.ch

UNEP www.unep.org and the WMO www.wmo.int

For More Information Please Contact Nick Nuttall, UNEP Spokesperson, on Tel: +41 795965737,

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November 23, 2007

Churches uniting to fight global warming
01:00 AM EST on Friday, November 23, 2007
By Natalie Garcia

Journal Environment Writer

In the past, churches and scientists rarely propagated the same message, but at least in one area, that has changed. Religious organizations across Rhode Island see damage to the planet as an offense to God's creation.

Throughout the year, congregation after congregation joined the newly established state chapter of Interfaith Power and Light, part of a national campaign to mobilize worshippers to help fight global warming.

Maybe it's the unique nature of this crisis — one that threatens economic security and the quality of life for the next generation — that brought Rhode Island's faithful into the fold, with more than 20 houses of faith statewide signing up to intensify their role as environmental stewards.

"I never thought it was a faith issue, but it fits in quite naturally," said Eric Roberts, who attends St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Kingston.

Protecting God's creation is the driving message of the campaign, while theoretical questions about the history of the Earth are not largely debated, said Roberts, who teaches biology at Rhode Island College and regularly rides the bus to work in Providence.

Nationwide, 25 states have started chapters of the interfaith campaign, including about 4,000 congregations.

Conservation is not at odds with religious beliefs, Roberts said, and congregants are more focused on human impact on the planet and what they can do to ensure a livable future for their children and grandchildren.

Established in January, the group has asked all members to order energy audits on their facilities and host educational events to spread awareness on climate change, said the chapter's director, Howie Brown.

Many of them discovered that their facilities were wasting energy by using inefficient incandescent light bulbs and switched to energy-saving compact fluorescent lighting.

In January, Rhode Island Interfaith will hold the state's first faith-based climate change meeting, in Warwick.

On Nov. 15, St. Augustine's hosted a climate change presentation by a volunteer with The Climate Project, a nonprofit outreach organization started by former Vice President Al Gore.

In the basement of St. Augustine's, volunteer Mary Jane Sorrentino showed an abbreviated slide show from Gore's now-famous documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, to about a dozen people on the rain-soaked evening.

Some of them occasionally gasped at the alarming climate change statistics Sorrentino flashed onto a white cotton bed sheet pinned to the basement's wall.

"It's embarrassing to see how we compare to the rest of the world," said St. Augustine congregant and Exeter resident Bob Richardson. "No wonder they hate us."

Richardson had just learned that Americans produce more than five times the worldwide average of carbon dioxide pollution per person, and that the U.S. government has not ratified the Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty which member nations pledge to systematically reduce greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming.

Rabbi Amy Levin and her congregation are taking seriously their call to environmental action.

In one of the most significant steps taken by a Rhode Island Interfaith member, the Temple Torat Yisrael in Cranston is incorporating green building technologies in the planning of a new synagogue in East Greenwich.

It has already purchased six acres, Levin said, and is now on a search for an architect with extensive knowledge of green building practices.

“Since we have begun the process of looking for a new home this has been a high priority,” she said. “They will have a mandate from us to explore all available options in renewable materials, energy savings and [reducing our] carbon footprint.”

Levin said the synagogue might try to get the U.S. Green Building Council’s prestigious Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification, which requires several environmentally responsible technologies in design, construction and operation.

This undertaking is all part of what her faith has been already teaching, Levin says.

“Judaism has been a very environmentally aware religion [for] more than 2,000 years,” Levin said.

Known to carry strong influence in American politics, religious groups can use their organizational strengths to support climate change legislation and educate millions of congregants on the effects of global warming on a regular basis.

Chris Wilhite, the Rhode Island chapter director of the Sierra Club, said he sees the growing connection between the religious bloc and environmental awareness as an opportunity to make changes.

“Churches are one of the most powerful partnerships we can strike,” Wilhite said. “They are a force to be reckoned with politically.”

Wilhite said the proliferation of houses of worship making an effort to curb global warming is a sign that more people recognize the problem.

Marianna Richardson, Bob Richardson’s wife and also a member of St. Augustine’s, said environmentalism appeals to her from her overlapping roles as a grandmother, a person of faith and a consumer.

Richardson said she thinks it has taken a lot of people a long time to face climate change because it's frightening.

"I think human capacity to deny what they are afraid of is a huge issue with stuff like this," she said. "I think I am knowledgeable above average and above average in what I do, but I am nowhere near my potential in what I can do."

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November 26, 2007

Posted on Sun, Nov. 25, 2007

Green sermons taking root throughout the Southeast

BY GREG BLUESTEIN

The tall, tan pastor stood at the pulpit of his Baptist church on a recent Sunday morning, cleared his throat, and nervously proclaimed the following:

First, he believes in God. And second, he believes in the Bible.

Robert Walker Jr.'s audience, a crowd of about 100 faithful parishioners, shuffled uncomfortably as he spoke, surely wondering why their pastor of a decade was offering up these disclaimers.

But it didn't take long to figure out why.

Over the next few minutes, Walker told his flock that science contends that sixth century scholars wrote the Old Testament, but that it was still written with "divine spirit." It was his way of telling them that science and religion aren't always at odds.

"We can embrace God and Scripture and science together. And it's enough to say when they agree - and sometimes they do - we should embrace it. And they agree that our Earth cannot last forever. And that we are charged with the responsibility of taking care of it."

With that, there was another rustle in the crowd. And Peachtree Baptist Church had opened its two-month Sunday sermon series on the environment.

The congregation is one of 130 members of the local chapter of the Interfaith Power and Light movement, a group that tries to engage the faithful into environmental activism. And thanks to a recent spurt in environmental interest, similar chapters are springing up through the South.

"We try to engage faith communities to do just this - encourage their congregations to talk actively about environment and faith," said Jennifer Downs, the chapter's outreach coordinator.

"We don't want this just to be a political conversation. Scientists won't be able to solve this by themselves."

The chapter offers tips on low-energy care of church organs, sermon suggestions and hands out kits that encourage people that encourage greening through holidays. One program encourages people to switch to energy efficient light bulbs on each night they light a candle for Hanukkah or Advent.

The movement has quickly spread its roots throughout the Southeast.

In Virginia, the chapter offers tips on how to incorporate environmental concerns into worship prayers. "Be gentle in interpreting these dangers, which can be frightening," offers one.

The North Carolina group presents a workshop that tackles global warming and energy efficiency, a message it highlights using Al Gore's global warming documentary "An Inconvenient Truth," which it screened to about 100 churches in 2006.

It has also has trained about 150 pastors, rabbis and religious leaders to make politically neutral, scientifically sound statements in the context of their own religious faith.

"The greatest social movements of our time, from abolition to civil rights, didn't seem to take off until the religious community got involved," said Mark Ginsberg, the chapter's outreach coordinator.

Virginia's chapter has focused on developing a three-hour training program for congregations that asks participants to calculate their carbon footprints and pledge a 10 percent reduction, all through the context of religion.

"We want people faith-driven more so than issues driven," said the Rev. Pat Watkins, the chapter's director. "When the faith community gets on board, it's going to make a difference with how we treat the environment."

A movement called "Cool Congregations" is afoot in Tennessee, where members of different congregations meet at a community spot for a morning workshop to discuss the connection between faith and environment - and then spread the gospel to their houses of worship. The groups meet every few months to check in on progress.

"A lot of people are catching on with this in a big way," said the Rev. Jim Deming, who leads the Tennessee organization. "At some point, we're going to be overwhelmed by demand. In many ways the Southeast has been behind, but we really can't wait. This is an immediate crisis."

The Georgia chapter counts more than two dozens member congregations, from synagogues to Unitarian churches.

Walker's Peachtree Baptist Church, a member of the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, seemed to take his sermon in stride. At the very least, he joked, none walked out or dropped out after he spoke.

"I had to deconstruct what we've been taught," he said. "I've been here almost 10 years, so I feel like the church trusts me enough - even if they don't follow me, they'll hear me out."

If the green movement is going to succeed, he wondered, why can't it find a home in the church? "Most churches are self-preserving and reactionary. Where's the proactivity? We're trying to set a tone for other churches."

November 28, 2007

WORLD

Communities, Corporations and Countries Deliver on Planting of One Billion Trees

Author: United Nations Environmental Programme

Published on Nov 28, 2007, 07:43

An indigenous pencil cedar, or perhaps an African olive tree, planted in the Horn of Africa has become a living symbol of enduring hope, optimism and action for communities and countries determined to combat climate change and revive biodiversity.

Today the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) announced that a promise made last year for the UN climate convention meeting to plant a billion trees had been met.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, said: "I am delighted to say that an initiative to catalyze the pledging and the planting of one billion trees has

achieved and indeed surpassed its mark. It is a further sign of the breathtaking momentum witnessed this year on the challenge for this generation-climate change".

"There had been a few cynical smiles and shaking of heads when the Billion Tree Campaign was launched. Some said it would never happen, and others couldn't at first see the *raison d'être*. But citizen after citizen, community after community and country after country, have proved the doubters wrong and demonstrated an abiding truth in 2007," he added.

"Namely that given a focus and the chance to act, millions if not billions of people around this world want an end to pollution and environmental deterioration and have rolled up their sleeves and got their hands dirty to prove the point," said Mr Steiner.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan Green Belt founder and co-patron of the campaign, said: "I am elated beyond words at the global interest and action that was motivated by the Billion Tree Campaign. I knew we had it within us as a human family to rise up! We called you to action almost exactly a year ago and you responded beyond our dreams. Thank you very much! Now we must keep the pressure on and continue the good work for the planet. Plant another tree today in celebration!"

The enthusiasm of individuals to make a difference is underlined by figures collected by UNEP which indicate that half of all those who planted are often private citizens or households planting one to three trees. Significantly, another 13 per cent have been planted by the private sector, which participated actively in the initiative.

ICRAF Director General Dennis Garrity said: "The World Agroforestry Centre is very proud that the ambitious goal of the Billion Tree Campaign has been attained. This milestone shows clearly that the global community has the spirit and the substance to unite in achieving ambitious targets to create a better environment for all. We look forward to working with UNEP and so many other organizations in setting and achieving even greater stretch goals for a more 'bountreeful' world in the coming years."

The news comes as thousands of delegates across the world are ready to arrive on the Indonesian island of Bali for the next and most crucial round of global warming negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, jointly established by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization, has in 2007 concluded that climate change is happening; the global impacts are likely to be in many cases devastating but cost effective solutions are available now to counter the worst.

The Billion Tree Campaign, inspired by a remark by Wangari Maathai, was launched at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi on 8 November 2006.

Among the first, if not the first tree planted, was an indigenous sapling earthed in the soil of the garden of Meryem Amar-a UNEP staff member based in Nairobi who has been coordinating the

UNEP-side of the effort including catalyzing action as well as registering pledges and plantings on a dedicated web site.

Early pledges included one from the forest restoration NGO Trees for Life; a Colombian radio station; Tree-Nation in Barcelona; the Great Rift Valley Trust and the Government of Morocco.

A big boost came in Mexico where the government and local authorities-with support from the army and inspired by President Felipe Calderón-pledged and planted over 200 million trees.

In Kenya the environmental arm of French energy company Total joined the push and in some parts of the world refugees took up the challenge by planting over 9.5 million trees.

The billionth tree planted is believed to be in Ethiopia where, and as part of the country's Millennium Commemoration 2007, close to 700 million trees have been planted alone.

Tewelde Berhan Gebre Egziabher, a UNEP Champion of the Earth and senior member of the country's Environmental Protection Authority, says that amongst the trees planted are the African Olive tree and the African pencil cedar.

The initiative, whose other co-patron is His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco, is unlikely to end with the surpassing of the one billion trees planted mark.

UNEP is expecting that Guatemala, China and Spain will shortly announce that several million more trees have been planted.

Indonesia is expected today to plant almost 80 million trees in one day in the run up to the Bali climate convention meeting next month.

The totals of trees planted are still being collated with the numbers rising almost daily. But the top-ranking countries appear to be Ethiopia, over 700 million trees planted; Mexico, 217 million trees; Turkey, 150 million; Kenya, 100 million; Cuba, 96.5 million; Rwanda, 50 million; Republic of Korea, 43 million; Tunisia, 21 million; Morocco, 20 million; Myanmar, 20 million and Brazil, 16 million. The Green Belt Movement alone planted 4.7 million trees, double the number of trees it had initially pledged.

The Billion Tree Campaign web site with pledgings, plantings and news is at www.unep.org/billiontreecampaign

More details on the UN Framework Convention Conference in Bali, 3-14 December, is at www.unfccc.int

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December 3, 2007

Climate Action for a Low Carbon Economy

Platform by UNEP and Sustainable Development International will assist business, governments and NGOs to reduce their carbon footprint

Bali/Nairobi, 3 December 2007 - A new book launched today in Bali is set to serve as key reading for businesses, governments and NGOs looking for a way to reduce their carbon emissions.

The book and accompanying website are part of the Climate Action international communication platform, a joint project launched by Sustainable Development International in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Featuring articles from several leading authorities including UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner, IPCC Chairman Rajendra Pachauri, Sir Nicholas Stern and Jeffrey Sachs, Climate Action will be widely distributed during the key climate change conference in Bali on 3-14 December.

The 300-page publication - the first of a series of annual reference books - will encourage and assist governments and businesses to lower their greenhouse emissions, while also informing them about how they can adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Crucially, the book puts the emphasis on practical 'Actions' - concrete steps that companies and governments can take to reduce their carbon footprint. It focuses on a series of key issues, including market mechanisms, energy, transportation, telecommunications and buildings. The book will also help institutional investors to analyze and compare companies that are responding to the business risks and opportunities resulting from global warming.

Following the Bali conference, Climate Action will be distributed to governments, think-tanks, environmental organizations and businesses, including the world's largest companies. It will be particularly valuable in highlighting the widespread benefits to society that will derive from reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate Action is the latest in a series of UNEP initiatives to help promote a low-carbon economy. UNEP is also working towards the creation of a carbon neutral network to promote climate-friendly initiatives among governments, cities, companies and organizations across the world.

Notes to editors:

Climate Action offers comprehensive resources that promote dialogue between governments and international industry, and highlight the sharing of best practice and new initiatives. It also aims to raise awareness of the latest market trends, threats and opportunities in response to rising global temperatures.

The platform brings together six influential organizations concerned with the successful mitigation of climate change: UNEP, Ceres (and its Investor Network on Climate Risk), the

Carbon Trust, FTSE4Good and the Pew Center on Global Climate Change. These global partners will help to widely disseminate the publication and website to policy makers, lobbyists, business leaders and the financial community.

For More Information Visit:

<http://www.climateactionprogramme.org>

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December 6 2007

Silver Lining to Climate Change - Green Jobs

Bali/Nairobi, 6 December 2007 - As representatives from over 180 countries gather in Bali to map a post 2012 agreement, new research shows the challenge of climate change also presents opportunities for new industries and employment.

"Millions of new jobs are among the many silver, if not indeed gold-plated linings on the cloud of climate change," said Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

"New research reveals that these jobs are not for just the middle classes ? the so-called 'green collar' jobs - but also for workers in construction, sustainable forestry and agriculture to engineering and transportation," he said.

"Talk of environmental sustainability and climate change often emphasizes the costs, but downplays the significant employment opportunities from the transition to a global economy that is not only resource efficient and without the huge emissions of greenhouse gases, but one that also restores environmental and social values," Steiner continued.

Mr Steiner was referring to the preliminary draft report, Green Jobs: Can the Transition to Environmental Sustainability Spur New Kinds and Higher Levels of Employment?, that was commissioned by UNEP, in groundbreaking partnership with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). The final report will be released early next year, but some of the research covered includes:

- In the US alone, the environmental industry in 2005 generated more than 5.3 million jobs - ten times the number in the US pharmaceutical industry.
- The renewable energy programmes in Germany and Spain are merely ten years old but have already created several hundred thousand jobs.
- The Indian city of Delhi is introducing new eco-friendly compressed natural gas buses that will create an additional 18,000 new jobs. - The ethanol programme in Brazil has created half a million jobs and its bio-diesel programme is specifically designed to benefit hundreds of thousands of mostly poor smallholder farmers.
- By the year 2020, Germany will have more jobs in the field of environmental technologies than in its entire automotive industry.
- In Europe, a 20 per cent increase in energy efficiency would create about a million jobs. The same applies in emerging and developing countries.
- In solar heating, China is the global leader. With combined sales revenues of about \$2.5 billion in 2005, more than 1,000 Chinese manufacturers employed more than 150,000 people. Future estimates of installed capacity mean employment could grow substantially in this area.

Commenting further on the report, Mr Steiner said: "The transition is being spurred on by the existing Kyoto climate agreement with its carbon trading and clean development mechanisms and the anticipation of further, deeper and more decisive emissions reductions post-2012. Another factor is the shifting relationship between environmental advocates, organized labour and heads of industry from one of suspicion that environmental regulation was bad for business and bad for jobs, to one of cooperation based on mutual self-interest."

New industries to address climate change will be at the forefront of the 'cleantech' sector. A new report by UNEP's Sustainable Energy Finance Initiative (<http://www.unepfi.org/>) estimates that investment in renewable energy has now reached \$100 billion and represents 18 per cent of new investments in the power sector.

A recent report by the US economist Roger Bezdek concluded that with the right government signals and investments in research and development, renewable energy and energy efficiency industries could create 40 million jobs across the United States alone by 2030.

"Added together, we are clearly on the edge of something quite exciting and transformational," said Mr Steiner, emphasizing that the "right government signals" are needed to accelerate this push across the globe, starting with the negotiations in Bali.

"Without a strong and decisive emission reductions regime, the transformational foundations being laid today could prove to be built on sand tomorrow. We need to change the subsidies, tax structures, and accounting methods that permit the "externalization" of severe environmental impacts so they are factored into the costs of doing business on this planet," he said.

As part of its work on this issue, UNEP is an active partner with the ILO under its banner "Green Jobs" initiative, which supports a concerted effort by governments, employers and trade unions to promote environmentally sustainable jobs and development in a climate challenged world.

ILO Sustainable Development Specialist, Peter Poschen, pointed out that, "Adapting to and mitigating climate change will entail a transition to new patterns of production, consumption and employment. Huge opportunities exist to create green jobs through energy and industrialization policies that reduce the environmental footprint. These jobs can provide decent work and incomes that will contribute to sustainable economic growth and help lift people out of poverty. They are central to the positive link that needs to be established between climate change and development. By the same token, the major investments to adapt to climate change could provide many new and better jobs for the vulnerable people who need them most," he said.

Lucien Royer, Director of Occupational Health and Environment and Sustainable Development at the ITUC said, "The 'Green Jobs' approach to climate change embodies positive elements for tripartite cooperation between governments, employers and trade unions in building support for national policy and action. Moreover, it creates a basis for developing 'Just Transition' programmes for workers that will be displaced by change and for strengthening the engagement of employers with trade unions to help meet climate targets at the workplace level," he said.

Note to Editors

For further information about UNEP's work on climate change see www.unep.org. Also, see UNEP's labour and environment initiative http://www.unep.org/labour_environment/index.asp

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December 7, 2007

A cross of green
Nov 29th 2007 | AUSTIN
From The Economist print edition

The continuing rise of creation care
AP
AP

Get article background

AS AMERICAN officials fly off to Bali for a meeting on climate change, they will be thinking hard about the people back home who are studying their every move. In contrast to 1997, when

the religious right led denunciations of the deal negotiated in Kyoto, many of today's evangelicals want America to be generous and constructive.

“Regardless of whether all nations agree to be part of the solution, America must do the right thing.” That was an amazing statement, when it was first made in 2006 as part of a green manifesto issued by a group of religious activists led by Richard Cizik, vice-president of the National Association of Evangelicals. But Mr Cizik has gone a long way towards transforming the thinking of American Christians about the planet. It helps that he is no liberal softie: he still opposes abortion, same-sex marriage and stem-cell research.

Even so, Mr Cizik and other green evangelicals have faced an uphill battle. Their preference for the term “creation care” is a reflection, in part, of the horror that the word “environmentalism”—tinged with secular humanism, even liberal paganism—still strikes in the evangelical psyche.

The late Jerry Falwell, for example, loathed environmentalists. In March he said global warming was “Satan's attempt” to distract the church from its fight against abortion and gay marriage. Since his death, the anti-environmental torch has been carried by leading evangelicals like James Dobson and Gary Bauer. But as the creation-care movement picks up, they are starting to sound like dinosaurs. According to a poll in October, two-thirds of evangelicals want immediate action on global warming. Creation care is only part of it: the urge to enhance national security by lessening America's dependence on foreign oil is important too.

The new mood reflects a generational change among evangelicals, says Andrew Walsh, a religion-watcher at Trinity College, Hartford. The younger lot wants to focus more on issues such as AIDS and the crisis in Darfur—a cluster of concerns that have more in common with climate change than with crusading against homosexuality. Among many of the new generation there is less of a feeling that America must always pursue its own interests, adds Dennis Hoover, a writer on conservative Protestantism.

One open question is how far green evangelicals can go in co-operating with Christians with a different ethos. At least in his early green days, Mr Cizik avoided associating with mainline Protestants who were liberal in politics as well as theology. But some intriguing exchanges may be triggered by the recent conversion of Pope Benedict XVI—widely admired by American conservatives—to the view that global warming is a serious issue.

Already, even within the evangelical camp, some patching over of differences has been needed to rally round the green cause: some eco-evangelicals root their beliefs in a literal reading of the book of Genesis, while others interpret the Creation story a bit more freely. The theology is going to get more and more interesting.

December 10, 2007

World

Climate Change and Conflict-New Report Weighs the Risks and Pin Points Likely Hotspots

Author: United Nations Environmental Programme

Published on Dec 10, 2007, 07:21

Combating climate change will be a central peace policy of the 21st century.

Unchecked it is likely to aggravate old and trigger new tensions in parts of the world that may spill over into violence, conflict and war a new report concludes.

Areas at increased risk of insecurity include northern and southern Africa alongside countries in the Sahel region and the Mediterranean.

Other potential hot spots are central Asia; India, Pakistan and Bangladesh; China; parts of the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico and Andean and Amazonian regions of Latin America.

a) Climate status: Regions in which extreme climatic conditions already prevail today. b) Climate future: Regions which could be put at risk in future by unabated climate change. Source: WBGU 2007

The report, prepared by German and Swiss academics, urges governments meeting at the UN climate convention conference in Bali to adopt deep and decisive emission reductions alongside support for adaptation or 'climate proofing'.

Otherwise climate change, including more extreme weather events; impacts like the melting of glaciers; the drying out of big forest systems and rising numbers of climate refugees is likely to overwhelm the ability of many countries to govern and to cope.

Professor Hans Schellnhuber, a lead author of the report, Director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and Visiting Professor at Oxford University, said: "Without resolute counteraction, climate change will overstretch many societies' adaptive capacities within coming decades. This could result in destabilization and violence jeopardizing national and international security to a new degree".

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director UN Environment Programme (UNEP), said: "There are multiple environmental challenges facing the world and the security of communities and countries. Climate change is perhaps the most high profile".

"However, if we can counter climate change and climate proof economies to buffer them against the climatic changes already underway, perhaps the world can unite around these other pressing challenges from reversing the decline of biodiversity and loss of marine resources up to designing a more intelligent, fairer and ultimately sustainable global trade regime".

The new report comes in the wake of rising concern over climate change and conflict. Earlier in the year the UN Security Council debated the issue and there have been warnings from retired and serving senior military in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom.

Later today the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), jointly founded by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organisation, will co-win the Nobel Peace Prize-again reaffirming growing understanding between combating climate change and peace.

The new report, entitled *Climate Change as a Security Risk*, has been prepared by the German Advisory Council on Global Change drawing on the work of international experts and organizations including UNEP.

The report suggests four 'climate-induced conflict constellations'. These are degradation of freshwaters; decline in food production; increase in storm and flood disasters and environmentally-induced migration.

It also tries to define and explain what may constitute vulnerable states and societies. These are likely to be ones that are in political transition and have a low level of economic activity with often large population or high population densities.

Countries bordering a neighbour in which violent conflict is being waged or ones that have themselves experienced violent conflicts in the very recent past within their own borders will also be vulnerable to renewed conflict in a climatically constrained world.

Highlights from the Report-Regional Hotspots

North Africa: The potential for political crisis and migratory pressure will intensify as a result of the interaction between increasing drought and water scarcity, high population growth, a drop in agricultural potential and poor political problem-solving capacities. The populous Nile Delta will bear risk from sea-level rise and salinization in agricultural areas.

Sahel zone: Climate change will cause additional environmental stress and social crises (e.g. drought, harvest failure, water scarcity) in a region already characterized by weak states (e.g. Somalia, Chad), civil wars (e.g. Sudan, Niger) and major refugee flows (Sudan: more than 690,000 people; Somalia: more than 390,000 people).

Southern Africa: Climate change could further weaken the economic potential of this region, whose countries already belong to the poorest in the world in most cases. It could also worsen the conditions for human security and overstretch the capacities of states in the region.

Central Asia: Above-average warming and glacial retreat will exacerbate the water, agricultural and distributional problems in a region which is already characterized by political and social tensions, civil war (Tajikistan) and conflicts over access to water and energy resources.

India, Pakistan, Bangladesh: The impacts of climate change will be especially severe in this region: glacial retreat in the Himalayas will jeopardize the water supply for millions of people, changes to the annual monsoon will affect agriculture, and sea-level rise and cyclones will threaten human settlements around the populous Bay of Bengal.

These dynamics will increase the social crisis potential in a region which is already characterized by cross-border conflicts (India/Pakistan), unstable governments (Bangladesh/Pakistan) and Islamism.

China: Climate change will intensify the existing environmental stress (e.g. air and water pollution, soil degradation) due to the increase in heat waves and droughts, which will worsen desertification and water scarcity in some parts of the country.

Sea-level rise and tropical cyclones will threaten the economically significant and populous east coast. The government's steering capacities could be overwhelmed by the rapid pace of modernization, environmental and social crises and the impacts of climate change.

Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico: Increased frequency of more intense hurricanes could overwhelm the economic and political problem-solving capacities in the region (especially in Central America).

Andean region and Amazonia: Faster glacial retreat in the Andes will worsen the region's water problems. The collapse of the Amazon rainforest, which cannot be ruled out, would radically alter South America's natural environment, with incalculable economic and social consequences.

The report Climate Change as a Security Risk is available at www.wbgu.de under flagship reports. It is also available at Earthscan www.earthscan.co.uk

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December 11, 2007

INDONESIA: Archbishop of Canterbury urges 'moral vision' on climate change
By Vanya Walker-Leigh December 11, 2007 [Ecumenical News International]

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, in a message to participants at United Nations climate change talks in Indonesia, has said a clear moral vision is needed to deal with the challenge of global warming.

"Ultimately the control of climate change, ultimately the welfare of the environment is an issue of survival for everybody," Williams said in a 10-minute video statement relayed to a December 11 ecumenical meeting during talks being held at Nusa Dua on the Indonesian island of Bali.

"It is not a question that can be addressed by one society alone, by one religious tradition alone, by one State alone. It's something that demands collaboration," said Williams, leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion in his message for the meeting on the fringes of the international gathering.

Describing God's justice as timeless, he warned that giving priority to the interests of present generations over those of the future generations was an unjust act, which God would judge.

Government negotiators at the December 3-14 U.N. conference are working to frame a successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol, which contains binding targets for some nations to reduce climate change-inducing gas emissions, but it is set to expire in 2012.

Williams urged faith communities to hold up a "clear moral vision" to governments and societies.

"This will mean real challenges to developed and prosperous societies, real challenges to let go of some of their security, and some of their prosperity," said Williams. "We should be under no illusion that this will be an easy task."

Negotiators for the United States were reported to have insisted on removing firm targets for reducing carbon dioxide from the "road map" being drawn up at the Bali talks.

China's emissions are not covered by Kyoto, and the world's most populous nation is for its part resisting a call for developing countries to cut emissions. At best, China says, developing countries can only slow their growth.

"The biggest challenge that faces us in terms of global policy is how we are to find ways of reducing and controlling climate change without eating into the economic aspirations, the proper aspirations of our poorer societies, towards prosperity, respect and dignity," said Williams.

The Anglican leader's message appeared on screen after an ecumenical service organized by the World Council of Churches. Such services have been a regular feature of the annual U.N. conferences on climate change that have taken place since 1995.

December 11, 2007

Environmental policies must respect needs of the poor: pope
AFP

Published: Tuesday December 11, 2007

Pope Benedict XVI on Tuesday called for environmental policies to take account of the needs of poorer countries, as the UN-sponsored global climate change conference continued in Indonesia.

He also condemned the destructive effects of military spending in his annual message ahead of World Peace Day on January 1.

"Respecting the environment does not mean considering material or animal nature more important than man," said the pope in his message.

"Rather, it means not selfishly considering nature to be at the complete disposal of our own interests, for future generations also have the right to reap its benefits and to exhibit towards nature the same responsible freedom that we claim for ourselves.

"Nor must we overlook the poor, who are excluded in many cases from the goods of creation destined for all.

The pope's message echoed that of last year when he issued a strong warning on the environmental impact of the global race for energy supplies, saying it was a threat to world peace.

"If the protection of the environment involves costs, they should be justly distributed, taking due account of the different levels of development of various countries and the need for solidarity with future generations," he added.

Noting the growing numbers of conflicts across the world, the pope denounced the destructive effect of the international arms trade.

"(O)ne must acknowledge with regret the growing number of states engaged in the arms race: even some developing nations allot a significant portion of their scant domestic product to the purchase of weapons," he said.

He criticised both the industrially developed countries who profited from the arms trade; and the rulers of poorer countries who sought to tighten their grip on power by "acquiring ever more sophisticated weaponry."

He added: "In difficult times such as these, it is truly necessary for all persons of good will to come together to reach concrete agreements aimed at an effective demilitarization, especially in the area of nuclear arms."

December 11, 2007

ENVIRONMENT-BRAZIL:

Bishop Fasts Again for Sao Francisco River

Fabiana Frayssinet

SAO PAULO, Dec 11 (IPS) - Brazilian Catholic Bishop Luiz Cappio has entered the third week of his hunger strike against the diversion of water from the Sao Francisco river, in the arid northeast of the country, amid expressions of support.

The Franciscan bishop, 61, is prepared to continue his fast to the death, Ruben Siqueira, of the Land Pastoral Commission (CPT), told IPS in a telephone interview from Sobradinho, a small village in the northeastern state of Bahia on the banks of the Sao Francisco, where Cappio is fasting and praying.

The Sao Francisco river rises in the eastern state of Minas Gerais, and wends its way northwards through five states and 503 municipalities for 2,863 kilometres before finally reaching the Atlantic ocean between the states of Sergipe and Alagoas.

Bishop Cappio, who held a hunger strike for the same reason two years ago, feels "betrayed" by the leftist government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Siqueira said.

A communiqué from Cappio's diocese of Barra, in Bahía state, says that the hunger strike will only end when Lula "finally shelves the initiative" which, according to the government, seeks to provide water for 12 million people in the semi-arid northeast of Brazil, the country's poorest region.

The administration's argument is refuted by Cappio and the social, campesino (small farmer), trade union, religious and environmental organisations that support him.

The project involves the building of two canals to remove and redistribute water from the river, and will cost some 3.6 billion dollars. But its ostensibly social goal is "nothing but propaganda" by the government, according to Siqueira.

Studies in the possession of the organisations that oppose the project indicate that the water would actually benefit large economic interests.

Seventy percent of the total volume of water derived from the project would be used by the shrimp industry, made up of large and medium sized companies which produce for export, Siqueira said.

A further 26 percent will be used by the steel plants in the city of Fortaleza, in the northeastern state of Ceará, he added.

The CPT spokesman mentioned the Ceará Steel company, an international consortium of Italian, South Korean and Brazilian capital, including the Vale do Rio Doce mining company and the National Development Bank (BNDES).

Out of every 45 cubic metres of water channeled northwards by the project, nine cubic metres, or 20 percent, will be fed to the Ceará Steel company, said Siqueira.

"The real objective is to provide water for large-scale irrigation, shrimp farming, big industries and big cities. Only four percent is actually intended for the people living in poor and arid areas," he said.

Another motive for opposing the project is that, over the last 70 years, the Sao Francisco river "has increasingly been used intensively for economic purposes, and this is harming hydroelectric energy production," Siqueira said.

Seventy percent of the river's waters are already committed to power generation in hydroelectric stations which supply 90 percent of electricity in the northeast. Its water is also being used to irrigate fruit for export and sugar cane plantations from which fuel alcohol is produced.

Diverting more water from the river would have a negative impact on the level of Sobradinho lake, held back by a dam which acts as the artificial regulator for the whole river, and would endanger the water supply of some 14 million people.

Siqueira said the Sao Francisco River Basin Committee has determined that the available river flow is 360 cubic metres of water per second for all uses, and that 335 cubic metres per second are already in use.

"The river just hasn't got enough water for the government's project," he said.

The CPT and other social and labour organisations advocate a different way for people to "coexist with the natural resources of Brazil's semiarid region."

They propose small-scale projects such as collecting and storing rainwater, and pumping groundwater, which could benefit 34 million people for half the cost of the government's project, according to studies.

Cappio is continuing his hunger strike, taking only filtered river water from the Sao Francisco with a little sugar. His chapel has become a centre of pilgrimage.

In the last few days, visitors including soap opera actress Leticia Sabatella, and organisations like the Landless Movement (MST), have come to show solidarity. The MST carried out a protest march there.

Meanwhile, preliminary work is already under way at the project site, guarded by the army.

Karla Arnes, a government representative from the Integration Ministry, dismissed the fears of the organisations opposing the project, in an interview with IPS.

"The National Water Agency (ANA) would never have authorised the project if it weren't primarily providing water for human and animal consumption. No companies are benefiting from this," Arnes said, repeating that the main goal was to benefit 12 million people.

Neither would the ANA have authorised the project if the Sao Francisco river could not provide a flow rate of 25 cubic metres per second. "This will not affect the volume of flow in the river," she said.

In seasons of heavy rainfall the Sobradinho dam overflows, causing floods. At those times a higher volume of water per second could be removed from the river, and the diversion would be a positive thing because that excess water would be used, Arnes said.

Two years ago, Cappio called off his first hunger strike after 11 days, when the government promised more public debate and consultations before undertaking the project, after sending a representative to talk to the bishop.

Dialogue began, followed by the elections in which Lula won a second term of office. "Then, in spite of letters from the bishop and every possible action, nothing was decided, and the government resumed work on the project," Siqueira said. (END/2007)

December 12, 2007

Kicking the CO2 Habit at Climate Convention Meet
UN, Costa Rica, New Zealand and Norway Outline Climate Neutrality Strategies in Bali and Beyond

Bali/Nairobi/Oslo/San Jose/Wellington, 12 December 2007 - The United Nations has become part of the growing worldwide effort to become climate neutral.

Members of the UN attending the crucial climate convention meeting in Bali today announced that they are offsetting their greenhouse gas emissions linked with travel to and from the event.

The move, covering some 20 agencies, funds and programmes, also includes the Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, and his team.

In order to show leadership and demonstrate practical action in support of developing countries and the urgent need to counter global warming, the UN bodies have jointly agreed to invest in credits accumulating in the adaptation fund of the Kyoto Protocol.

The UN calculates that its greenhouse gas emissions arising from travel to and from Indonesia represents around 3,370 tonnes of carbon dioxide worth approximately \$100,000 at current carbon prices.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), said today: "The UN is today delivering as one on the issue of climate change as it is increasingly doing across the range of 21st century challenges as part of its on-going and forward-looking reform agenda".

"Offsetting emissions by supporting the soon-to-be operational adaptation fund sends a clear signal that climate proofing vulnerable economies has like the UN's action on climate change generally risen to the top of the organization's agenda in 2007," he said.

"Under the leadership of Ban Ki-Moon, the entire UN system has now pledged to work towards climate neutrality, not just in Bali but across offices and operations globally and forever. Indeed I can announce today that UNEP will be among the early movers and will become climate neutral next month," said Mr Steiner.

Norway, one of four countries that have pledged to go climate neutral nationally, today also reconfirmed that it is backing the UN system-wide work towards climate neutrality with an initial investment of \$820,000 for the UNEP-hosted Environmental Management Group.

Erik Solheim, Minister of the Environment and International Development, said: "We believe it is important that the UN take the lead and facilitate a common understanding of what climate neutrality is and how to achieve it. We are very happy to witness the strong system-wide response across the UN these past months, coordinated by the UN Environmental Management Group, the EMG, and we are proud to be a key financial supporter."

The news comes as Costa Rica, New Zealand and Norway fleshed out some of the pioneering plans and strategies they are developing in order to achieve climate neutrality in their own countries.

New Zealand

David Parker Minister Responsible for Climate Change Issues for New Zealand, which will in June next year be the main host for UN World Environment Day with the slogan Kick the CO₂ Habit, said: "We're proud to be hosting World Environment Day in 2008. New Zealand aims to become the world's first truly sustainable nation".

"Our plan to become climate neutral involves a goal of generating 90 percent of our electricity from renewable sources by 2025, and halving our per capita transport emissions by 2040 by introducing electric cars and a requirement to use bio fuels. To incentivise climate-friendly behaviour we're introducing an emissions trading scheme, which includes all sectors and all gases," he added.

Agriculture and livestock is an important sector in New Zealand's economy, said Mr Parker.

"New Zealand is already a world leader in agricultural research, and is turning its expertise towards research to reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions, for example, methane from livestock," he added.

Costa Rica

Paulo Manso, Chief of Costa Rica's delegation to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, said: "The decision to become climate neutral had been taken by President Oscar Arias as part of the new Presidential initiative called Peace with Nature".

"The Peace with Nature initiative honours the ethical, human, social, environmental and economic approach which Costa Rica has towards the environment and sustainable development," he added.

Costa Rica has placed climate change at the very top of its agenda arguing that a climate neutral economy is also a competitive one.

The aim is to achieve the neutrality goal by 2021 to coincide with the country's 200th anniversary of independence.

The strategy will build on Costa Rica's decision to tax fossil fuels in 1996 with 3.5 per cent of the money raised allocated to the National Forestry Financing Fund.

These, along with other financial support such as loans and grants, are part of a payment for environmental services programme that pays landowners who manage forests for their carbon sequestration and storage alongside management for water production, biodiversity and scenic beauty.

Costa Rica's avoided deforestation programme (see separate press release from Costa Rica) will include support for the Billion Tree Campaign established by UNEP and the World Agroforestry Centre, whose patrons are Wangari Maathai and Prince Albert of Monaco.

In 2007 Costa Rica planted more than five million trees or 1.25 per person making it the highest per capita planting in the world.

Other elements of the strategy include increasing the percentage of renewable energy generation to well over 90 per cent and action on energy efficiency including energy saving appliances.

Biofuels and a switch to electric and hybrid buses and cars are also part of the plan alongside capture and use of methane from landfills and wastewater treatment plants as a fuel.

Norway

Mr Solheim, the Norwegian minister of Environment and Development today, reaffirmed his country's commitment to become "climate neutral by 2050" and starting immediately to over-fulfill its Kyoto obligations during the first commitment period..

He said the Norwegian Parliament was expected on 14 December to approve a plan for Norway to buy carbon credits worth four billion kroner- around 500 million Euro- under the Clean Development Mechanism and Joint Implementation of the Kyoto Protocol.

Mr Solheim said the country would be pursuing vigorous energy savings and efficiency measures at home to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to fully utilize and contribute to the evolution of the carbon markets established under the UNFCCC's Kyoto Protocol.

Mr Steiner added that it was vital that a deep and decisive international emissions reduction regime is up and running by 2012.

"However, it also clear that some countries are voluntarily and already prepared to go that extra mile. And it is not just countries but a growing and widening group of companies, cities and individual citizens who are also looking to their carbon footprints with a view to working towards climate neutrality," he added.

Mr Steiner said that, at the suggestion of Costa Rican Environment Minister Ricardo Dobles, UNEP was establishing an Internet-based climate neutral network.

He urged other interested countries, companies and cities to join the initiative in advance of its official launch at the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum in Monaco in late February 2008.

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The UN Environmental Management Group is at www.unemg.org

December 13, 2007

Speech by Achim Steiner, UN Under Secretary General and Executive Director UN Environment Programme, to the Plenary of the UNFCCC in Bali, Indonesia. Bali, Indonesia, 12 December 2007 - Mr Secretary General, Honorable Presidents and Prime Ministers, COP President, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Heads of Agencies and UN bodies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues and friends,
In 2007 climate change is understood as an environmental change phenomenon but one that has profound economic and social-indeed security-implications.

The reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), established by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) in 1998, have transformed the scientific and political landscape- this year and forever.

We are facing a challenge of extraordinary scale and of pace.

But the IPCC underlines that we are also facing an extraordinary opportunity if only we can grasp it.

An opportunity of moving towards more intelligent and sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Every generation has its challenge-this one, climate change, is ours.

Ten years ago governments adopted the Kyoto Protocol. It was a moment of huge celebration and optimism.

Ten years on the UN can say it has delivered the structures, mechanisms and creative markets instruments but there remains a gap between the promise and the reality.

Indeed we are now faced with ever sobering impact assessments-ones that may play out in a far shorter and more rapid time scale than had been imagined only a few years ago.

It is a scientific reality that demands and requests an order of political commitment, responsibility and urgency higher than we may have imagined only 12 months ago.

The UN is delivering as one in rising to the challenge under our new Secretary-General.

Collectively the UN has engaged on behalf of member states in assisting to realize what a post 2012 emissions reductions regime might look like and one that reflects the responsibilities and opportunities unfolding.

The UN is not alone.

One of the defining developments of the recent years and months is the rate at which cities, companies and citizens are also requesting solutions and a chance to maximize the opportunities for transiting to a low carbon world.

Within the last half hour, Costa Rica, New Zealand and Norway publicly reaffirmed commitments to climate neutrality.

Countries of Europe and Asia, of North America and Latin America and of Africa and of the Caribbean and the Pacific-join them under the understanding of the Rio Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities.

But responsibilities nevertheless.

- The multilateral system is certainly trying to live up to its responsibilities to support member states and establish a platform of consensus-building and greater public awareness around the climate challenge.
- Support via the impartial and validated science and forward-looking economic assessments of the IPCC.
- The Secretary-General's unprecedented High Level Event in which Heads of State committed to finding solutions to the climate challenge.
- Through confidence-building between governments such as the accelerated freeze and phase out of HCFCs under the Montreal Protocol.

And we will continue that support to Member States in Bali and Beyond.

- In collaboration with the UNFCCC, we have been building the capacity of negotiators from developing countries-it will continue.
- UNEP and adaptation or climate proofing economies-we will focus and distill the latest scientific knowledge of the IPCC to establish much needed impact assessments at the regional and national level.
- Ecosystems will be crucial in a climatically challenged world. UNEP will continue to not only build understanding but assist in transferring 'soft' technology on intelligent and effective ecosystem management.

- We will continue to devise and define smart market mechanisms to meet the sustainable energy challenge.
- We need to make progress even while the negotiations are on going and to be concluded.
- UNEP will be taking forward its partnerships with the multi-trillion dollar finance and investment community in order to accelerate the transition to a more climate-friendly but also profitable global economy.
- And we will accelerate the implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan on Technology Support and Capacity Building.
- Under the UN Nairobi Framework, UNEP and UNDP are already assisting developing countries to gain greater access to the carbon market.
- Ministers in developing countries need swift and reliable advice on climate proofing infrastructure up to agriculture and health-we are developing this service too.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The eyes and the ears of 6.5 billion people are on this meeting via the medium of modern media.

At the last climate COP, held in Nairobi, UNEP and the World Agroforestry Centre-under the patronage of Wangari Maathai and Prince Albert of Monaco- launched the Billion Tree Campaign.

Over 1.5 billion trees have been planted. This week Indonesia planted some 80 million trees alone-proof positive that if you give the public, business and indeed governments a platform action will follow.

I sincerely believe we are in the final end game of devising an even greater stage.

One upon which governments, communities and corporations are liberated to use their ingenuity and entrepreneurialism in order to realize a low carbon and climate proofed world.

One in which we may finally get to grips with the unsustainable production and consumption patterns of the past.

One in which we unleash the greatest and most abundant commodity on this planet: namely human ingenuity.

In doing so we can transform the way we do business on this planet and not only deal with the climate change challenge but the wider sustainability issues confronting current and future generations.

The science, but also increasingly the day to day experience of millions of people, tells us climate change is a reality right now but also an opportunity that we cannot fail to take.

So why not take it now. And if not here, where? If not now, when?

December 14, 2007

INDONESIA: Al Gore backs Archbishop of Canterbury's 'moral' stand on climate

By Vanya Walker-Leigh December 13, 2007

[Ecumenical News International] Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Al Gore, in a speech to U.N. climate change talks in Bali that received strong applause from delegates, has echoed a call by the Archbishop of Canterbury to confront the issue as a moral one.

"It is a moral imperative, you have the capacity to act," Gore told the U.N. conference on December 13 during a speech in which he said the United States was the principal barrier to reaching agreement on a new international pact to deal with climate change.

"We have everything we need, except political will," said Gore in his speech. "But that is a renewable resource," he said, regarding the will to act.

Gore's speech coincided with reports that attaining a mandate to steer negotiations for the next two years on a post-2012 climate change deal could be blocked by the U.S. administration's objection to a firm commitment on cutting emissions of climate-change inducing gases.

In a speech on December 11 relayed by video at a church-related meeting during the December 3-14 Bali talks, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, had urged faith communities to hold up a "clear moral vision" to governments and societies.

Senior international officials at the talks interviewed by Ecumenical News International said they would welcome a more proactive stance by faith-based organizations on climate change.

"In my view there are three ways to reach people: through their wallets, their health and their soul," said Ahmed Djoghlaif, of Algeria, the executive secretary of the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity. "The first two are certainly current, the third has yet to be achieved. I would warmly welcome a far higher level of engagement by faith groups in biodiversity issues."

The head of the British delegation to the Bali talks, Chris Dodswell, said his government continued to support the formation of a global coalition of faith communities to campaign on climate change.

In April, the then British environment minister, David Miliband, who shortly afterwards became the foreign minister, issued a call for a faiths' climate change coalition when he addressed a Vatican seminar on climate change and development. Miliband had said in his Vatican speech that an "ecological conversion" was needed to mobilize governments, businesses and citizens across the world to act.

"Climate change is not just an environmental or economic issue, it is a moral and ethical one," Miliband said. "It is not just an issue for politicians or businesses, it is an issue for the world's faith communities."

December 15, 2007

UNFCCC PRESS RELEASE

UN Breakthrough on climate change reached in Bali

(Bali, 15 December 2007) – 187 countries meeting in Bali on Saturday agreed to launch negotiations towards a crucial and strengthened international climate change deal.

The decision includes a clear agenda for the key issues to be negotiated up to 2009. These are: action for adapting to the negative consequences of climate change, such as droughts and floods; ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; ways to widely deploy climate-friendly technologies and financing both adaptation and mitigation measures.

Concluding negotiations in 2009 will ensure that the new deal can enter into force by 2013, following the expiry of the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol.

Indonesian Environment Minister and President of the conference, Rachmat Witoelar said: "We now have a Bali roadmap, we have an agenda and we have a deadline." "But we also have a huge task ahead of us and time to reach agreement is extremely short, so we need to move quickly," he added.

Earlier this year, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued a finding that if left unchecked, the world's average temperature could rise by as much as 6 degrees centigrade by the end of the century, causing serious harm to economies, societies and ecosystems worldwide.

"This is a real breakthrough, a real opportunity for the international community to successfully fight climate change," said Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). "Parties have recognised the urgency of action on climate change and have now provided the political response to what scientists have been telling us is needed," he added.

While a new global deal is envisioned for 2013, countries also agreed on a number of steps that need to be taken immediately to further implement the existing commitments of Parties to the UNFCCC. These issues are particularly important for developing countries (see fact sheet).

The conference was attended by around 11,000 participants, among them the Secretary-General of the United Nations and six Heads of State.

Four major UNFCCC meetings to implement the Bali roadmap are foreseen for next year, the first to be held in March or April.

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About the UNFCCC

With 192 Parties, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has near universal membership and is the parent treaty of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. The Kyoto Protocol has 176 member Parties to date. Under the Protocol, 36 States, consisting of highly industrialised countries and countries undergoing the process of transition to a market economy, have legally binding emission limitation and reduction commitments. The ultimate objective of both treaties is to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system.

About the CDM

Under the CDM, projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions in developing countries and contribute to sustainable development can earn certified emission reduction (CER) credits. Countries with a commitment under the Kyoto Protocol buy CERs to cover a portion of their emission reduction commitments under the Treaty. There are currently more than 860 registered CDM projects in 49 countries, and about another 2000 projects in the project registration pipeline. The CDM is expected to generate more than 2.6 billion CERs by the time the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol ends in 2012, each equivalent to one tonne of carbon dioxide.

Fact sheet: Individual decisions taken at Bali to further implement the existing commitments of Parties to the UNFCCC

Adaptation

Governments decided that funding for adaptation projects in developing countries, financed by the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), would begin under the management of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). This ensures that the Adaptation Fund will become operational in an early stage of the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol (2008-2012). The fund is filled by means of a 2% levy on CDM projects. Currently the fund is worth about 37 million euros. Considering the amount of CDM projects in the pipeline, this figure will rapidly increase to an estimated 80- 300 million USD in the period 2008-2012. The Governments could not agree on additional practical adaptation measures, such as how to integrate adaptation into national policies. This issue will be

on the agenda of the next meeting of the so-called Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice in Bonn in June of 2008.

Technology

The Bali Conference also made important progress on the issue of technology, one of the key concerns of developing countries. Governments agreed to kick start strategic programme to scale up the level of investment for the transfer of both the mitigation and adaptation technologies that developing countries need. The aim of that programme is to give an extra push to concrete demonstration projects, to create more attractive environments for investment, as well as to provide incentives to the private sector for technology transfer. The GEF will start setting up this programme together with international financial institutions and representatives of the private financial sector.

Parties also agreed to extend the mandate of the Expert Group on Technology Transfer for a further five years. The Expert Group has been asked to pay particular attention to the assessment of gaps and barriers to the use of, and the access to, financing resources. Furthermore, the Expert Group will start working on performance indicators that can be used to regularly monitor and evaluate progress on the development, deployment and transfer of environmentally sound technologies. The work of the Expert Group provides important input into the discussions on technology transfer for the new post-2012 climate change deal.

REDD

“Reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries” (REDD) was a key issue at Bali. Parties affirmed the urgent need to take further meaningful action to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and adopted a work programme for further methodological work. That programme will focus, for example, on assessments of changes in forest cover and associated greenhouse gas emissions, methods to demonstrate reductions of emissions from deforestation and the estimation of the amount of emission reductions from deforestation. The decision furthermore encourages Parties to support capacity building and to undertake efforts, including demonstration activities, to address the drivers of deforestation. This is important to address the needs of local and indigenous communities who depend on forests for their livelihoods. Deforestation is regarded to be an important component of a future climate change regime beyond 2012 - in both mitigation and adaptation strategies.

IPCC

Parties agreed to recognize that the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the most comprehensive and authoritative assessment of climate change to date. The scientific findings will continue to inform the international climate change process.

CDM

Small-scale afforestation and reforestation: Parties agreed to double the limit in size of small-scale afforestation/reforestation project activities to 16 kilotonnes of CO₂ per year. This move will expand the number and geographical reach of the CDM to countries that have thus far

been unable to take part in the Mechanism for this category of project activities.

Carbon capture and storage

Parties for the first time considered the possible inclusion of carbon capture and storage (CCS) in geological formations as CDM project activities. They agreed to do further work on this and established a workplan for 2008. The plan will include receiving and considering input on technical, legal, policy and financial topics associated with CCS.

This input will be considered at the next Climate Change Conference in Poznan next year. CCS is widely regarded as an important technology to enable the continued use of fossil fuels in a clean way.

Least developed countries

Parties agreed to extend the mandate of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) Expert Group. This group provides critical advice to LDCs in assessments of adaptation needs. It is universally accepted that it is critical that LDCs are supported in assessing their adaptation needs because of their low adaptive capacity.
