

**United Nations Environmental Program
Archive of E-Articles
2010**

January 2, 2010

Shrinking religious orders take up land conservation

By Bridget MacDonald
Washington Post

Looking over the wooded parcel her Catholic order sold in 1992, Sister Chris Loughlin stood with arms folded, the regret on her face plain to see.

But Loughlin and her fellow Dominican sisters in Plainville, Mass., about 30 miles southwest of Boston, have more than made up for the loss of 10 acres from the former orchard that was bequeathed to the order in 1949.

Gesturing to surrounding fields and forests, Loughlin explained: "Now we have these 42 acres, and 32 of them are in a conservation restriction. So no matter what happens at this point, at least the land is preserved."

The old orchard is now home to the Crystal Springs Earth Learning Center, and the rambling farmhouse is the unassuming headquarters of a remarkable land conservation initiative, the Religious Lands Conservancy.

Launched by Loughlin in 2002 with the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, the Religious Lands Conservancy has been instrumental in placing hundreds of acres owned by religious communities into conservation. With a faith-based mission to protect the Earth, Loughlin has approached congregations throughout the Northeast to broach the spiritual value of conservation.

It's not just a feel-good spiritual mission. During the past 40 years, the number of Catholic nuns has plummeted 66 percent, and the number of Catholic brothers by 60 percent. The financial strain of dwindling membership has resulted in lucrative -- and often attractive -- offers to sell the orders' land to developers.

Loughlin said that although religious orders are fading, their land could yet be a lasting legacy.

She is among a growing network of Catholic sisters who have reexamined their connection to the Earth in the context of their faith. Mary Evelyn Tucker, a professor of environmental and religious studies at Yale University, said the increasing involvement of religious groups in preservation is not simply a trend but also "the rediscovery of ancient traditions."

"All the rituals of world religions are very much nature-based," she said.

The green-sister revolution is rooted in the teachings of the Rev. Thomas Berry, who before his death in June fostered the idea that the environmental crisis must also be understood as a spiritual crisis. Sister Miriam MacGillis, a Dominican nun who has been at the forefront of the movement, said Berry's perspective shifted her work "quite radically" to encompass a respect for all life on Earth.

Ever since MacGillis helped found the 226-acre Genesis Farm and its Earth studies center in Blairstown, N.J., in 1980, Catholic sisters across the United States and Canada have woven environmental justice and community-supported agriculture into their religious vocation.

Living in Massachusetts -- the nation's third-most densely populated state -- the Dominican sisters of Plainville are helping to save a critical habitat, said Bob Wilber, director of land protection for the Massachusetts Audubon Society, and their foresight has helped spark conversations with other orders.

"Some of the most significant land left [in Massachusetts] is owned by religious entities," Wilber said.

As religious orders took root across the United States in the 19th century, they built networks of schools, hospitals and orphanages to provide services to the poor and marginalized. The rise of government and private programs, however, made many of these institutions obsolete.

In the mid-1970s, the sisters in Plainville confronted an increasingly familiar situation: Fewer students were enrolling in their parochial school, and shrinking numbers of sisters meant having to hire (and pay) lay teachers.

"We converted that school building into a home for our retired sisters," Loughlin said.

In a scenario faced by many Catholic orders, the cash-strapped sisters began to sell off pieces of property to help pay for the care of elderly members. In similar situations, land that was once eyed for a cemetery was split into subdivisions, and shuttered churches have been converted to condominiums.

Kathy McGrath of the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition said many religious groups are starting to see that the benefits of protecting land often outweighs the costs, although some still need convincing.

"It's so important," McGrath said, "to have someone like Chris who is connected to . . ."

"Old nuns," Loughlin interjected from across the table.

About 60 miles to the southeast, at the gateway to Cape Cod, the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary has run a retreat center on 118 acres of waterfront property in Buzzards Bay since 1943.

Waterfront land in the area has skyrocketed in value, and the congregation has had many offers to sell. Yet the Rev. Stanley Kolasa, the center's director, explained that "we realized that this is a gift -- this is a gifted place. We want in some way to return the gift."

With financial uncertainties prompting difficult questions, members of the congregation looked for answers at the Religious Lands Conservancy's 2005 conference. Mass Audubon joined the conversation, and the land soon became a top priority for the state's Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program.

"It blossomed into a contiguous 300 acres on the ocean," said Mass Audubon's Wilber. "It's probably the last time this will ever happen with land fronting on the water."

-- *Religion News Service*

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/01/AR2010010101586.html>

January 5, 2010

Do we need to say our prayers?

By Greig Whitehead
BBC News

For millions of people in Africa, climate change is a reality, says Greig Whitehead. However, as he explains in this week's Green Room, in religious nations such as Kenya, many believe that tackling global warming is beyond their control.

Kenya is a deeply religious country.

Christians, Muslims and Hindus alike assemble for regular and often lengthy worship; prayers are offered up before and after every public meeting, and even before starting a cross-country "safari", the god of one's faith is called on to bless the journey.

So it comes as no surprise to hear a female pastoralist from the arid lands of North-East Kenya decrying the combined wisdom of the world's scientists, after being told that climate change is man-made.

"How can man change the climate and make it stop raining: it is God's will that has brought the drought," she utters.

But even with trust in the power of God, Kenya is a country on the brink of disaster.

As news reports show, the country's rivers are drying, its more remote areas are turning to desert, and the food chain - from land, to animals, to humans - is breaking down.

The ramifications of the rural drought now stretch to the streets of Nairobi, where five million people face daily power rationing, severe water shortages and higher food prices.

In battle terms, Kenya is on the frontline; it is staring climate change in the face.

Climate for change

But to deal with the global phenomenon, Kenya's "wananchi" (citizens) need to understand the complex of challenges they are up against, including a range of home-grown factors.

A growing population, coupled with insufficient investment in rural infrastructure and land management, makes it even more difficult to adapt to climate change and stave off the impending disasters brought by human induced global warming.

For the future of Kenya, it is vital that practical solutions are found to meet people's concerns and help build sustainable systems that are less vulnerable to increasingly unpredictable weather patterns.

Most importantly, it is up to the youth of Kenya to take up the fight on climate change; to succeed where their elders are failing and to inspire a new generation to change their thinking and adapt their ways.

There are more than 4,000 secondary schools across Kenya, and apart from their purely academic function, most of them play a key role as a focal point for the surrounding community.

Secondary schools are well placed to act as catalysts for community action.

The 12% of youth fortunate to attend these schools - the country's future leaders - have the knowledge and abilities to become "change-agents", able to motivate people to develop a better understanding of the causes and impacts of environmental degradation.

This then provides a foundation on which to discuss and take action.

'Here and now'

Climate change is about the here and now in Kenya, already seriously affecting the wellbeing of millions of people.

It is a salutary warning for the more affluent countries in the North that a problem which - in essence - they have created, through industrialisation and development, will in time rebound to affect their own livelihoods.

Climate change is a global issue transcending national boundaries, but impacting first on those who can least afford to cope with the consequences.

The "God not man" cry from the lady in Kenya's northern reaches illustrates a common problem relating to understanding the underlying causes, and underscores the incapability of people in such situations to deal with the crisis that has impacted so severely on their communities.

As Wangari Maathai, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, notes:

"Climate change will bring massive ecological and economic challenges... therefore, alleviating dehumanising poverty will become even more difficult."

One of the keys to enable understanding and adaptation is to harness the power and ingenuity of youth. As Kefa Kones Kibet, a 17-year-old from Nakuru High School in Kenya's Rift Valley, remarks:

"Climate change causes suffering for people. Many people in Africa walk for miles in search of water.

"Women are the ones who suffer most because they are the ones who look out for the family. People should be educated on how to plant trees and how best to use the little water available.

"The only way to curb climate change is through action now for a better tomorrow."

Greig Whitehead is programme manager for the International Climate Challenge, Kenya

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

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/8434059.stm>

January 7, 2010

Churches urged to protect biodiversity in their churchyards

By Charlie Boyd
Christian Today

The Church of England is advising churches to protect biodiversity by managing rather than mowing their churchyards.

An estimated two thirds of the Church of England's churches – around 10,000 – have churchyards, which collectively cover the space of a small national park.

David Shreeve, the Church of England's national environment adviser, said churchyards were a "vital" biodiversity resource.

"Churchyards can be a vital biodiversity resource often containing a variety of wildlife which are unique to the area and many manage their land in such a way to celebrate the diversity of life," he said.

"Whilst there are areas needing to be mown, many churchyards can also be managed to provide excellent wildlife areas."

The advice follows the decision by the Church of England's national environmental campaign, Shrinking the Footprint, to sign up to the United Nations' International Year of Biodiversity.

The Church of England said thousands of its churchyards were contributing to the biodiversity of the country in ways that did not compromise respect for family and friends of those buried there.

All Saints, Odell in the Diocese of St Albans won an award from the Campaign to Protect Rural England for its community-led conservation project, which included 'adopt a grave'. In the Diocese of London, a section of the churchyard at St Andrew's Fulham Fields was given over to the creation of a wildlife garden out of plants and objects that were mostly donated or found locally.

St Peter and St Paul with St Andrew, Flitwick, in the Diocese of St Albans has recorded more than a hundred species of wildflowers in its churchyard.

Judith Evans promoter of the Living Churchyard scheme for St Albans said churchyards made a huge contribution to the biodiversity of the country at the same time as engaging and educating the wider community.

"They often support species of plants and animals which have disappeared from the surrounding area, or are capable of so doing," she said.

"Many churches in the diocese and nationally are managing their churchyards in an environmentally-friendly way, often with the help of their local wildlife trusts, but they are still in the minority.

"In the International Year of Biodiversity we hope to make them the majority to demonstrate that the church really cares about God's creation."

Almost 1,000 organisations have signed up to the International Year of Biodiversity, which celebrates the variety of life on Earth.

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/churches.urged.to.protect.biodiversity.in.their.churchyards/25022.htm>

January 11, 2010

Pope denounces failure to forge new climate treaty

By Nicole Winfield
Associated Press

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI denounced the failure of world leaders to agree to a new climate change treaty in Copenhagen last month, saying Monday that world peace depends on safeguarding God’s creation.

He issued the admonition in a speech to ambassadors accredited to the Vatican, an annual appointment during which the pontiff reflects on issues the Vatican wants to highlight to the diplomatic corps.

Benedict has been dubbed the “green pope” for his increasingly vocal concern about protect the environment, an issue he has reflected on in encyclicals, during foreign trips and most recently in his annual peace message. Under Benedict’s watch, the Vatican has installed photovoltaic cells on its main auditorium to convert sunlight into electricity and has joined a reforestation project aimed at offsetting its CO2 emissions.

For the pontiff, it’s a moral issue: Church teaching holds that man must respect creation because it’s destined for the benefit of humanity’s future.

In his speech, the pontiff criticized the “economic and political resistance” to fighting environmental degradation that was exemplified in the negotiations to draft a new climate treaty at last month’s summit in Copenhagen.

Officials from 193 countries met at the summit, which ended Dec. 19 having failed to produce a successor treaty to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. It produced instead a nonbinding accord that included few concrete steps to combat global warming.

The Copenhagen summit did set up the first significant program of ensuring aid to help poorer nations cope with the effects of a changing climate. But while the accord urged deeper cuts in emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases blamed for global warming, it did nothing to demand them.

“I trust that in the course of this year ... it will be possible to reach an agreement for effectively dealing with this question,” Benedict said.

Benedict didn't name countries responsible for bogging down negotiations, but he listed as the victims island nations at risk of rising seas and Africa, where the battle for natural resources, increased desertification and over-exploitation of land has resulted in wars.

“To cultivate peace, one must protect creation!” Benedict told the ambassadors, many of whom wore their national dress or medal-draped formal attire for the audience in the frescoed Sala Regia of the Vatican's apostolic palace.

The pontiff said the same “self-centered and materialistic” way of thinking that sparked the worldwide financial meltdown was also endangering creation. To combat it will require a new way of thinking and a new lifestyle — and an acknowledgment that the question is a moral one, he said.

“The protection of creation is not principally a response to an aesthetic need, but much more to a moral need, inasmuch as nature expresses a plan of love and truth which is prior to us and which comes from God,” he said.

To illustrate his point, the German-born pope recalled the experiences of eastern Europe under the “materialistic and atheistic regimes” of the former Soviet bloc.

“Was it not easy to see the great harm which an economic system lacking any reference to the truth about man had done not only to the dignity and freedom of individuals and peoples, but to nature itself, by polluting soil, water and air?” he asked.

“The denial of God distorts the freedom of the human person, yet it also devastates creation.”

Benedict's theme was similar to the message he issued for the church's World Day of Peace, on Jan. 1, where he argued that climate change and natural catastrophes threaten people's rights to life, food, health — and ultimately peace.

And it was reminiscent of the exhortation to world leaders that he issued ahead of Copenhagen summit, on Dec. 6, in which he called for them to “identify actions that respect creation and promote sustainable development,” noting that they would have to adopt “sober and responsible lifestyles” to do so.

“In this sense, to guarantee full success at the conference, I invite all those people of good will to respect God's laws of nature and rediscover the moral dimension of human life,” he said at the time.

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2010/01/11/international/i023818S59.DTL>

January 11, 2010

Boosting Biodiversity Can Boost Global Economy

2010 is Litmus Test of International Community's Resolve to Conserve and Enhance Planet's Natural Assets

UN's International Year of Biodiversity Kicks Off in Berlin

United Nations Environment Programme

Berlin/Nairobi – A new and more intelligent pact between humanity and the Earth's economically-important life-support systems is urgently needed in 2010, the head of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) said today.

Speaking at the launch of the UN's International Year of Biodiversity in Berlin today, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP's Executive Director Achim Steiner said that an unprecedented scientific, economic, political and public awareness effort was needed to reverse- and to stop- the loss of the planet's natural assets.

These losses include its biodiversity such as animal and plant species and the planet's ecosystems and their multi-trillion dollar services arising from forests and freshwater to soils and coral reefs.

“The words biodiversity and ecosystems might seem abstract and remote to many people. But there is nothing abstract about their role in economies and in the lives of billions of people,” said Mr. Steiner at the meeting hosted by German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

“Take coral reefs for example. The range of benefits generated by these ecosystems and the biodiversity underpinning them are all too often invisible and mainly undervalued by those in charge of national economies and international development support,” he added.

The latest estimates by The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) study, which UNEP hosts, indicates that coral reefs generate annually up to US\$189,000 per hectare in terms of coastal defenses and other areas of ‘natural hazard management’.

“In terms of diving and other tourism revenues, the annual services generated equate to perhaps US\$1 million; genetic materials and bio-prospecting, up to US\$57,000 per hectare annually and fisheries, up to US\$3,800 per hectare per year,” explained Mr. Steiner.

Meanwhile, it is estimated, for example, that one fifth of coral reefs are already seriously degraded or under imminent risk of collapse as a result of unsustainable human activities such as coastal developments, over-fishing, destructive fishing practices and pollution.

Climate change and ocean acidification, linked with the build-up of carbon dioxide, could eventually see 50 per cent and perhaps up to 100 per cent loss of coral reefs worldwide.

“If you factor the true value of coral reefs into economic planning, it is likely that far more rational and sustainable choices would be made in terms of development, emissions and pollution control and resource management. It is a similar story in respect to all of the planet’s nature-based assets from forests and freshwaters to mountains and soils,” said Mr. Steiner.

He added that 2010 was meant to be the year when the world reversed the rate of loss of biodiversity, but this had not happened.

“I would urge heads of state here in Berlin and beyond to renew their commitment and set their sights broad and high. The urgency of the situation demands that as a global community we not only reverse the rate of loss, but that we stop the loss altogether and begin restoring the ecological infrastructure that has been damaged and degraded over the previous century or so,” stressed Mr. Steiner.

He added that the International Year of Biodiversity would prove a success only if several litmus tests are met.

Science

There is an urgent need to bridge the gap between science and policy-makers in governments around the world.

In February, environment ministers attending UNEP’s Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum will decide whether or not to establish an Intergovernmental Panel or Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

“There is an urgent need to take forward the science, in part to sharpen our understanding of the natural world and unravel its complexities. For example, we still do not know how many species are needed within a given ecosystem to maintain its health and its economically-important services,” said Mr. Steiner.

“There is also an urgent need to ensure that the wealth of science we already have is used by governments to maximum effect and genuine and sustained action on the ground,” he added.

The proposed IPBES is aimed at addressing these issues. Mr. Steiner pointed out that governments should consider supporting the proposed new panel or give guidance on an alternative body or mechanism. He added the status quo was not an option if biodiversity loss is to be truly addressed.

Public Awareness

Mobilizing public support across countries, cities, companies and communities would be among the keys to a successful year.

“De-mystifying terms such as biodiversity and ecosystems and communicating complex concepts and sometimes obscure scientific terms, will also be vital to get people on board,” said UNEP’s Executive Director.

“Linking livelihoods, the combating of poverty and the relationship between biodiversity and natural systems with the health of economies needs to set the tone. Equally the link between not only the threat from climate change but the role of living organisms and systems in buffering humanity against the worst impacts of global warming are messages that need to be heard loud and clear,” he added.

- For example, an estimated 5 gigatonnes or 15 percent of worldwide carbon dioxide emissions – the principal greenhouse gas – are absorbed or ‘sequestered’ by forests every year, making them the “mitigation engine” of the natural world.
- Forests also capture and store rainwater, releasing it into river systems while also recycling a great deal of the nutrients upon which agriculture depends.
- Marine ecosystems, including mangroves, salt marshes and sea-grasses are not only coastal defenses and fish nurseries. It is estimated that they are absorbing and locking away greenhouse gases equal to half the world’s transport emissions.

Economics

Bringing the economics of biodiversity and healthy ecosystems into mainstream economics and national accounts would be a major achievement.

TEEB, which builds on some 20 years of work, will publish its final report in advance of the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya, Japan, in October this year.

However, its work so far has shed new light on how much the global economy is losing as a result of its failure to sustainably manage its natural capital.

The TEEB Interim Report estimated that annual losses as a result of deforestation and forest degradation alone may equate to losses of US\$2 trillion to over US\$4.5 trillion alone.

The study is also underlining the huge economic returns from investing in nature.

It is estimated that for an annual investment of US\$45 billion into protected areas alone, the delivery of ecosystem services worth some US\$5 trillion a year could be secured.

The study underlines that many countries are already factoring natural capital into some areas of economic and social life with important returns, but that this needs rapid and sustained scaling-up.

In Venezuela, investment in the national protected area system is preventing sedimentation that otherwise could reduce farm earnings by around US\$3.5 million a year

Planting and protecting nearly 12,000 hectares of mangroves in Vietnam costs just over US\$1 million but saved annual expenditures on dyke maintenance of well over US\$7 million

One in 40 jobs in Europe are now linked with the environment and ecosystem services ranging from clean tech ‘eco-industries’ to organic agriculture, sustainable forestry and eco-tourism.

“Among the positive outcomes of the recent UN climate convention meeting in Copenhagen was an agreement that Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) can join the existing options for combating climate change. In other words, paying developing nations to conserve rather forests systems so that the carbon remains locked in nature rather than emitted to the atmosphere,” said Mr. Steiner.

Other possibilities, ones that meet the climate but also the biodiversity challenge, could follow and should be taken forward in 2010.

These include carbon payments for farmers and landowners who manage agriculture and land in ways that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance living systems and the role of marine ecosystems in climate including adaptation but also their importance in terms of biodiversity.

Alien Invasive Species

Part of the challenge that echoes the economic question includes addressing alien invasive species.

These are species that, as a result of international trade including shipping or deliberate introductions, can flourish unchecked in their new homes sometimes thousands of kilometers from where they are naturally found.

□ By some estimates alien invasive species may be costing the global economy US\$1.4 trillion or more while representing a further challenge to the poverty-related UN Millennium Development Goals.

□ In sub-Saharan Africa, the invasive witchweed is responsible for annual maize losses amounting to US\$7 billion: overall losses to aliens may amount to over US\$12 billion in respect to Africa's eight principle crops.

“Improved international cooperation through the UNEP-linked Convention on Biological Diversity is needed and stepped up support for the Global Invasive Species Programme,” said UNEP's Executive Director.

“It is also important to boost the capacity of the responsible national customs and quarantine agencies, especially in developing countries and to accelerate controls on the movement of aliens via the UN's International Maritime Organization,” he added.

Access and Benefit Sharing

Successfully negotiating an international regime on access and benefit sharing of genetic resources at the CBD meeting in Japan would also be a landmark for 2010.

Currently, and in the absence of such a regime, many developing countries harbouring the richest source of genetic material are declining companies from developing countries and scientists access to these resources.

An international regime could foster cooperation and unlock the genetic resources available in the developing world for the development of new pharmaceuticals, new crop strains and materials for all nations.

In turn it could trigger financial flows from North to South and improve the economics of conserving biodiversity and ecosystems.

“Constructive negotiations are underway since the last meeting of the CBD in Bonn in 2008 and there is optimism that an international regime could be concluded to the benefit of developed and developing economies, to the benefit of biodiversity and ecosystems,” said Mr. Steiner.

Improved International Environment Governance

The international response to biodiversity loss and sustainable management of nature-based resources has been the establishment of several key bio-related treaties.

These include the CBD and its Cartagena Protocol on living modified organisms; the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species; the Convention on Migratory Species; the Ramsar Convention covering wetlands and the Africa Eurasia Waterbird Agreement.

Greater cooperation between the relevant treaties and agreements should be fostered in 2010 in order to accelerate the international response.

Notes to Editors

The International Year of Biodiversity under the theme Biodiversity is Life can be accessed at <http://www.cbd.int/2010/welcome/>

The 10th meeting of the conference of the parties to the CBD <http://www.cbd.int/cop10/>

The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity is at www.teebweb.org

UNEP's work on ecosystem management is at <http://www.unep.org/ecosystemmanagement/>

UN REDD is at www.un-redd.org

The Carbon Benefits Project

<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=585&ArticleID=6159&l=en&t=long>

The Natural Fix?-The Role of Ecosystems in Climate Mitigation

http://www.unep.org/pdf/BioseqRRA_scr.pdf

Blue Carbon and marine ecosystems

<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=599&ArticleID=6342&l=en&t=long>

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=608&ArticleID=6441&l=en>

January 13, 2010

Hindus urged to consider environment as they wash away sins

By Harmeet Shah Singh

CNN

New Delhi, India (CNN) -- The small print in Tuesday's full-page newspaper advertisements for a key Hindu event reflects one of India's biggest worries -- dirty water.

"Avoid using pollutants such as detergents and soaps in the holy Ganga," reads one of the don'ts at the bottom of the government ad.

It comes as hundreds of thousands of Hindus prepare to take holy dips into the revered Ganges. The river is a centerpiece of India's multi-million dollar river-conservation effort.

The Kumbh Mela, or the Pitcher Festival, starts Thursday at the northern holy site of Haridwar with the first of a series of mass bathing.

"Pure devotion that has endured the test of time," says the government of Uttarakhand state, home to Haridwar, in its description of the millennia-old event.

At the same time, there's an apparent underlying concern about the cleanliness of the river that is believed to wash off sins.

"Abstain from using polyethylene and plastic as it is unhealthy for the environment," the state government urges the faithful in a fervent appeal in its advertisement. "Throw all non-degradable litter, empty bottles, tins, polyethylene bags, etc in dustbins."

Twelve major river systems flow through the Indian subcontinent along with a number of smaller streams, according to officials.

The one involving the Ganges and two others is the biggest, covering more than 43 percent of the region's total river catchment area, data shows.

In 1985, India began an arduous river-cleaning program aimed at the Ganges. It was expanded ten years later and at present covers 38 rivers in 167 towns spread over 20 states.

Diversion and treatment of sewage, low-cost sanitation and electric crematoria for the Hindus to burn their dead instead of open-air funeral pyres along the banks are key features of the colossal project.

India has resolved to rid at least the Ganges of pollution by 2020, but environmental watchdogs paint a depressing scenario.

On its Web site, the country's Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) lists as critical the levels of organic and bacterial contamination in the nation's bodies of water.

The CPCB has drawn its observations from the results of monitoring water quality from 1995 to 2006.

It blames the incidence on domestic sewage from cities and towns, which it notes continue to flow into rivers untreated.

"All these river action plans are a complete failure," remarks Gita Kavarana, a water expert with the non-profit Center for Science and Environment.

She insists the government's investment in waste management had fallen far short of its objectives.

"Many sewage treatment plants are not performing to their capacity. The net result of all this is that our rivers are bearing the load of untreated sewage," she notes.

Inadequate sanitation in rural India compounds the problem.

The government estimates that less than 30 percent of villagers have access to latrines, prompting them to walk out to the fields or to the banks of rivers and lakes.

Seven years ago, then prime minister and one of the most prominent leaders of India's Hindu nationalist party, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, made a tacit admission in his own characteristic style.

"It is ironic that, although we consider our rivers holy, we have allowed river pollution to assume alarming proportions," he told conservationists back in 2003.

Little has changed since then, environmentalists say.

<http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/01/12/india.dirty.water/index.html>

January 13, 2010

US cult of greed is now a global environmental threat

By Suzanne Goldenberg
The Guardian

The average American consumes more than his or her weight in products each day, fuelling a global culture of excess that is emerging as the biggest threat to the planet, according to a report published today. In its annual report, [Worldwatch Institute](#) says the cult of consumption and greed could wipe out any gains from government action on [climate change](#) or a shift to a clean [energy](#) economy.

Erik Assadourian, the project director who led a team of 35 behind the report, said: "Until we recognise that our environmental problems, from climate change to deforestation to species loss, are driven by unsustainable habits, we will not be able to solve the ecological crises that threaten to wash over civilisation."

The world's population is burning through the planet's resources at a reckless rate, the US thinktank said. In the last decade, consumption of goods and services rose 28% to \$30.5tn (£18.8bn).

The consumer culture is no longer a mostly American habit but is spreading across the planet. Over the last 50 years, excess has been adopted as a symbol of success in developing countries from Brazil to India to China, the report said. China this week overtook the US as the world's top car market. It is already the biggest producer of greenhouse gas emissions.

Such trends were not a natural consequence of economic growth, the report said, but the result of deliberate efforts by businesses to win over consumers. Products such as the hamburger – dismissed as an unwholesome food for the poor at the beginning of the 20th century – and bottled water are now commonplace.

The average western family spends more on their pet than is spent by a human in Bangladesh.

The report did note encouraging signs of a shift away from the high spend culture. It said school meals programmes marked greater efforts to encourage healthier eating habits among children. The younger generation was also more aware of their impact on the environment.

There has to be a wholesale transformation of values and attitudes, the report said. At current rates of consumption, the world needs to erect 24 wind turbines an hour to produce enough energy to replace fossil fuel.

"We've seen some encouraging efforts to combat the world's climate crisis in the past few years," said Assadourian. "But making policy and technology changes while keeping cultures centred on consumerism and growth can only go so far.

"If we don't shift our very culture there will be new crises we have to face. Ultimately, consumerism is not going to be viable as the world population grows by 2bn and as more countries grow in economic power."

In the preface to the report, Worldwatch Institute's president, Christopher Flavin, writes: "As the world struggles to recover from the most serious global economic crisis since the Great Depression, we have an unprecedented opportunity to turn away from consumerism. In the end, the human instinct for survival must triumph over the urge to consume at any cost."

- This article was amended on Wednesday 13 January 2010. We said "In the last decade, consumption of goods and services rose 28% to \$30.5tn (£18.8bn)". We meant £18.8tn. This has been corrected.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/jan/12/climate-change-greed-environment-threat>

January 15, 2010

Forest Monks

By Lucky Severson

Religion & Ethics Newsweekly

Transcript of video:

LUCKY SEVERSON, correspondent: This ragtag parade in northwest Thailand, in the area known as the Golden Triangle, is a celebration of sorts, but it also has a very serious purpose, and one that has had dangerous consequences.

(speaking to Thai man): How was he killed?

PIPOB UDOMITTIPONG: He was stabbed to death.

SEVERSON: You think that he was killed because of his environmental work?

UDOMITTIPONG: Of course, definitely.

SEVERSON: Why?

UDOMITTIPONG: Because there was no other reason. He's such a nice man. If you meet in person, he's a very amicable man. He has no enemies whatsoever.

SEVERSON: What was so unusual about the killing was that the victim held a position of great respect in Thai society. The victim was a Buddhist monk, an environmental activist.

Susan Darlington is writing a book about Thailand's environmental Buddhism.

PROFESSOR SUSAN DARLINGTON (Hampshire College): There were 18 human rights and environmental activists who were assassinated in Thailand in a three-year period, none of whose murders were solved. So somebody was feeling threatened and had the power to push back and try to send perhaps warnings or to stop these people altogether.

SEVERSON: Sulak Sivaraksa is a noted Buddhist scholar who has written over a hundred books. He claims he knows who was pushing back against the monks who were trying to protect the forests: international corporations with financial ties to some corrupt generals in the Thai military.

SULAK SIVARAKSA (International Network of Engaged Buddhists): Unfortunately the big loggers, in cooperation with generals, they don't care. They cut the trees, and the monks protested, and they even arrested monks. Not before in history that monks had been arrested.

SEVERSON: Darlington is a professor of anthropology and Asian studies at Hampshire College in Massachusetts. She says it wasn't until the late 1980s, after whole forests had vanished, that monks became activists.

(speaking to Professor Darlington): We're talking about whole forests, clear cutting?

DARLINGTON: Clear cutting to either get the logs—the teak forests were going at a rapid rate, other hardwoods—or cutting down forest to make room for intensive agriculture.

SEVERSON: The forests went away, and the animals, too, and then in 1988 catastrophic floods caused people to reevaluate what they had been told was progress.

DARLINGTON: Up to three hundred people were killed from the floods, and most experts pointed to this and said the flooding would not have occurred if there hadn't been such severe deforestation.

SEVERSON: Sulak Sivaraksa founded the International Network of Engaged Buddhists. He says Buddhism's views of the environment are both moral and spiritual.

SIVARAKSA: Buddhism believes that we are all interrelated, not only among human beings but to all sentient beings, including animals, nature, the river, the trees, the clouds, the sun, the moon, we all related. We are brothers and sisters. So if you harm any of these you harm yourself.

DARLINGTON: Buddhists' primary motivation, primary goal is to end suffering, and destruction of the environment causes suffering on many levels. Therefore as monks it is part of our role to make people aware of this and to undertake actions to prevent this and to protect the forests that still exists.

SEVERSON: To protect to the forests, one monk did something radical, just as they are doing here now. He started tying orange robes around trees, in effect ordaining the trees.

DARLINGTON: He was called crazy, and a national newspapers called for him to disrobe from the sangha [community or order], that this was not appropriate behavior for a monk, he's misusing the religion. But meanwhile other monks began to do tree ordinations as well. "You can't ordain a tree. What does that mean?" So people started debating, what does it mean to ordain a tree?

SEVERSON: To the monks, it meant making the forests sacred, off limits to exploitation. The idea has caught on with some villagers, like these. The forests rangers with the guns are not official rangers. They're volunteers who patrol the mountainside looking for timber poachers. Senior monk Anek took us to an area near his village that was clear-cut in the dark of the night. August 21st there was a forest here. August 22nd it was gone. Three acres of prized hardwood disappeared overnight. Anek says he doesn't think monks' robes wrapped around trees would have prevented this.

INTERPRETER (translating senior Buddhist monk Anek): He says it might not deter them because they are investors from outside, they have no respect for the culture, they have no respect for the tradition. He's saying that he feels sad because it took them many years to preserve this.

SEVERSON: Anek says he still gets threats for ordaining trees but not as many as before and not as severe. He doesn't think this area was clear cut for the trees, but instead for the land,

which foreign companies are using for huge farming operations, like the tangerine plantations that stretch for miles along rolling hills that were once covered with pristine forests. Unfortunately for the locals, the companies are hiring cheap labor from nearby Burma. So they're losing the land and their ability to live off it. In the middle of the plantations there is a Buddhist monastery that acts as a buffer against development. The senior monk here is also an environmental activist. His name is Abbot Kittisap.

(speaking to Buddhist abbot): But you're not fearful?

Because of his activism, and because he is testifying in the trial of the murdered monk who was his friend, Abbot Kittsop has 24-hour-a-day police protection, the gentlemen you see here. The abbot says he is still fearful for his safety, but his conscience keeps him going. Even though it's been four years since the controversial killing, no one has been convicted of the crime, and recently the chief investigator confirmed many people's suspicions when he accused the police of tampering with the evidence. Many here don't think justice will ever be served, but Susan Darlington says that doesn't mean the monks have not made progress. The Thai government, for instance, has cracked down on illegal logging.

DARLINGTON: I think the role of Buddhism in protecting the environment has come a long way. These monks really do, they put a moral standard into the environmental movement that makes people really stop and think. It brings a spiritual element to it.

SEVERSON: Others like Sulak say spirituality also requires action.

SIVARAKSA: Spirituality is not merely personal contemplation, not only meditation, that you feel peaceful and then you feel "I'm alright, Jack." I think that's is dangerous. It's escapism.

SEVERSON: Sulak Sivaraksa, who received the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the alternative Nobel Peace Prize, says many Westerners and many Buddhists alike do not understand the meaning of engaged Buddhism.

SIVARAKSA: In fact, meditation only helps you to be peaceful. But you must also confront social suffering as well as your own personal suffering, and people suffer now because of the environment.

SEVERSON: The generals and the developers still have the upper hand, but the battle for the land, and the hearts and mind of the people is not over. Ordinary people are now beating a drum for the monks.

For Religion & Ethics Newsweekly, I'm Lucky Severson north of Chang Mai, Thailand.

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/january-15-2010/forest-monks/5472/>

January 16, 2010

Pastors in Northwest Find Focus in 'Green'

By William Yardley
The New York Times

MILLWOOD, Wash. — State auditors told Millwood Community Presbyterian Church last summer to close its farmers' market on the church parking lot or the lot could no longer be claimed as tax-exempt. Without hesitation, the church kept the market and paid the \$700 in annual taxes.

Money is tight, but the locally raised beef and vegetables and, most important, the environmentally minded customers had become central to the 90-year-old church's ministry.

"It's like we've got more going on in our parking lot than we do within the walls of the church," said the pastor, Craig Goodwin.

Across the Northwest, where church attendance has long been low but concern for the environment high, some church leaders and parishioners are ringing doorbells to inform neighbors — many of whom have never stepped inside the sanctuary down the street — about ways to conserve energy and lower their utility bills. Some view the new push as a way to revitalize their congregations and reconnect with their nearby community.

Religious leaders have been preaching environmentalism for years, and much attention has focused on politically powerful evangelical Christian leaders who have taken up [climate change](#) as a cause. Yet some smaller, older and often struggling mainline churches are also going greener, reducing their carbon footprint by upgrading basement boilers and streamlining the Sunday bulletin, swapping Styrofoam for ceramic mugs at coffee hour and tending jumbled vegetable gardens where lawns once were carefully cultivated.

"I've never been good at door-to-door evangelism," said Deb Conklin, the pastor at Liberty Park United Methodist Church in Spokane, Wash., where an aging and shrinking congregation of about 20 people worships on Sundays. "But this has been so fun. Everybody wants to talk to you. It's exciting. It's ministry."

Several mainline church leaders in the Northwest said environmentalism offered an entry point, especially to younger adults, who might view Christianity as wrought with debates over gay rights and abortion.

A study released in December by the Barna Group, which more typically studies trends among evangelicals, said that older, mainline churches faced many challenges but that their approach to environmental issues was among several areas that “position those churches well for attracting younger Americans.”

“We actually encourage it as a way to get people into the churches,” said LeeAnne Beres, the executive director of Earth Ministry, a Seattle group founded in 1992 that has guided many area congregations through environmental upgrades over the past decade but has recently emphasized more direct political action for pastors and parishioners. “That is what people are interested in, and I don’t see anything Machiavellian in that.”

“It’s fertile ground,” Ms. Beres said, “and these are issues that people are predisposed to care about here in the Northwest.”

Several pastors said they had worked to ground environmental activism in religious teaching and more traditional areas of ministry, particularly social justice, to distinguish it from secular environmentalism. That might mean discussing the impact of climate change on people in countries susceptible to rising seas or on other species, what Hunt Priest, the rector of Emmanuel Episcopal in Mercer Island, Wash., called “the web of creation.”

“For a little while some people forgot this was a spiritual issue,” Mr. Priest said, “and we’ve reclaimed that now. I think we got caught up in things like changing light bulbs and saving paper and having the power company come out and do an audit.

“All important, but for us it needs to be about how we live our lives as Christians now that we know more about what we’ve done to the environment.”

Mr. Priest, who recently joined Ms. Beres and other pastors to lobby staff members of Senators Patty Murray and [Maria Cantwell](#), both Democrats of Washington, for a cap on carbon emissions, said he was wary of viewing environmentalism as a “church growth program.” He noted that while some mainline churches had reported increased attendance as they emphasized the issue, Emmanuel’s congregation, now about 250 families, had declined even though the church had been active on environmental issues for more than a decade.

Still, he said, concern for the environment “can be a spiritual growing edge.”

“Greening a congregation,” as some call it, is not always easy. At Westminster Congregational United Church of Christ near downtown Spokane, built in 1893, the congregation has about 200 people, down from 2,000 a few decades ago. The pastor, Andrea CastroLang, said the church

recently had an energy audit and that while it has made some of the proposed changes, including upgrading the boiler, some were impractical for the soaring, heat-leaking sanctuary.

“They were like, ‘It’d be really great if you could lower your ceiling,’ ” Ms. CastroLang said. “We said, ‘We can’t do that.’ ”

Food is at the forefront of some local efforts, and it is central to the changes under way here at Millwood Presbyterian. In 2008, Mr. Goodwin, the pastor, and his family experimented with eating only locally grown food. Mr. Goodwin, who blogged about the experience, said that he had not been particularly environmentally minded in the past and that the shift came as he tried to help his church engage more with the modest neighborhood surrounding it. The congregation, once 1,700 people, had shrunk to 420 five years ago but has since risen to about 500, he said.

Mr. Goodwin said the farmers’ market, originally conceived by a teenage girl in the congregation, Kelly Hansen, was part of what he hoped would be environmentalism at a basic level, what he called “place making,” with the church a shaping force.

“We’ve been trying to sort out how we flesh out a future in this community,” Mr. Goodwin said. “Instead of ‘How do we get people in here?’ It became ‘Let’s get ourselves out there.’ ”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/16/us/16church.html?th&emc=th>

January 24, 2010

Indians keep faith with Ganges despite pollution

by Yasmeen Mohiuddin
AFP

KANPUR, India – For India's devout Hindus, the sacred River Ganges is always clean and always pure -- even if its waters are a toxic stew of human sewage, discarded garbage and factory waste.

The belief that the Ganges washes away sin entices millions of Hindus into the river each year, and huge crowds of pilgrims are currently passing through the town of Haridwar for the three-month Kumbh Mela bathing festival.

But concern over pollution along the length of the 2,500 kilometre (1,500 mile) river is growing, and the city of Kanpur -- 800 kilometres downstream of Haridwar -- is the site of one of the worst stretches of all.

Factories in the industrial city chug millions of litres (gallons) of polluted water into the river daily, rubbish forms into solid floating islands, and a foul smell wafts over the water's murky surface.

The situation is "acute and critical", said D.K. Sundd, executive director of the Sankat Mochan Foundation, a non-profit group working to clean up the river.

"The problem is worst in Kanpur. The city generates nearly half the volume of sewage and industrial waste as compared to the fresh water flow in the Ganges," he said.

Most communities located on the river from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal in Bangladesh lack proper sewage treatment facilities, and the river has for years "been misused as a convenient sink for raw waste," said Sundd.

Next to one Hindu temple in Kanpur, domestic waste water spills out of a giant drain, merges with a stream of white foam and flows into the river.

Ganges water is considered by many to be blessed, and has for centuries served as an essential component of Hindu ceremonies, from childbirth to death -- when ashes are often scattered in the river after cremations.

Worshippers like Ram Sharma, who regularly wades in the water for an early morning bath with only a cloth tied around his waist, are proof that for many Indians faith outweighs science.

"How can you call this water dirty?" asked Sharma incredulously.

"For us it is holy water," he said as he dipped his cupped hands in the river and took a slurp.

Further down the banks, Mahinder Pal Singh rolled up his pants and stood knee-deep in the water praying.

"You won't find water this auspicious anywhere upstream," he said proudly.

He may be right -- Sundd points out that the polluted segments are separated by cleaner stretches, one of them being Haridwar, the site of this year's Kumbh Mela.

"Ganges water is well known for its extraordinary resilience and recuperative capacity," said Sundd.

In Kanpur, one challenge that the holy water must overcome is the leather industry, which employs around 50,000 people in more than 400 tanneries using chemicals such as toxic chromium compounds.

Although factories are required to treat sludge and waste water before transferring it to a common effluent treatment plant, environmentalists accuse them of dumping waste directly into the Ganges.

Imran Siddiqui, director of Super Tannery Ltd., one of Kanpur's largest tanneries, said the leather business was unfairly being singled out because it was the city's most prominent and profitable.

"People are making culprits out of the tanneries, only it's not true. Only two percent of total generation of effluent comes from tanneries," he said.

"There is more toxic and hazardous waste compared to tannery waste, like that coming out of the electroplating and the dyeing industries," Siddiqui added.

The common effluent treatment facility in Jajmau, the hub of Kanpur's leather trade, has a capacity of nine million litres (two million gallons) a day reserved only for industrial waste water.

"Nobody knows how much waste water they generate but everybody accepts that tanneries produce more than nine MLD (Million Litres a Day), probably between 20 to 30 MLD," said Ajay Kanujia, a chemist at the Jajmau plant.

Siddiqui said Super Tannery had set up a state-of-the-art primary effluent treatment plant as part of its "moral responsibility".

But Kanujia dismissed the move, saying smaller tanneries were all dumping their waste water into storm drains.

"One single tannery may be doing primary treatment and chromium recovery, but if 90 percent are not then what is happening?" he said.

Kanujia said chromium levels in the river had not decreased since the common treatment plant was established in 1995, and now stood at more than 70 times the recommended maximum level.

The government has spent more than 160 million dollars to clean up the river since initiating in 1985 the Ganga Action Plan, which uses the Hindi name for the river, but even it has conceded bacteria levels are dangerously high.

In February last year the government established the National Ganga River Basin Authority to monitor conservation efforts, and in December the World Bank announced a one billion dollar loan to support clean-up schemes for the river.

But years of state-funded attempts have "failed miserably," said Rakesh Jaiswal founder of the Kanpur-based NGO Eco Friends.

"We do not have a vision for the river -- what's practical and what's achievable," he said.

January 25, 2010

Religious talk to fight climate change

By Helen Grady
Analysis, BBC Radio 4

If the case for tackling climate change is backed by science, why do so many green campaigners rely on the language of religion?

I am looking at a clock that is counting down the months, days, hours and minutes until planet Earth reaches "the point of no return".

As I type, we have 83 months to go. The end of the world, if not exactly nigh, certainly seems to be on its way.

But this doomsday countdown has not been devised by a religious cult or millenarian seer. It is on the website of the New Economics Foundation (Nef), designed to raise awareness about climate change.

Nef's policy director Andrew Simms says the web clock was based on a "real and rather conservative bit of number-crunching".

"We wanted to show that there is a real timeframe involved," he said. "You can't negotiate with the weather in the same way you can negotiate with a government department."

The website's designers are not the only ones who are keen to warn us of impending climate Armageddon.

Ahead of last month's Copenhagen climate summit, politicians and campaigners were queuing up to tell us it was our "last chance" to tackle global warming.

Gordon Brown even warned that "the dire consequences of failure" at Copenhagen could include a "catastrophic" future of killer heat-waves, floods and droughts.

Heaven and hell

But while such claims are supported by science, some campaigners think it is time to stop relying on apocalyptic messages to convert people to the climate change cause.

"Selling people a vision of climate hell simply doesn't work," says Solitaire Townsend, co-founder of the firm Futerra, a firm that specialises in green public relations.

"A lot of environmentalists think they need to convince people that the way they live their lives is wrong," she adds. "They want us to stop sinning so they try to scare us into conversion with predictions of high-carbon hell. But it's not an effective message.

"We need to start selling people a vision of low-carbon heaven," Ms Townsend argues. "If we did everything necessary to prevent climate change, what would the world look like? When you start talking about that, most people decide it would be a nicer place to live. So we need to concentrate on getting people excited about creating that low-carbon heaven."

Sin, fear and guilt

The theologian and environmentalist Martin Palmer is also troubled by the green movement's reliance on visions of hell as a way of converting people to their cause.

He says: "In the 70s and 80s, environmentalists thought that if they presented people with the scientific facts, they would realise how desperate the crisis was and change.

"That optimism started to fade in the 90s. They realised that no one is converted by a pie chart, so they started trying to motivate us through fear.

"Now they are playing with some of the most powerful emotional triggers in Western culture. They've adopted the language and imagery of a millenarian cult."

For Palmer, who is a United Nations adviser on climate change and religion, the green movement's appropriation of religious language and imagery has backfired.

"Environmentalists have stolen fear, guilt and sin from religion, but they have left behind celebration, hope and redemption," he says.

"They read science in the way that fundamentalists read religious texts: they cherry-pick the bits that support their argument and use them to scare people," he adds. "Then they offer no solutions other than letting greens take over the running of the world."

Passion for social change

For some, this appropriation of religious language and themes reveals the extent to which climate change is, for a section of the green movement, part of a much wider agenda for radical social change.

"Scratch the surface of a lot of greens and you find quite a lot of anger about the way people are," says Solitaire Townsend. "There's a lot of passion to do more than just reduce carbon levels.

"There's always been a part of the environmental movement that has wanted to change who people are, and change society," she argues. "Some greens want to change our relationship with nature and get us interested in consciousness rather than consumption. These are very philosophical messages."

But the missionary zeal of such campaigners is often disguised by their use of science to support their agenda.

And for one leading green thinker, it will be a step forward for the environmental movement when the philosophical ideas that underpin much environmental thinking are made more openly in the debate about climate change.

Professor Mike Hulme, who founded the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, believes it is not enough for environmentalists to warn of climate hell and say the science demands action, because deciding how to tackle climate change is a deeply political issue.

"At Copenhagen, you could find the strongest advocate of market-based solutions to climate change sitting alongside the most radical member of Greenpeace," says Hulme. "They would both say the science demands that we act. But it misses the point - what is the action?"

"Science cannot resolve the differences in ethics, values and ideologies that underpin the different solutions to tackling climate change," he points out. "Only open, honest, explicit political argumentation can do that."

"That's why all organisations and all interest groups should be upfront and explicit about the underpinning ethical and ideological drivers of their preferred solution."

Analysis will be broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on Monday 25 January at 2030 and Sunday 31 January at 2130 GMT. Or listen again via the [BBC iPlayer](#). You can also subscribe to the [podcast](#).

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/8468233.stm>

January 25, 2010

Keeping the eco-faith

By James Catford

The Washington Post

Copenhagen, just over one month ago, was a success - both for myself and the Bible Society in the UK. I'm not referring to the climate conference itself with its disappointing political

outcomes. What I refer to is the success of those who made their voices heard in the build-up to the conference.

These voices, weighed in media coverage and discussions, were effective in pricking a global conscience with an urgent need for collective responsibility. They triumphantly raised the profile of the dangers greenhouse gases pose to our planet and livelihoods by allowing easy access to information on climate change. It was these voices, from the third sector -- public services, scientists, schools and faiths -- that began to have an impact on my attitude towards the environment and the subsequent actions of Bible Society to help keep the collective conscience awake to protecting the earth.

One month before Copenhagen's Climate Conference, faith leaders from around the world gathered in Windsor, UK, at an **Alliance of Religions and Conservation** summit attended by UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, to celebrate how faiths can continue to make a positive impact on the environment. Thirty commitments were signed by nine faiths, proving the steadfastness of the faithful in the run up to the political decisions due to be made at COP15.

Around this time, my colleagues and I began to re-address the Biblical scriptures that care for the earth. Engaged with the relevance of the scriptures to creation care and curbing climate change, we began an exciting journey to sharing ways in which the scriptures - Biblical, Jewish and Islamic, can inspire practical steps to protecting the environment. These scriptures now appear on an interactive resource on faith and climate change that unites all faith climate organisations and opens dialogue for its members in a **friendly network** to share best practice and celebrate our collective responsibility.

The science of manmade climate change has often been called into question. The rise in aviation emissions by those who attended the Copenhagen Conference only aided a sense of hypocrisy or scientific disbelief from those of us who read about it from afar. Immediately following COP15, a Bible Society poll conducted on Faithbook - an interfaith social networking page on Facebook - showed 47% of the faithful feel that religious leaders should fly less to set an example and reflect the ecological beliefs of their faiths. Last week, in response to Copenhagen and the results of the poll (in which 63% also believe that religions have not yet done enough to tackle climate change), Bible Society hosted, via the new online network, the world's first virtual dialogue, or "no fly summit", on faith and climate change.

The No Fly Summit on Faith and Climate Change, I hope, opens a bright green door for interfaith dialogue. The summit attracted speakers from all over the world: Jerusalem, Switzerland, Kenya, UK and the Caribbean - they needed only log in at home. Using cutting-edge video chat room technology, the speakers were able to talk to each other, via the network Faith Climate Connect, about the scriptures, Copenhagen and practical next steps. Speakers included the founder of the Jewish Climate Initiative, Rabbi Michael Kagan; the Environmental Adviser to the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, David Shreeve; the African

representative in the World Council of Churches Committee for Climate Questions, Prof Jess Mugambi; Dr Denise Thompson; and, Rabbi Awaham Soetendorp one of the leaders of the Earth Charter. The "No Fly Summit" brought them together for a technological first, for they were watched on a huge screen by an audience in London and people from all over the world could log into the network at home and post questions to the speakers.

The outcome was very positive and, for me, it marks a promising start of practical progress for faith communities following Copenhagen. I hope both the dialogue and the network help to keep up the momentum of those voices that were heard prior to the conference. The virtual dialogue was certainly proof that people of faith are not distracted by the disappointment of COP15. Each of the speakers made reference to ways in which God makes it very clear in the scriptures, that we should be responsible stewards of the earth and all agreed that care for the environment is a religious duty, not just a question of faith and scriptures.

This viewpoint is also echoed by 7 out of 10 people in the Faithbook poll, who say that caring for the planet is not just supported by faiths and scriptures: it is a religious duty. Reassuringly, in the face of disappointment following COP15, two-thirds of people also believe that their faith and scriptures have a greater influence on their environmental actions and beliefs than science or government policy.

I take great comfort from both the poll results and the fact that, with its launch last week, the online network Faith Climate Connect has already attracted over 100 members from across 21 countries. It shows what an impact people of faith can have in the climate change debate and how we can tackle it together as a collective. If governments and political leaders won't take the lead, then the faith community must. As the virtual dialogue made clear, God tells us to take care of His planet. At the end of the creation story in Genesis it says: 'God saw all that He had made and it was good'. It's a beautiful world and I, for one, want it to stay that way. I have faith that I'm not alone in finding the best way to look after it.

*James Catford is Chief Executive of the **Bible Society** (formally British and Foreign Bible Society) and has been in post since 2002. Previously, Catford was Publishing Director for Hodder Headline and later HarperCollins.*

http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2010/01/keeping_the_eco-faith.html

January 26, 2010

Papal Message on Peace and the Environment Emphasizes Humanity's Responsibility to Safeguard the Environment

United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi - The Vatican's permanent diplomatic representative to Kenya on Tuesday re-emphasized humanity's intrinsic connection to the environment and the well being of the planet.

Speaking before he delivered a message on Peace and the Environment at the United Nations Environment Programme's headquarters in Nairobi, H.E Archbishop Alain Lebeaupin said, "Development is above all a human issue, and we have an ethical obligation to protect creation".

Traditionally, on 1 January of every year, the Pope delivers a message for the World Day of Peace. This year, the message focuses on the environment, with a title urging, "If You Want to Cultivate Peace Protect Creation".

The message which was delivered to Under Secretary General and UNEP's Executive Director, Achim Steiner, encourages humans to be "guardians" and not "masters" of creation, careful cultivators and not blind "exploiters" of Nature.

This view is not exclusive to Christianity, it is ultimately a point agreed upon across different faiths. According to the UNEP publication Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action, the world religions condemn greed and destructiveness, and universally urge restraint and protection.

The book stresses that human beings are obligated to be aware and responsible in living in harmony with the natural world and should follow the specific practices prescribed by their traditions.

<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=608&ArticleID=6451&l=en>

January 27, 2010

Minister Preaches a Green Message

Groups, Politicians Reach Out to Priest Who Works to Improve Environment

By Yukari Iwatani Kane
The Wall Street Journal

When a San Francisco nonprofit was pushing a controversial California bill last year to remove the restrictions on energy that residents can generate from solar and wind systems, the group needed supporters.

So it turned to an ordained minister named Sally Bingham.

"We have very few voices that are embraced by all levels of society as moral arbitrators," says Adam Browning, executive director of the nonprofit, Vote Solar Initiative. "But Sally speaks with moral authority."

As the environmental minister at San Francisco's Grace Cathedral, Ms. Bingham is sought after by more than just Vote Solar. Other environmental groups and political leaders are also reaching out to the 67-year-old, who operates a nonprofit interfaith environmental outreach group dubbed the Regeneration Project out of a modest office in the city's Financial District.

As one of just a few "canons to the environment" in the Episcopal Church, Ms. Bingham focuses her ministry efforts on improving the environment. She helped Grace Cathedral become greener with energy-efficient lightbulbs and appliances and negotiated with Pacific Gas & Electric Co. to put solar panels on the cathedral. Ms. Bingham also launched Interfaith Power & Light, a nationwide network of 10,000 congregations that are committed to fighting global warming by reducing their carbon footprints and lobbying for environmental policies.

All of that has put Ms. Bingham at the forefront of increasing the influence of religion in the environmental debate, along with other religious leaders like Rick Warren, the evangelical pastor of the Saddleback megachurch in Lake Forest, Calif., and organizations such as the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change in Washington and Jewish environmental group Hazon in New York.

"God created all these amazing natural resources and put us in charge of taking care of it," says Ms. Bingham, adding that every mainstream religion has a mandate to protect creation. "This isn't for us to destroy, this is for us to enjoy and use sustainably."

"Bringing a diverse group of religious leaders can have a tremendous impact," says Vote Solar's Mr. Browning. "People tend to sit up straighter and listen a little more attentively."

But others say the role of religious leaders can be limited. Those leaders' "priorities aren't necessarily shared by the other members of the religious tradition," says John Green, a political science professor at the University of Akron in Ohio.

Still, some lawmakers are tapping into the religious influence. Ms. Bingham has worked with Democratic politicians such as U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer, state Sen. Fran Pavley and state Rep. Nancy Skinner to help amass support for environmental initiatives. Last year, Ms. Bingham was part of a coalition of religious figures that U.S. Rep. Henry Waxman (D., Calif.) depended on to support the House climate bill that includes a cap-and-trade system. She was also recently appointed to the climate and energy task force of President Barack Obama's council on faith-based and neighborhood partnerships, which works to improve communities.

Ms. Bingham says she struggles with the compromises that must be made to pass legislation. She viewed Mr. Waxman's climate bill last year as inadequate, for example, but decided to help because something was better than nothing. The bill passed by eight votes in June.

Ms. Bingham says she has always felt a connection with the environment and couldn't understand why her church didn't. A Bay Area native, she enrolled in an undergraduate program at the University of San Francisco at the age of 44 in the mid-1980s so she could qualify to study at the local theological seminary and explore environmental issues. Ms. Bingham, who has three children and is divorced, was ordained as a priest in 1997.

Ms. Bingham says most religious leaders aren't opposed to environmental initiatives, but it's sometimes difficult to convince them that it's a priority. So she relies on cost arguments.

One member of her interfaith network of green congregations, the San Francisco Zen Center, for example, has 128 solar panels installed in its San Francisco location, decreasing its energy bill by a third, says Linda Cutts, a senior dharma teacher at the center.

Scharmél Roussel, a staff member of Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church in Little Rock, Ark., says such efforts by other faith organizations made a difference with her. After seeing "Lighten Up!", a documentary Ms. Bingham made about environmental stewardship in 2003, Ms. Roussel helped set up an Arkansas chapter of the interfaith network last year.

"Seeing people from so many different faith traditions united in their desire to care for creation" was inspiring, says Ms. Roussel.

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<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703808904575025924209388434.html>

January 28, 2010

Major environmental issues arising for Haiti recovery

United Nations Environment Programme

Port-Au-Prince – Two weeks after the 7.0 magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti on 12 January, a massive humanitarian operation is underway and aid is beginning to reach those who desperately need it in Port-au-Prince and the surrounding areas. The most urgent priorities remain water, health care, shelter and food.

Thanks to a team of senior experts on the ground, UNEP continues to provide technical assistance and support on environmental matters to the Humanitarian Country Team and to the local government, including through emergency environmental assessments of affected sites and active participation in the humanitarian cluster system.

Field-based rapid assessments since 13 January have identified a number of major environmental issues for the short and medium term, including:

Medical waste: Emergency response operations are currently generating a very significant amount of medical waste, which is piling up in hospitals and medical treatment centers. No systems or equipment are yet in place to dispose of these potentially hazardous materials. UNEP is working with the Haitian Government and WHO to establish an appropriate containment space and handling procedures for this waste in the Port-au-Prince area.

Rubble and demolition material: In the epicenter and highly affected areas, the percentage of destruction or severe damage to buildings and other structures is 60-80%. The volume of demolition waste potentially generated by recovery and reconstruction operations has yet to be technically estimated, but will be in tens of millions of tons. Recycling efforts are already being observed, but debris is also being dumped in large quantities on the roadsides. Unless this issue is managed properly, additional environmental impacts will arise. UNEP is working with number of other partners to develop a Debris Management Strategy for Port-au-Prince and environs.

Secondary spills and hazardous chemicals: Recovery and reconstruction operations will in time work over a large number of badly damaged small industry and storage sites. This implies a risk of oil and chemical spills. The extent and impact of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) from sources like damaged electric transformers also need to be assessed.

Landslides: Multiple small landslides visible on all hillsides in the impacted area. Little movement has been noted so far, mainly due to the coral sand geology and dry conditions. However, many more landslides are anticipated after the first heavy rains.

Geological and flood risks for rebuilt camps: Many damaged accommodation areas will be further degraded by the earthquake as it has destabilized slopes and blocked drainage lines with debris. There is a high potential for building back better and disaster risk reduction through improved hydrology, slope stabilization by revegetation, and geological engineering work.

Environmental impact of massive population displacements: The massive ongoing displacement of population represents an immediate pressure on local resources. It has been reported that over 1,000,000 people have moved to less affected rural and urban areas in the western part of the southern peninsula, central and northern part of the country. In the short term, these population's energy and livelihood needs will create additional pressure on Haiti's already exhausted natural resources.

Green food and cash for work schemes: Several million people have been economically affected by the quake, which has destroyed the Port-au-Prince regional economy for the medium term at least. It is anticipated that the most vulnerable will be assisted with large-scale food and cash for work schemes. Opportunities exist to direct these schemes to sustainable "green" and disaster risk reduction activities such as clean-up, urban catchment rehabilitation and reforestation.

UNEP will continue to support the people of Haiti and the international community throughout the emergency and early recovery phases, through targeted interventions aimed at mitigating further environmental risk, "building back better," and ensuring long-term sustainable recovery.

A Flash Appeal for USD 575 million, covering a period of six months, was launched by the UN and international partners on Friday 15 January. The Appeal includes USD 1 million for environmental interventions during the early recovery phase of operations.

In addition to post-disaster interventions, UNEP will continue to develop the Haiti Regeneration Initiative, a long-term programme to be implemented by a wide range of partners, aimed at reducing poverty and vulnerability to natural hazards through the restoration of ecosystems and sustainable natural resource management. Well planned, concerted action will be required over the next 20 years and beyond to halt the ongoing degradation and to gradually restore the Haitian environment and related livelihoods.

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=608&ArticleID=6454&l=en>

February 7, 2010

Use religious leaders for climate change awareness: Nobel laureate

Indo-Asian News Service

New Delhi - Countries should take help from religious leaders to create mass understanding about global warming and thus help curb it, according to Wangari Maathai, Nobel laureate from Kenya.

“We should solicit the support of religious groups,” Maathai, a 2004 Nobel peace prize winner said late Saturday at the Delhi Sustainable and Development Summit here.

“The religious groups and leaders can play a major role (in persuading people). The approach should be bottom up to tackle the climate threat,” she said.

She said the involvement of religious groups will inculcate a sense of faith among people that “environment is the creation of god and it should be protected”. If people become aware and concerned then the threat can be curbed, she explained.

Maathai said that environment protection is just not an issue of “politics, business and money”, there is “much more than money”. We need to have “value and love for environment”.

Maathai and her grassroots organisation, which became known as the Green Belt movement, have assisted women in planting more than 40 million trees on community lands including farms, schools and church compounds.

The afforestation activist, who considers Mahatma Gandhi as a source of inspiration, said religious leaders “can motivate people for good”.

Delegates from across the world, including ministers from various countries, are currently in New Delhi to deliberate on the issue of climate change after a not-so-successful Copenhagen summit last year.

<http://www.sindhtoday.net/news/1/101969.htm>

February 9, 2010

India's Tribe Appeals Avatar's Cameron to Defend Their Sacred Mountain

News Blaze

Dongria Kondh tribe of Orissa (India), in an advertisement in the prestigious Variety magazine, asked Oscar winner "Avatar" director James Cameron for help in their struggle to defend their sacred mountain.

The ad says: "Appeal to James Cameron...AVATAR is fantasy ...and real. The Dongria Kondh tribe in India is struggling to defend their land against a mining company hell-bent on destroying their sacred mountain. Please help the Dongria. We've watched your film...Now watch ours...

www.survivalinternational.org/mine".

Survival, who put this ad on behalf of the tribe, says that their "story is uncannily similar to that of the Na'vi in Avatar". Survival's ten-minute film "Mine: story of a sacred mountain", narrated by actress Joanna Lumley (Absolutely Fabulous), exposes the Dongria's plight.

Survival's director Stephen Corry says in a release: Just as the Na'vi describes the forest of Pandora as 'their everything', for the Dongria Kondh, life and land have always been deeply connected. The fundamental story of Avatar - if you take away the multi-coloured lemurs, the long-trunked horses and warring androids - is being played out today in the hills of Niyamgiri in Orissa, India. Like the Na'vi of 'Avatar', the Dongria Kondh are also at risk, as their lands are set to be mined by Vedanta Resources who will stop at nothing to achieve their aims. The mine will destroy the forests on which the Dongria Kondh depend and wreck the lives of thousands of other Kondh tribal people living in the area. I do hope that James Cameron will join the Dongria's struggle to save their sacred mountain and secure their future.

Acclaimed Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement in Nevada (USA) today, asked for a thorough investigation by a United Nations body into this issue taking into consideration the concerns of the tribes living in the area, issues raised by environmentalists involved, and claims of the mining company. Zed, who is the president of the Universal Society of Hinduism, added that besides the financial interests of the miner, various other issues were also involved here, like sacredness of the mountain, disturbance of lifestyle and tradition of the tribes, affect on ecosystems- water sources-wildlife-water pollution-displacement-deforestation-endangered species, etc.

Vedanta Resources, headquartered in London (United Kingdom), is a diversified metals and mining group with wide-ranging interests in aluminum, copper, zinc, lead, iron ore and commercial energy, whose principal operations are in India, Zambia and Australia. Anil Agarwal is Executive Chairman. Survival, founded in 1969 and also headquartered in London, is international organization with supporters in 82 countries, working for tribal peoples' rights through education, advocacy and campaigns. "Avatar", nominated for nine Oscars, stars Sam Worthington (Somersault) and Zoe Saldana (Guess Who).

February 13, 2010

India's Holy Ganges to Get a Cleanup

Government Embarks on \$4 Billion Campaign to Treat Heavily Polluted Waters; Devout Hindus Revere River as 'Goddess'

By Krishna Pokharel
India News

VARANASI, India—More than a million devout Hindus bathed in the Ganges River Friday, braving the risk of terrorist attack, stampede and petty crime for the chance to wash away the sins of a lifetime and open the gateway to heaven after death.

But perhaps the greatest threat to the devotees who flocked to Haridwar, India, on one of the most auspicious days of the triennial Kumbh Mela festival, was the water itself.

The river is intensely polluted with sewage and industrial waste. Water-treatment facilities have been unable to keep up with India's rapid growth, often held back by a shortage of funds and other resources.

A dip in the Ganges River in India is believed by devotees to wash away all sins. But increasingly it has become heavily polluted with sewage and industrial waste. Now, a \$4 billion government program aims to clean the river.

Now, the spiritually cleansing waters of the Ganges are about to get some cleaning of their own. The Indian government has embarked on a \$4 billion campaign to ensure that by 2020 no untreated municipal sewage or industrial runoff enters the 1,560-mile river.

Only 31% of municipal sewage in India undergoes treatment, according to the Central Pollution Control Board, a government agency in New Delhi, while the rest gets discharged into the country's rivers, ponds, land and seas, contaminating underground and surface waters. More than 500,000 of the 10.3 million deaths in India in 2004 resulted from waterborne diseases, according to the most recent comprehensive mortality data from the World Health Organization.

The filth in the Ganges holds special resonance for this majority-Hindu nation. The Ganges basin supports more than 400 million of India's 1.1 billion people, the majority of whom are Hindus, who revere the river as "mother" and "goddess."

The cleanup initiative, which is supported by the World Bank, includes the expansion of traditional treatment facilities and, for the first time in India, the introduction of innovative river-cleaning methods.

Veer Bhadra Mishra, a 70-year-old priest and hydraulics engineer in Varanasi, the holy city downstream from Haridwar, has been a prominent advocate of treatment methods used abroad but not yet in India. His plan: to introduce a system to divert sewage and effluents, before they enter the river, to a series of specially designed ponds, for treatment and ultimately to be used in irrigation or directed back into the river.

His efforts were mired in court and by opposition from local bureaucrats. The bureaucrats had a "difference of opinion" with Mr. Mishra about the best way to clean the river, says Ramesh Singh, general manager of Ganga Pollution Control Unit, the local government body charged with running government treatment facilities in Varanasi.

Mr. Singh says the technologies already in use were time-tested and reliable, but suffered from a lack of trained manpower and proper infrastructure, and a shortage of funds for equipment maintenance.

Last summer, after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh identified cleaning up the river as a national priority, the government in New Delhi increased funding to operate and maintain conventional treatment facilities, and also approved Mr. Mishra's plan—giving \$184,000 to his organization, the Sankat Mochan Foundation, for the design of a new sewage treatment plant.

The foundation is working with GO2 Water Inc., a Berkeley, Calif., wastewater-technology company. In the plan, 10.5 million gallons of sewage a day—13% of the daily output from Varanasi's 1.5 million people—will be intercepted daily at the riverbank, and diverted. In a nearby village, water will pass through a series of ponds, where sunlight, gravity, bacteria and microalgae will clean the water. A larger pond system is planned, to process 33% more of the city's sewage.

Devout Hindus come from all over to cleanse themselves in the Ganges for the festival of Kumbh Mela, celebrated every three years. The government has started a massive campaign to clean up the polluted river itself.

The treatment system "will be the best solution for dealing with huge amount of domestic sewage being discharged into Gangaji and other rivers in India," Mr. Mishra said, using the honorific "ji" with the river's local name, Ganga.

In Haridwar, the National Botanical Research Institute is developing a wetland with local species of reeds to absorb the polluting elements from the wastewater, according to U.N. Rai, a scientist heading the project. Other wetlands will be developed in other areas "to ease the current pollution load in the river," Mr. Rai says.

The load is heavy. On a recent winter morning in Varanasi, lab technician Gopal Pandey descended the stone stairs of Tulsi Ghat, one of the holy city's 84 bathing platforms, to fetch some Ganges water for testing at the Sankat Mochan Foundation, an organization run by Mr. Mishra.

In the laboratory, Mr. Pandey found that each 100 milliliters of the river's waters were laden with 29,000 fecal coliform bacteria, which potentially cause disease. India says a maximum of 500 per 100 milliliters is safe for bathing in the river. Another sample from downstream, after the Ganges meets a tributary carrying a black mass of thick industrial effluents, showed 10 million bacteria—mostly E-coli—in the same amount of river water. Mr. Pandey's verdict: "The pollution is at very, very dangerous level."

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<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704878904575031333129327818.html>

February 16, 2010

British Bishops Urge 'Carbon Fast' for Lent

British bishops urge Christians to go on environmentally friendly 'carbon fast' for Lent
The Associated Press

Several prominent Anglican British bishops are urging Christians to keep their carbon consumption in check this Lent.

The 40-day period of penitence before Easter typically sees observant Catholics, Anglicans, and Orthodox Christians give up meat, alcohol or chocolates.

But this year's initiative aims to convince those observing Lent to try a day without an iPod or mobile phone in a bid to reduce the use of electricity — and thus trim the amount of carbon dioxide spewed into the atmosphere.

Bishop of London Rev. Richard Chartres said that the poorest people in developing countries were the hardest hit by man-made climate change.

He said Tuesday that the "Carbon Fast" was "an opportunity to demonstrate the love of God in a practical way."

<http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory?id=9851650>

February 17, 2010

Rwanda Named Global Host of World Environment Day 2010

United Nations Environment Programme

Kigali (Rwanda)/Nairobi (Kenya) - Rwanda, the East African country that is embracing a transition to a Green Economy, will be the global host of World Environment Day 2010, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) announced today.

World Environment Day (WED), which aims to be the biggest global celebration for positive environmental action, is coordinated by UNEP every year on 5 June.

This year's theme is 'Many Species. One Planet. One Future.' - a message focusing on the central importance to humanity of the globe's wealth of species and ecosystems. The WED theme also supports this year's UN International Year of Biodiversity.

Rwanda's combination of environmental richness, including rare and economically-important species such as the mountain gorilla, allied to newly evolving and pioneering green policies is among the reasons why UNEP welcomed its offer to be the global 2010 host.

While the country faces many challenges ranging from overcoming poverty and developing sustainable energy resources to land degradation, this 'land of a thousand hills' is developing forward-looking strategies including the development of renewable energies such as solar power and biogas generation.

It is already internationally-renowned for introducing a ban on plastic bags, nationwide environmental clean-up campaigns and the development of a conservation corridor for chimpanzees.

Paul Kagame, the President of the Republic of Rwanda, said: "The environment, from the country's biological diversity to developing modern and sustainable businesses, is at the heart of our vision for the future of Rwanda. We are honoured to host World Environment Day on behalf of both the African and the whole international community, and we look forward to organizing a truly global celebration of the diversity of life on our planet."

Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director and UN Under-Secretary-General, said: "WED has become a dynamic and global grass roots expression of humanity's desire to realize meaningful and positive environmental change. And Rwanda is an African nation that, despite big challenges, is seizing the multiple opportunities possible from Green Economic policies."

"The pairing of Rwanda with WED in 2010 is thus a compelling and inspiring alliance-underlining that all economies, rich and poor and North and South have real and tangible

opportunities to shape a more sustainable development path: One that develops new business models based on intelligent management of the natural world and high tech clean and renewable businesses," he added.

WED is a day for everyone on the planet to get involved and go green - from schoolchildren to presidents and from community groups to multinationals.

Rwanda's capital Kigali will be the venue for this global celebration of the environment, with a myriad of activities over several days to inspire Rwandans, East Africans and people around the world to take action for the environment.

The celebrations in Kigali will be just one of thousands of events taking place around the globe on 5 June. UNEP plans to make WED 2010 into a bigger celebration than ever before, building on the unprecedented success of WED 2009 - when people in more than 80 countries registered activities on the WED website, hundreds of people posted *Daily Do Something Tips* and more than 10,000 people joined the 'twitter for trees' campaign, among other achievements.

Under the rallying cry of 'Many Species, One Planet, One Future', WED 2010 will aim to mobilize more people than ever for the environment on 5 June, with a huge variety of activities ranging from school tree-planting drives to community clean-ups, car-free days, photo competitions on biodiversity, bird-watching trips, city park clean-up initiatives, exhibits, green petitions, nationwide green campaigns and much more.

The WED 2010 website will inspire, inform and involve people through unprecedented interactivity, offering daily tips, information and statistics on biodiversity, a platform where people around the world can register their activities, social networking campaigns and competitions to get people on every continent involved. Anyone can organize an event and register it on the WED website - the most important thing is to give a helping hand to the amazing variety of life on our planet.

Notes to Editors:

About WED 2010

A total of 17,291 species are known to be threatened with extinction - from obscure plants and insects to well-known birds and mammals. This is just the tip of the iceberg; many species disappear before they are even discovered.

The reason? Human activities. With our present approach to development, we have caused the clearing of much of the original forest, drained half of the world's wetlands, depleted three quarters of all fish stocks, and emitted enough heat-trapping gases to keep our planet warming

for centuries to come. We have put our foot on the accelerator, making species extinctions occur at up to 1,000 times the natural rate.

As a result, we are increasingly risking the loss of the very foundation of our own survival. The variety of life on our planet - known as 'biodiversity' - gives us our food, clothes, fuel, medicine and much, much more. You may not think that a beetle in your backyard or grass growing by the roadside has a fundamental connection to you - but it does. When even one species is taken out of the intricate web of life, the results can be catastrophic.

At the same time, humans have the power to stem the tide of extinction. Through concerted conservation action, we have brought some species back from the brink, and have restored some vital natural habitats around the world. But we need to do much more, and much faster, to win the race against extinction.

For this reason, the United Nations has declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity. It is an opportunity to stress the importance of biodiversity for human well-being, reflect on our achievements to safeguard it and encourage a redoubling of our efforts to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss.

The theme of WED 2010 (World Environment Day) is 'Many Species. One Planet. One Future.' It echoes the urgent call to conserve the diversity of life on our planet. A world without biodiversity is a very bleak prospect. Millions of people and millions of species all share the same planet, and only together can we enjoy a safer and more prosperous future.

As we celebrate WED, let us consider carefully the actions each of us must take, and then address ourselves to our common task of preserving all life on Earth.

Through WED, we can employ our individual and collective power to stem the tide of extinction. Our conservation action has brought some species back from the brink, and has restored some vital natural habitats around the world. On WED, let us resolve to do much more, and much faster, to win the race against extinction!

For more information on the International Year of Biodiversity, visit:

<http://www.unep.org/iyb/>

Details about WED campaigns and special initiatives will be announced at www.unep.org/WED in the run-up to 5 June.

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=612&ArticleID=6464&l=en>

February 18, 2010

Religion rejuvenates environmentalism

By Courtney Woo
The Miami Herald

Evangelical pastor Ken Wilson's environmental conversion began a few years ago with goose bumps, watery eyes and an appeal for help.

"I heard Gus Speth, the dean of forestry at Yale, say to a group of religious leaders, 'I used to think the top environmental problems facing the world were global warming, environmental degradation and eco-system collapse, and that we scientists could fix those problems with enough science,' " Wilson recalls. "But I was wrong. The real problem is not those three items, but greed, selfishness and apathy. And for that we need a spiritual and cultural transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that. We need your help."

Back home, Wilson thought more about passages in the Bible containing messages of stewardship for the Earth. He began preaching about a Christian duty to protect the environment, or "creation care," at the Vineyard Church of Ann Arbor, Mich., where he is senior pastor.

"It was like I was popping a cork," Wilson says. "People came up to me in the lobby after the lectures actually with tears in their eyes, saying thank you for speaking to this issue."

Wilson was surprised to see that many of those people were new to the church.

"There was a Ph.D. in evolutionary biology who came to the church for the very first time for the creation care series, and he said to me, 'Here's a church that is finally talking about science in a positive way and actually cares for the environment.' "

While only 21 percent of Americans report being active in the environmental movement, a 2008 survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that nearly 90 percent of Americans described themselves as religious.

"Simply based on the numbers, the faith community could be critically important to the environmental dialogue," says Jerry Lawson, national manager of the Environmental Protection

Agency's Energy Star Small Business and Congregations Network, a division of EPA that helps congregations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Energy Star estimates that if each of the more than 300,000 houses of worship in the United States cut energy consumption by 10 percent, congregations would save \$200 million and would eliminate greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to 400,000 cars.

Because of their large numbers, American evangelicals could be a critical component of the burgeoning eco-religious movement. About 59 million Americans identify as evangelical Protestants, according to the 2008 Pew study.

Evangelical attitudes toward environmentalism are complex. As early as 1970, the National Association of Evangelicals equated preservation of natural resources and ecological balance with preservation of God's creation.

But around that time, evangelicals began to clash ideologically with scientists and leaders of the early environmental movement over issues of population control and evolution, Wilson says. Environmentalists advocated abortion as a solution to population control, while evangelicals opposed abortion. Meanwhile, political conservatism began to dominate evangelical thought and environmentalists became associated with liberalism.

Executive Pastor Don Bromley of the Vineyard Church of Ann Arbor counts himself a former skeptic of the environmental movement.

"I used to believe stereotypes that environmentalists didn't care about human beings as much as they did the natural world," Bromley says. "They were anti-progress."

Today, those divisions still hold.

The evangelical-oriented Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation questions the science of catastrophic climate change.

(Mainstream scientists have concluded that the evidence of warming is unequivocal.) The Alliance argues that mandated reductions of greenhouse gas emissions will cause more harm than good because raising energy prices and cutting consumption will retard the economic development of poor regions plagued by disease, premature death and short life expectancies.

Still, signs of conversion are emerging.

Tri Robinson, 61, is senior pastor of the Vineyard Boise church. Five years ago, he revisited the Bible when his two adult children questioned the absence of environmental messages in the church. Robinson says he, like Wilson, suddenly saw environmental messages everywhere.

"I realized that issues of the environment were killing the poor and were stimulating things like human trafficking," Robinson recalls. "I'd tapped a whole new world I'd never seen before."

Also like Wilson, Robinson preached this message to his congregation. Instead of getting "tarred and feathered," as he'd feared, he received a standing ovation - his first in 25 years.

"It was like he was filling a gap," says parishioner Jessie Nilo, who heard Robinson speak that day. "It strengthened my relationship with God, connecting me to his creation in a new way. It's very freeing to be able to embrace another part of who God is."

Robinson represents a growing number of Christian leaders who, in recent years, are engaging in dialogue at a national level through conferences and interfaith coalitions.

In 2006, 86 evangelical leaders, including Robinson and Wilson, signed the Evangelical Climate Initiative; two years later, 46 Southern Baptist leaders signed a declaration for action on climate change. The Southern Baptist Convention is the country's largest Protestant denomination, with more than 16 million members and 42,000 churches.

Religious leaders from other traditions are also witnessing transformations of attitude among their membership.

"When I first started talking about environmental issues 13 years ago, there were folks who got up and walked out," says the Rev. Sally Bingham, an Episcopal and founder of Interfaith Power and Light, a national interfaith organization promoting energy efficiency and conservation. "Today, these messages are bringing people into the church."

Membership in Interfaith Power and Light has exploded.

The organization has grown from 100 congregations in 2000 to more than 10,000 congregations in 29 states in 2008.

"We go to mosques, churches and synagogues, and we talk about the connections between faith and the environment and why it's important to be good stewards of the earth," says Allison Fisher, the program director for the greater Washington division of Interfaith Power and Light. "Faith gives congregations a vision that this work is possible."

But with more than 300,000 houses of faith in the country, advocates are now trying to preach a little bit louder - and perhaps a little more strategically. To resonate with Christian churchgoers, for example, Christian leaders have developed language that frames environmental messages in a biblical context.

"As soon as I say, 'warming' or 'global warming,' people in the audience begin to eye me with suspicion," Bromley says. The term "creation care," on the other hand, is less politically loaded because it connects care for the environment to scripture.

Nevertheless, polls indicate that the message is not getting out to Christians at large. A 2008 Barna poll found that 85 percent of U.S. Christian church attendees had not heard of "creation care," and 64 percent of active attendees claimed they'd never heard a sermon on the topic.

Cultural and ideological divides remain a challenge to promoting collaboration between the Christian and secular worlds.

"American society has been in a 30-year culture war. Some groups believe the Earth was created 10,000 years ago, the others, 4.5 billion. We can't move forward as a society unless we bridge that divide," Wilson says. "Getting people of faith concerned about environment is a big part of that."

Robinson is attempting to bridge the gap with his personal blog, Timber Butte Homestead, which he launched in late 2008 to chronicle his family's experiences living and working on an environmentally friendly ranch.

Robinson writes about baling hay, building a chicken coop and using a solar water system. With few references to God and faith, he hopes to attract readers outside the church.

"If you're truly an evangelical Christian, you care about the un-churched," Robinson says. "The environment has given me a voice outside of the church." He says his site receives more than 4,000 visits a week.

Robinson also blogs about religion and the environment for the Huffington Post, a liberal-leaning news Web site that he says he previously did not read, because, he says lightheartedly, "I'm a Christian."

But there are pastors and churchgoers who remain skeptical.

In 2007, 25 conservative leaders requested the resignation of evangelical lobbyist Richard Cizik for promoting creation care.

"I get lots of e-mails from pastors and church leaders who wonder how I could be duped into the climate change lies," Bromley says. "And I get an e-mail a week or every two weeks questioning why we're even talking about global warming on our Web site."

Some leaders worry they'll lose members if they speak out.

"I've had pastors from conservative states tell me that if they talk about these things, people will walk out of the church," Bromley says.

But environmental messages could also attract new members.

Sixteen-year-old Lillie Slaughter joined St. William's Catholic Church in Louisville, Ky., in June. Although she was raised Catholic and attends a Catholic high school, this soft-spoken teenager has only recently begun attending Mass again.

"I come here because my Environmental Concerns teacher goes here," Slaughter says. "My parents don't come with us. My sister and I come on our own."

Some religious leaders are hopeful the environmental movement might change the demographics of religious institutions, bringing in young people who care about the environment.

"As the faith community becomes engaged in environmental issues, it will change the church," Wilson says. "It will change the people we're able to reach, it will change the mix of the church, and it will change the feel of the church."

According to a 2007 Pew survey and a 2009 Trinity College report, Protestant and Catholic populations are growing smaller and older.

But in churches with environmental programs, "I'm gradually beginning to see these older folk being replaced with young families who are interested in environmental stewardship," Bingham says.

Bromley observes similar views among young evangelical pastors.

"I don't meet pastors my age that have those super skeptical views," says Bromley, who is in his mid-30s. "Now almost every person under 35 is talking about the environment and global warming. I didn't see that 10 years ago."

As environmentalism changes faith, faith is also changing the environmental movement.

In 2006, the Center for Health and Global Environment at Harvard Medical School and the National Association of Evangelicals held a first-of-its-kind retreat to unite 28 faith leaders and scientists on issues of climate change and global warming. Participants wrote and signed a call to action, which they presented to President George W. Bush, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, congressional leaders, and national scientific and evangelical organizations in 2007.

Wilson was at the meeting, where he got to know environmental scientist Carl Safina. Wilson and Safina became friends and launched The Friendship Collaborative, a program for scientists and religious leaders that mimics the retreat.

"The world doesn't listen to just scientists," Safina says. "Although science tells us the facts, the solutions are moral solutions. And people don't look to science for morality. They look to religion."

The secular Sierra Club, an environmental organization, recently invested in religious partnerships.

With 40 percent of the club's members attending a house of worship, "it was actually an in-reach rather than an outreach," says Lyndsay Moseley, former representative of the Sierra Club's Faith Partnerships program, which began in 2005.

"We were missing an opportunity to connect with our religious members and provide them with resources to bring to their mosques, churches and synagogues," Moseley says. "The impact, we hope, is a broadened base of support for environmental change."

Moseley sees that base growing.

"Five years ago, the Sierra Club could not have identified a religious environmental initiative in each state," she says. But when she researched initiatives for the Sierra Club's first national report on faith communities in 2008, Moseley says it was hard to pick just one.

Funders appear to be noticing. Richard Fireman, the public policy coordinator for North Carolina Interfaith Power and Light, says his organization received grants from private funders to protest Duke Energy's proposed Cliffside power plant near Charlotte, N.C., and to work on the North Carolina Saves Energy campaign.

"That was the first time we'd received money to do on-the-ground public policy work," says Fireman. "The context in which we operate has changed and now there's real opportunity."

"Political and economic cycles go up and down, but faith is persistent and consistent in our lives" says Rizwan Jaka, board member of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society Center in Sterling, Va.

"What we all do in our homes is critical because that's thousands of homes per congregation," he says. "You can make a huge difference if all those people use a few hours less of electricity each day."

Jaka hopes that members of the mosque will spread messages of conservation and stewardship to Muslims and people of other faiths.

"It's kind of like a domino effect of healing the Earth," he says.

When and how this healing will play out is less clear.

"This issue is going to get worse before it gets better," Wilson says, referring to climate change. "We're taking a long-term view. We need to mobilize people now, but we'll need action even more 20 to 30 years from now."

Fireman says that personal sacrifice alone, even in massive numbers, will not reduce energy consumption significantly. He believes the crisis can only be solved through pastoral education, public policy, and structural and institutional change.

"The missing link is the local church," Robinson says. His goal, like Wilson's, is to create a model that local churches can follow and to show them that with a focus on creation care, they can flourish.

"I don't know if we'll do it," Wilson says. "All I can say is that we'd better, and we don't have much time."

(Woo, who has a master's degree in social marketing and public relations, reported this story as a Carnegie-Knight News21 fellow from the University of North Carolina.)

February 18, 2010

Saving the planet mixes well with religion, Yale scholar says

By Sara Israelsen-Hartley
Deseret News

PROVO — The Jordan River may be sacred to millions of Christians and Jews, but that sacredness hasn't kept it from becoming a polluted waterway.

"What does it mean to have these places ... so undermined by our human activity that they've lost their real vital value?" asked John Grim, senior lecturer and scholar at Yale and coordinator of the Forum on Religion and Ecology. "Yet the symbolic value, we claim it daily without a second thought, 'The River Jordan, it means something in my tradition.' But the reality is sad, bad news."

Grim, who teaches students from the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies as well as the Yale Divinity School and department of religious studies, spoke to BYU students in a recent lecture about the emerging alliance of religion and ecology and how scientists and scholars are turning to religion for help protecting and preserving the planet.

"We have a number of laws with regard to environmental issues," Grim said. "But why have we not, as a nation or people, been able to make the turn to see past some of the constraints that hold us? We need larger and deeper motivations, a clearer understanding of these issues to make this turn."

And that's where religion comes in.

"Religions are ancient transmitters of values questions," he said. "Religions have been at ethical issues for so long."

And religious people already believe in the importance of altruism and compassion, community building, social justice with equal distribution of resources, asceticism and restraint, and long-term perspective, Grim said — all values that coincide with environmental protection.

Jason Brown is working on master's degrees from Yale in the joint forestry/divinity school program, and he said he easily applied Grim's ideas of reconstructing old concepts, retrieving old or neglected ideas and re-evaluating those ideas to his beliefs as a Latter-day Saint.

Rather than focus on dominion, Latter-day Saints should reconstruct the term to mean a compassionate relationship with the earth, like God's loving relationship with man, said Brown, a BYU graduate.

And retrieving the Mormon tenet of vitality of the earth would help church members see the earth as a living creature, rather than just a resource to have stewardship over.

"The notion that plants and animals have spirits, that they have a vital presence, seems to imply a different kind of ethical relationship than simply relating to the earth as a material blessing that is to be used with judgment," Brown said.

As far as re-evaluating, Brown wanted members of the church to change the way they view the earth, and to see it as sacred and important, more than just a collection of trees or plants.

"It's significant to me that Joseph Smith received a vision in a grove of trees, which to us is a Sacred Grove," Brown said. "As Mormons, we strive to live the restored gospel, and for me that includes a spiritual and vital planet," Brown said.

To view the entire lecture visit: www.kennedy.byu.edu/archive/

For more information visit: fore.research.yale.edu/

<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700010469/Saving-the-planet-mixes-well-with-religion-Yale-scholar-says.html>

February 19, 2010

The Pope vs. climate change deniers

By John Gehring
The Washington Post

The recent blizzard of bunk coming from climate change deniers giddy over the recent Snowmageddon that paralyzed the nation's capital is a classic case of putting ideology and politics before science. While the overwhelming body of evidence from experts points to human

causes exacerbating climate change - this means extreme weather and more intense storms not only rising temperatures - some politicians can barely contain their joy at the recent deep freeze.

Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.) built a six-foot-tall igloo on Capitol Hill with a cardboard sign on top that read "Al Gore's New Home." Former House speaker Newt Gingrich (R) offered this awkward taunt on Twitter: "where is al gore to explain it snows this heavily as a sign global warming is imminent." The Washington Times crowed in a bizarre **editorial** that "record snowfall illustrates the obvious: the global warming fraud is without equal in modern science."

While some lawmakers and ideologues blithely challenge the world's leading scientists, along with a **growing number of military leaders** concerned about this issue as a global security risk, they also part company with the Catholic Church and Pope Benedict XVI. The **Green Pope**, as some have called Benedict, has frequently addressed climate change and care for the environment as profound moral issues. The pope has touted solar energy, the benefits of local agriculture, sustainable development and the perils of hyper-consumerism. He has spoken boldly about the shameful reality of "environmental refugees" and recognizes the link between war and ecological exploitation. The Vatican has even taken steps to become the world's first "carbon-neutral state."

In his **latest encyclical**, Pope Benedict calls for a "model of development based on the centrality of the human person, on the promotion and sharing of the common good, on responsibility, on a realization of our need for a changed life-style, and on prudence, the virtue which tells us what needs to be done today in view of what might happen tomorrow." This type of farsighted thinking and simple common sense would be helpful on Capitol Hill. You might think that conservatives, as much as anyone, would be interested in well, conservation, and prudent stewardship of natural resources. But it seems wink-and-nod slogans like "Drill, Baby, Drill" are easier to come up with than finding real solutions to a crisis. Fortunately, people of faith are showing the kind of leadership and clear-eyed vision that many of our esteemed public officials lack.

As Christians around the world begin the observance of Lent, many people of faith are using these 40 days of fasting and prayer to conserve energy, eat less meat, take public transportation instead of driving and spreading the message that environmental justice is a core principle of faith. Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good has launched a social media Facebook campaign: **Go Green for Lent: Faith, Stewardship and the Common Good**. Bishop Jaime Soto of Sacramento is **challenging the area's 900,000 Catholics** to join him in cutting back on using their computers, iPods and cell phones. Several prominent Anglican British bishops are also calling for a "**carbon fast**" by urging Christians to keep their carbon consumption in check this Lent. The Archdiocese of Washington has also developed a **calendar** listing 40 ideas for carbon fasting.

For Catholics, caring for creation and being prudent stewards of our rivers, mountains and forests is not a trendy cause. It's a Biblical mandate, and a necessity to promote the sacred dignity of life. The Catholic Church has been in the forefront of these efforts long before rock stars and Hollywood celebrities made it cool to be "green." In particular, faith communities have a unique role to address the ways the **poor and vulnerable** around the world are most impacted by

climate change. International agencies estimate that there will be more than 200 million environmental refugees by 2050 as a direct result of rising sea levels, erosion and agricultural damage.

While the fate of climate change legislation in the Senate remains unknown, the faith community is not going away on this issue. We know the stakes are too high for politics as usual. Perhaps our elected officials can stop building snowmen, get off Twitter and starting leading.

John Gehring is director of communications for [Catholics in Alliance for the Common](#)

http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2010/02/the_pope_vs_climate_change_deniers.html

February 20, 2010

DC Green Muslims and local groups partner to protect the environment

By M. Scott Bortot
Arab News

WASHINGTON : A recent series of record-breaking snowfalls in Washington, DC, has sparked debate among global warming pundits -- both its supporters and detractors -- as to the extent of humanity's impact on the environment.

While the pundits debate, eco-conscious DC-area Muslims are promoting a message of environmental stewardship to both Muslims and non-Muslims in their community.

As it turns out, a strong connection exists between Islam and protecting the Earth.

DC Green Muslims was born in October 2007 when a group of friends gathered for a vegetarian, eco-friendly iftar. In the following months, the group held more eco-friendly meals attracting up to 150-people. Today, the group, which has a blog at <http://dcgreenmuslims.blogspot.com/>, is an active member of Washington's environmental awareness community.

But what is a green Muslim?

"A 'green Muslim' is someone who realizes that being aware of their impact on the Earth is something that is not a foreign concept to Islam but knows that it is rooted in Islam," Ryan Strom, an organizer with DC Green Muslims told America.gov.

Strom said his loosely affiliated organization partners actively with other like-minded DC area groups dedicated to environmental preservation. DC Green Muslims has worked with

Washington Parks and People to revitalize neglected parks and participated with Greater Washington Interfaith Power and Light (GW IPL) on a number of environmental programs.

"DC Green Muslims participated in a GW IPL dinner based on urban planning and how you interact with your neighborhood, how neighborhoods and cities are built and how they can impact your happiness," Strom said.

In October 2009, DC Green Muslims participated in 'No Impact Week' hosted by online news blog The Huffington Post. Group members discussed some of their 'No Impact Week' efforts on the DC Green Muslims blog.

In step with its community activities, DC Green Muslims also plans to work with DC-area mosques to further educate Muslims about Islam's connection with environmental issues.

"We are hoping to hold environmental workshops for people who give khutbas in mosques," Strom said. "We are trying to outreach to community leaders at mosques in and around Washington, DC, to get them to incorporate environmental stewardship from an Islamic perspective."

Several DC Green Muslims made their case to America.gov.

For green Muslims, environmental consciousness in Islam is rooted strongly in both the Qur'an and the hadith (tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him). Among the Qur'anic concepts that supports environmental protection is that of khalifa, or stewardship and amana, or trust.

Environmentally aware Muslims cite a Qur'anic verse that says amana was offered to the heavens, the earth and to the mountains. However, they refused to accept such a burden and it was transferred to humankind.

They propose that in this situation, humanity becomes a fulcrum for the earth. If humanity is centered and whole, the earth is balanced. But if humanity is not balanced -- by harming the environment and not promoting social justice -- corruption will spread on earth.

Concepts that support environmental awareness are also found in the prophetic tradition, say green Muslims. The Prophet spent part of his youth closely connected to nature as a shepherd. And a saying attributed to him indicates the entire earth can serve as a mosque.

They believe that if the earth can serve as a mosque, this supports a strong argument against polluting its land and its water -- used by believers in ritual ablutions.

However, a desire to protect and preserve their environment is not new among Muslim Americans.

In the late 1960s, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, currently a professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University, wrote *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*. In his

groundbreaking work, Nasr explored the consequences of the environmental crisis and called for a restoration of balance between humanity and nature.

In September 2007, Muslim American Society's (MAS) Ibrahim Ramey joined thousands of people in the "Climate Emergency Fast" to bring awareness to the global environmental crisis. On his blog, entitled "Ibrahim Abdil-Mu'id Ramey Voice of Reason," Ramey encouraged Muslims to fast just days before Ramadan.

"I believe that this additional act of fasting is necessary because, as Muslims, we are called to pray for the well-being of all mankind, and if we pray for humanity, fasting is indeed our most powerful and sincere form of prayer," wrote Ramey, director of the MAS' Freedom Foundation Human Rights and Civil Rights Division in Washington, DC. "Believe me when I say that the earth itself is in crisis. Real crisis. And this crisis threatens the delicate balance of nature that sustains all life on the planet."

Whether Washington, DC, based Muslim Americans are defending the earth through prayer and fasting, authoring pioneering environmental awareness books or beautifying local parks, a common thread binds them all.

"At the core our religion tells us that God has given us such a great natural resource and it is our job to protect and maintain it," Strom of DC Green Muslims said.

<http://arabnews.com/world/article20017.ece>

February 23, 2010

More Ambition Needed if Greenhouse Gases are to Peak in Time, Says New UNEP Report

Pledges Post Copenhagen Unlikely to Keep Temperatures Below 2 Degrees Celsius by Mid Century

UNEP Year Book Also Launched Today Outlines Growing Governance Challenge from Climate to Chemicals

United Nations Environment Programme

Bali (Indonesia) - Countries will have to be far more ambitious in cutting greenhouse gas emissions if the world is to effectively curb a rise in global temperature at 2 degrees C or less.

This is the conclusion of a new greenhouse gas modeling study, based on the estimates of researchers at nine leading centres, compiled by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

The experts (see notes to editors) suggest that annual global greenhouse gas emissions should not be larger than 40 to 48.3 Gigatonnes (Gt) of equivalent CO₂ in 2020 and should peak sometime between 2015 and 2021.

They also estimate that between 2020 and 2050, global emissions need to fall by between 48 per cent and 72 per cent, indicating that an ambition to cut greenhouse gases by around three per cent a year over that 30 year period is also needed.

Such a path offers a 'medium' likelihood or at least a 50/50 chance of keeping a global temperature rise at below 2 degrees C, says the new report.

The new study, launched on the eve of UNEP's Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum taking place in Bali, Indonesia, has analyzed the pledges of 60 developed and developing economies.

They have been recently submitted to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) following the UN climate convention meeting in Copenhagen in December.

The nine modeling centres have now estimated how far these pledges go towards meeting a reasonable 'peak' in emissions depending on whether the high or the low intentions are met.

"The expected emissions for 2020 range between 48.8 to 51.2 GT of CO₂ equivalent based on whether high or low pledges will be fulfilled," says the report.

The report, as noted earlier, says that in order to meet the 2 degree C aim in 2050, emissions in 2020 need to be between 40 Gt and 48.3 Gt.

Thus even with the best intentions there is a gap of between 0.5 and 8.8Gt of CO₂ equivalent per year, amounting to an average shortfall in emission cuts of 4.7 Gt.

If the low end of the emission reduction pledges are fulfilled, the gap is even bigger-2.9 Gt to 11.2 Gt of CO₂ equivalent per year, with an average gap of 7.1 Gt says the report *How Close Are We to the Two Degree Limit?*

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, said: "There are clearly a great deal of assumptions underlying these figures, but they do provide an indication of where countries are and perhaps more importantly where they need to aim."

"There clearly is 'Gigatonne gap' which may be a significant one according some of the modelers. This needs to be bridged and bridged quickly if the international community is to pro-actively manage emissions down in a way that makes economic sense," he added.

"There are multiple reasons for countries to make a transition to a low carbon, resource efficient Green Economy of which climate change is a key one. But energy security, cuts in air pollution and diversifying energy sources are also important drivers," said Mr Steiner.

"This week at the UNEP GC/GMEF we will also shine a light on the opportunities ranging from accelerating clean tech and renewable energy enterprises to the climate, social and economic benefits of investing in terrestrial and marine ecosystems," he added.

Some of those multiple opportunities for action are showcased in the UNEP Year Book 2010 which is being presented to ministers responsible for the environment who are attending the meeting.

These include Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) which gained political support at the Copenhagen climate change meeting.

REDD, which involves supporting developing countries to conserve rather than clear tropical forests, could make an important contribution not only to combating climate change but also to overcoming poverty and to a successful UN International Year of Biodiversity.

. The Year Book estimates that investing \$22 billion to \$29 billion in REDD could cut global deforestation by 25 per cent by 2015.

It also highlights a new and promising REDD project in Brazil, at the Juma Sustainable Development Reserve in Amazonas.

. Here each family receives US\$28 a month if the forest remains uncut, one potential way of tipping the economic balance in favour of conservation versus continued deforestation.

Renewables are also gaining momentum: although still very low compared to the huge potential of renewable energy, the global installed wind generation capacity has grown at the rate of 25 per cent per year over the past five years.

. In China, for example installed capacity has nearly doubled every year since the end of 2004 - and the report notes that the wind energy potential under perfect conditions has been estimated at up to 72,000 GW, nearly five times total energy demand. Probably 20 per cent of this energy potential could be captured in the future, representing almost 15 000 GW.

Managing a response to climate change also echoes the challenge of International Environment Governance, a key theme at this week's GC/GMEF.

Governance also underpins the international response to other challenges highlighted in the UNEP Year Book 2010.

Harmful substances

Among the chemicals now causing the greatest concern worldwide are endocrine disrupters, which interfere with hormone systems and are linked to serious effects on reproductive health.

A growing number of scientists are concerned that spikes in cancer, reproductive abnormalities, infertility, and behavioural disorders are the result of exposure to these chemicals during the development of fetuses and children.

The Year Book also looks at the nitrogen cycle, which has been identified as one of three key areas where 'planetary boundaries' have been crossed.

Most of the world's biodiversity hotspots receive nitrogen from air and water at levels known to alter ecosystems, and nitrogen is creating dead zones in coastal waters-areas where big drops in oxygen levels can occur.

Global nitrogen use in agriculture is projected to double to some 220 million tonnes a year by 2050 if present trends continue.

Reducing the world's nitrogen use will require a profound transformation of agricultural practices. But this may be essential to keep ecosystems from becoming so saturated with nitrogen that they become terrestrial equivalents of the oceans dead zones.

Ecosystem management

2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. Changes in biodiversity due to human activities have been more rapid in the past 50 years than at any other time in human history.

. The latest IUCN Red List, 17,291 species out of 47,677 assessed are under threat: 21 per cent of all known mammals, 30 per cent of all known amphibians, 12 per cent of all known birds, 28 per cent of reptiles, 37 per cent of freshwater fishes, 70 per cent of plants, and 35 per cent of invertebrates.

The report emphasizes that ecosystem management, of which biodiversity is the building block, has an important role to play in mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Managing ecosystems for resilience, and protecting biodiversity to support this resilience, is critical both to meet development objectives and to address the challenges of climate change.

Disasters and conflict

In 2009, progress was made towards understanding how climate change, environmental degradation, and mismanagement of natural resources increase vulnerability to both disasters and conflicts, also within the context of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

Equally how sustainable natural resource management may reduce vulnerability to disasters and conflict while supporting peacebuilding.

. Forty per cent of intra-state armed conflicts have been shown to be directly linked to competition over natural resources.

Disasters and conflicts are linked to the environment in two important ways. First, environmental degradation often results in the loss of natural defences and environmental services, increasing communities' vulnerability to environmental hazards and weakening their resilience.

Second, climate change is expected to exacerbate environmental degradation and increase disaster risks as storms, floods, and droughts become more frequent and more intense.

The year 2010 will see further work and research into this area, including new guidance on natural resource management, peacebuilding and ways to minimize conflict risks from natural resources while maximizing opportunities from economic development and livelihoods.

Notes to Editors

How Close Are We to the Two Degree Limit?-An information note to the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum. www.unep.org

This paper was prepared by the Chief Scientist of UNEP with input from representatives of the following groups: The Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (D. van Vuuren and M. den Elzen), Ecofys (N. Höhne), Potsdam Institute of Climate Impact Research, Germany (M. Meinshausen and J. Rogeli), Climate Analytics (M. Schaeffer), UNEP Risø Centre on Energy, Climate and Sustainable Development, Risø National Laboratory for Sustainable Energy, Technical University of Denmark (Jorgen Fenhann and John Christensen), National Center for Atmospheric Research, United States (B. O'Neill), International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (K. Riahi), Met Office Hadley Center, United Kingdom (J. Lowe), Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics, United Kingdom (C. Taylor, A. Bowen, N. Ranger.)

The UNEP Year Book 2010 is available online at www.unep.org/yearbook/2010

To order the Year Book 2010, visit www.earthprint.com/

For more information on the 11th Special Session of the UNEP GC/GMEF, visit: www.unep.org/gc/gcss-xi/

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=612&ArticleID=6472&l=en&t=long>

February 23, 2010

Changing lives through sustainability

2009-10 Sasakawa Prize winners bring light and heat to communities in Latin America, Africa and India

United Nations Environment Programme

Bali (Indonesia) - Two projects bringing green stoves and clean lighting to remote communities in Latin America, East Africa and India are the laureates of the 2009-10 UNEP Sasakawa Prize, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) announced today.

This year's winners are Nuru Design, a company bringing rechargeable lights to villages in Rwanda, Kenya and India; and Trees, Water and People (TWP), an organization that collaborates with local NGOs to distribute fuel-efficient cook stoves to communities in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Haiti.

The UNEP Sasakawa Prize, worth \$200,000, is given out each year to sustainable and replicable grassroots projects around the planet. The winners will receive their prestigious Prize at an Award Ceremony in Bali attended by dozens of Environment Ministers during the 11th Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council.

In a year that saw global leaders meet in Copenhagen for the crucial climate conference, the 2009 theme for the Prize is 'Green Solutions to Combat Climate Change'. The winners, who were selected by a panel of four people including Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and UN Messenger of Peace Wangari Maathai, will receive \$100,000 each in order to expand and develop their grassroots projects.

Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director and UN Under-Secretary-General who chaired the Jury Panel, said: "Combating climate change is not just up to governments: it starts at the grassroots level, as communities tap into the power of renewables and sustainable technologies. Through pioneering green ovens and sustainable lighting, Nuru Design and Trees, Water and People are changing the lives of thousands of schoolchildren, housewives and villagers across Latin America, Africa and India. This is the Green Economy of tomorrow, in action today."

The two projects are both helping to improve daily lives in far-flung, non-electrified villages while helping to fight climate change.

Nuru Design has already converted thousands of households to rechargeable lights, and aims to prevent the emission of around 40,000 tonnes of CO₂ from kerosene lighting in 2010.

And through fuel-efficient cooking stoves that burn 50 to 70 per cent less wood, TWP is helping households save money and preventing nearly 250,000 tonnes of hazardous emissions.

The winners

Nuru Design

Lack of reliable energy and lighting affects over two billion people in the developing world and remains a primary obstacle to improving health, increasing literacy and education, and, ultimately, reducing poverty and hunger. Meanwhile, the equivalent of 260 million tonnes of CO₂ is emitted into the atmosphere yearly from burning kerosene and firewood, which millions of people around the world rely on for lighting.

With seed-funding from the World Bank Lighting Africa initiative, Nuru Design UK co-developed and field-tested the Nuru lighting system with villagers and local partners in Rwanda - UNDP Rwanda and Millennium Villages. Nuru means "light" in Swahili, and the system consists of portable, inexpensive rechargeable LED lights that sell for \$5.

Nuru lights can be recharged by solar panel or AC charger, but the primary recharging source is human power using the world's first commercially available, locally-assembled, pedal generator: the Nuru POWERCycle. Gentle pedalling for 20 minutes using feet or hands, bicycle-style, can fully recharge up to five Nuru lights - each one lasting up to 37 hours. The lights give up to two weeks of bright light on a full recharge, allowing children to study, home-based businesses to operate, and households to function after dark.

The project has been a runaway success, making a significant, immediate and long-lasting environmental impact. In Rwanda alone, Nuru is adding 40 entrepreneurs every quarter, meaning 10,000 households every quarter will switch from kerosene to Nuru light.

Nuru Design plans to use the Sasakawa funding to scale up in Rwanda and to replicate their work in Burundi, Kenya, Uganda and India - expanding to 800 entrepreneurs who will deliver lighting to about 200,000 households.

Trees, Water and People

Nearly half the world's 6.8 billion people rely on smoky open fires to cook their daily meals. This traditional practice causes deadly indoor air pollution which kills 1.6 million women and children annually.

Trees, Water & People (TWP), a non-profit organization, collaborates with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Haiti to distribute fuel-efficient cook stoves that burn 50 to 70 per cent less wood and remove toxic smoke from homes. Other projects include community tree nurseries, reforestation, protecting watersheds and the promotion of renewable energy.

To date, TWP has coordinated the building of 35,000 stoves throughout Central America and Haiti, benefitting more than 175,000 people. The ecostoves burn 70 per cent less wood than traditional ovens, saving families \$1 to \$5 per day.

They also decrease harmful carbon emissions by 1 tonne of CO2 equivalent per year per stove for domestic users and 3.5 tonnes of CO2 equivalent per year for commercial users, like tortilla makers.

To supplement the fuel-efficient stoves project, TWP has helped villages create 16 community-run tree nurseries that sequester carbon and counter the effects of deforestation. To date, three million trees have been planted throughout Latin America.

TWP will use the Prize money to support and expand the fuel-efficient stove projects and community tree nurseries throughout Central America and the Caribbean, purchasing equipment and materials necessary for increased stove production, as well as vehicles for transportation and delivery.

Notes to Editors:

About the UNEP Sasakawa Prize

The UNEP Sasakawa Prize is sponsored by the Japan-based Nippon Foundation, an independent, non-profit grant-making organization that supports both Japanese and international philanthropic projects. The UNEP Sasakawa Prize was originally created 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.

The four members of the 2009-10 UNEP Sasakawa Prize jury are Jury Chairman and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and UN Messenger of Peace Pr. Wangari Maathai, Nobel chemistry Laureate and 1999 Sasakawa Winner Pr. Mario Molina, and Ms Wakako Hironaka, Member of Japan's House of Councillors.

At the UNEP Sasakawa Award Ceremony on 23 February, last year's Sasakawa Winners - Sunlabob Rural Energy and Practical Action - will deliver a report on their progress since they were awarded the Prize.

Winners' Biographies:

Nuru Design - Sameer Hajee

Prior to Nuru Design, Sameer Hajee was the Global Business Development manager at Freeplay Energy plc, the developers of the world's first hand-crank radio and flashlight. At Freeplay, Sameer created the international aid and development sales team which in 2006 and 2007 generated \$6 million in revenue. He also co-created and co-managed a Development Marketplace project that saw the creation of 50 rural energy enterprises in Rwanda.

In 2005, Sameer launched and managed the Growing Sustainable Business (GSB) initiative at UNDP in Kenya, where he helped domestic and multinational companies, such as SC Johnson, Tetra Pak and Microsoft, to develop and implement pro-poor business models in Kenya.

Trees, Water and People - Stuart Conway

After graduating from Colorado State University with a Bachelor's degree in Forest Management, Stuart Conway served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala for three years, where he introduced reforestation, agroforestry, soil conservation, and stove building techniques into nearby villages. Upon returning to the States, Stuart received his Master's degree in International Development and Agroforestry from Cornell University. He then served as Director for the New Forests Project at the International Center in Washington D.C., where he guided the program to plant over 2 million trees annually, establish agroforestry training centers in Guatemala and El Salvador, and initiated community reforestation projects throughout Central America.

In 1998, Stuart co-founded Trees, Water & People (TWP), a Colorado-based nonprofit committed to improving people's lives by helping communities protect, conserve and manage the natural resources.

In 2005, Prince Charles presented Stuart with the prestigious Ashden Award for Sustainable Energy, for TWP's fuel-efficient stove project in Honduras. Stuart and TWP were awarded the 2008 US\$1 million Rio Tinto Prize for Sustainability.

For more information, please visit the UNEP Sasakawa Prize website at:

www.unep.org/sasakawa/ or e-mail: sasakawaprize@unep.org

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=612&ArticleID=6473&l=en&t=long>

February 26, 2010

World Environment Ministers Signal Resolve to Realize Sustainable Development

Accelerating a Green Economy to Cooperative Action to Protect Human Health and Combat Climate Change Gets Support at Bali Meeting

11th Special Session of the UN Environment Programme's Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum

United Nations Environment Programme

Bali (Indonesia) - In the first landmark Declaration issued by ministers of the environment in a decade, governments pledged to step up the global response to the major environmental and sustainability challenges of this generation.

The wide-ranging Nusa Dua Declaration, agreed today in the closing session of the UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, underlines the vital importance of biodiversity, the urgent need to combat climate change and work towards a good outcome in Mexico later in the year and the key opportunities from accelerating a transition to a low-carbon resource-efficient Green Economy.

The statement also highlights the need to improve the overall management of the global environment, accepting that that 'governance architecture' has in many ways become too complex and fragmented.

An important step forward was made earlier in the week in the areas of chemicals, hazardous wastes and human health. Governments agreed at an Extraordinary Meeting to have more cooperative action by the three relevant treaties-the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions - as a first step to boosting their delivery within countries.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary and UNEP Executive Director, said: "The ministers responsible for the environment, meeting just over a month after the climate change conference in Copenhagen, have spoken with a clear, united and unequivocal voice."

"Faced with the continued erosion of the natural environment, the persistent and emerging challenges of chemical pollution and wastes and the overarching challenge of issues such as climate change, the status quo is not an option and change is urgently needed," he added.

"This change starts with recognition that the way we are managing the environmental dimension of sustainable development is currently too complex and fragmented. Change is needed here and the ministers signaled their determination to realize this through a political process," said Mr. Steiner.

"But the ministers also recognized that action towards a Green Economy -one able to meet multiple challenges and seize multiple opportunities- is taking route in economies across the globe. Accelerating this is a key element of the Nusa Dua Declaration and one that can direct future action towards realizing the kinds of transitions needed on a planet of six billion people, rising to nine billion by 2050," he added.

The Declaration, the first by world environment ministers since they met in Malmö, Sweden in 2000, will be transmitted to the UN General Assembly later this year.

There governments will begin preparations for a landmark conference in Brazil, called Rio plus 20.

Rio plus 20 comes two decades after the first Rio Earth Summit, which gave birth to many of the key treaties, ranging from climate change to biodiversity, which to date have defined the international response to environmental challenges.

Green Economy

Case studies, illuminating the multiple benefits of a Green Economy, were presented to delegates in advance of a landmark Green Economy report to be released later this year.

Uganda

- The area of land under organic agriculture has risen from 185,000 hectares in 2004 to close to 300,000 hectares in 2008, with a 360 per cent rise in the number of farmers engaged in the sector - from 45,000 certified farmers to 207,000.
- Certified organic exports have risen from US\$3.7 million in 2003-2004 to US\$22.8 million in 2007-2008.
- The country is also contributing to combating climate change. CO₂ emissions per hectare are up to 68 per cent less than on conventionally farmed land, with studies indicating that organic fields sequester 3-8 tonnes more carbon per hectare.

China

- More than 10 per cent of Chinese households rely on the sun to heat their water, with more than 40 million solar water heating systems in place.
- The renewable energy sector as a whole generates output worth US\$17 billion and employs 1 million workers, of which 600,000 are employed in solar thermal panel making and installing products, such as solar water heaters.
- The warm water from solar water heaters is also reducing rheumatoid arthritis among women as they now have hot water for laundry and dishwashing done by hand instead of only cold water.

Brazil

- The city of Curitiba has, through sustainable urban planning and transport, cut per capita loss from severe congestion. It is about 6.7 and 11 times less than per capita losses in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo.
- In 2002, Curitiba's annual fuel losses from severe traffic congestion equaled R\$1.98 million (US\$930,000). On per capita terms, this loss is about 13 times and 4.3 times less than those in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.
- Curitiba's fuel usage is also 30 per cent lower than in Brazil's other major cities.

Other Highlights of the UNEP GC/GMEF

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

The delegates were addressed by Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, chair of the IPCC which is co-hosted by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization.

Ministers re-affirmed the central importance of the IPCC and the importance of sound science upon which to base a response to climate change.

However, as a result of recent criticism of the IPCC and some key errors in the body's fourth assessment report, several governments called for an independent review of the IPCC.

Full details of the review and its scope will be announced next week with the report to be presented to the IPCC Plenary taking place in the Republic of Korea in October.

Several key decisions were adopted, including ones on oceans put forward by the Government of Indonesia and the strengthening the environment via the Environmental Management Group which UNEP hosts.

Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

Many experts believe a science panel or platform for biodiversity and ecosystems is needed to assist governments in combating the erosion of plants and animals and ecosystems such as forests, freshwaters and soils.

Governments agreed to a final meeting in June 2010, halfway through the UN's International Year of Biodiversity, to decide whether to establish such a body.

Haiti

Delegates also backed UNEP's support to Haiti in the wake of the devastating earthquake of 12 January 2010 and called on the organization to assist the UN country team to incorporate environmental issues in the rehabilitation and reconstruction and restoration phases.

Gaza

Delegates asked UNEP to assist in implementing recommendations from its environmental assessment of the Gaza Strip compiled following the escalation of hostilities in December 2008 through to January 2009.

The assessment covers issues such as solid waste management, pollution and the acute decline of Gaza's underground water supplies.

Notes to Editors

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For the full list of decisions and the full text of the Nusa Dua Declaration please go to www.unep.org/gc/gcss-xi/

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=612&ArticleID=6482&l=en>

March 1, 2010

Sovereignty Begins at Home

By James Treat

Muscogee Nation News

The Okmulgee sky was overcast during the second weekend of February, but the mood inside the Mound Building was considerably more upbeat. People from near and far had gathered for the Food Sovereignty Symposium, which is quickly becoming one of the more important annual events in Mvskoke country.

The program began on Friday morning with welcoming remarks by Ben Yahola and Vicky Karhu of the Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative, organizers of the symposium. They also introduced this year's theme: *Porwvn, Hompetvn, Pom Vhesaketv Tos* (Our Seeds, Our Food, Our Survival).

All symposium activities were free and open to the public thanks to funding provided by the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, and both A. D. Ellis and Alfred Berryhill were on hand to welcome participants to the Capitol Complex.

Second Chief Berryhill offered a song and a prayer in the Mvskoke language.

Principal Chief Ellis recounted some childhood memories on the family farm, including a humorous story about unintentional mischief involving jars of produce his mother had canned for the winter.

The first formal presentation, by one of the leading climate experts in the world, reviewed the scientific evidence for global warming and explained how our climate will change in Oklahoma.

This was a sobering reminder that food sovereignty is something everyone will be thinking about in the near future.

The speakers who followed presented various strategies for self-determination in an era of corporate domination.

A renowned food systems analyst detailed the relationship between agricultural production and economic recovery, demonstrating the importance of community-based food networks.

The coordinator of the Oklahoma Farm-to-School Program described how this synergistic venture in local food benefits both growers, who need to make a living, and students, who need to eat better.

The director of Urban Harvest, a program of the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma, explained how organic gardening and other neighborly practices can help feed those who might otherwise go hungry.

Two leaders from Dream of Wild Health, a native-owned organic farm in Minnesota, explained their effort to cultivate wellness by growing and preserving more than three hundred varieties of indigenous heirloom seeds.

An ethnobotanist from the Chickasaw Nation discussed their Ecological Resources and Sustainability program and offered an overview of traditional foods in the southeast.

All of these presentations were informative and encouraging, but the most enjoyable experience of the day was hearing about two Mvskoke community food projects. Barton Williams from the Wilson Indian Community and Bud McCombs from the Eufaula Indian Community related their efforts to establish community gardens, under the guidance of elders and for the sake of future generations. Williams and McCombs are engaging speakers, and we are fortunate to have such leaders in our midst.

If the highlight of the first day of the symposium involved Mvskoke produce, the highlight of the second day was Mvskoke food.

On Saturday, we enjoyed a noon meal of traditional dishes prepared by Mary Harjo: meat and hominy, *sakkonepke* (*safke* corn and chicken), red beans, homegrown squash and zucchini, boiled cabbage, *cvtvhakv* (blue corn dumplings), sour cornbread, and *safke*, with grape dumplings and sweet potato casserole for dessert.

(To borrow the words of a certain redneck comedian: “You might be a Mvskoke if . . . your mouth is beginning to water.”)

Chumona Deere described each dish during the meal, and in the first afternoon presentation Melissa Harjo-Moffer explained the preparation of Mvskoke foods. Harjo, Deere, and Harjo-Moffer are gracious hosts, and we are fortunate to have such leaders in our midst.

I'll write more about the symposium in my next column. In the meantime, I have posted the agenda for the Food Sovereignty Symposium 2010—including links to the organizations that participated—at the website below.

Sources:

[Food Sovereignty Symposium 2010](#)

[Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative](#)

<http://mvskokecountry.wordpress.com/2010/03/01/sovereignty-begins-at-home/>

March 4, 2010

Nigeria: Tackling Climate Change Through Religion

Tunbosun Ogundare

AllAfrica Global Media

Lagos — The effects of climate change particularly in sub-Saharan Africa are increasingly taking toll on the social and economic well-being of people of the region. Having realised these, some top faith leaders in the region have resolved to explore religion in tackling the menace.

The faith leaders have committed to taking proactive roles by helping educate members on the critical task and responsibilities all must play to safeguard the environment.

They made this commitment at the end of a two-day inter faith forum in Abuja, Nigeria, on climate change for sub-Saharan Africa.

The forum co-organised by the British Council and First City Monument Bank Plc (FCMB) to advance the awareness on climate change issues in the region, brought together over 100 participants from Nigeria, the United Kingdom and several other Sub-Saharan African countries including South Africa.

About 60 of them were faith leaders.

Those from Nigeria include Sheikh Qaribullah Kabar and Sheik Ibrahim Khali, both Islamic scholars; Professor Emeritus of Islamic Studies, Noibi; Rev. Mathew Kuka of Catholic mission; Pastor Ayo Oritsejafar, National President, Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN); Prof Wande Abimbola, former Vice-Chancellor, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; Archbishop

John Onaiyekan; Dr Newton Jibunoh, environment activist; Dr Abdul Audu, academics/environmentalist, and Prof Lanre Fagbohun, environmental lawyer,

Others were Dr John Momoh; Emir of Suleja, who represented Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Abubakar Sai'd; Hon Ezeuche Ubani, Chairman House of Reps Committee on Climate Change; Bishop Margret Idahosa, Church of God Mission; Oluwasetihun Salawu and so forth.

From outside the country were Longdi Daniels; and Jeremy UYhili among others.

The Nigeria's British High Commissioner Mr. Robert Scott Dewar and the British Council Director, David Higgs as well as Peter Obaseki, Executive Director, FCMB, were also in attendance.

At the end of the summit, participants arrived at a decision that as leaders of faith communities on the continent, they would commit to highlighting the very real threat to the world's people and to the fragile creation, from the threat of catastrophic climate change.

In all our religious teachings and Holy Scriptures, they said, it is clearly stated that protecting and taking care of nature and human life is one of the main instructions of Creator, and human beings are guardians of this earth.

They believe that if climate change are not curtailed, it would continue to increase the level of poverty, disease and conflict in Africa.

It is a known fact that Africa has already been impacted by climate change through more floods, droughts and extreme weather conditions - but least equipped technically and financially to deal with climate- related risks.

Subsistence farming, the main source of Africa's food, is being threatened by climate change because it mainly relies on rainfall that is becoming increasingly erratic

Studies have shown that climate change may increase competition for diminishing water resources that will force people to become 'climate change refugees', posing challenges to peace and security in the region.

Noting that faith leaders have a crucial role to play in pressing for changes in behaviour at every level of society; and that, all have a responsibility to learn and teach how to live and develop sustainable in a world of finite resources, participants identified some salient action points to pursue subsequently.

These include the need for faith leaders to strengthen their capacity building trainings on climate change issues so as to improve their knowledge and understanding of this serious global threat.

From there, they will further commit to raising awareness of environmental ethics in their religious activities and dedicate a minimum of one sermon, says for one month for issues related to climate change and environmental degradation.

Equally, they said they would commit to emphasising relevant verses in their Holy Books related to the environment as it is the responsibility of every believer to keep the earth clean and healthy for human life.

They are also ready to sharing best practices and strengthen existing structures and practices to implement agreed positive actions for adapting to climate change and preventing environmental degradation, while advising their communities on how to behave in their daily activities.

Similarly, they commit to working together with leaders of different faiths and engage with government, private sector, educational institutions, youth and civil society organisations in Africa and the region.

Their positions, however, are not limited to those above. They also said: "We should also involve and work with policy-makers and, where possible, hold them accountable, while ensuring that these people are a part of regional and national talks and (legal) agreements

"We commit to working together to hold developed countries to account for a reduction in emissions of greenhouse gases so that global warming does not exceed 2 C Degree and advocate for an adaptation or Global Climate Fund.

To help to achieve these ends, the faith leaders agreed to use the Abuja meeting as the first step in an ongoing process of collaboration.

"We believe our communities can be key agents of change and urge the government across levels and the international community, wherever possible, to support our efforts to build capacity, raise awareness and promote sustainable practice", they declared.

Nevertheless, the Abuja forum was the first of its kind in Africa coming few months after the Archbishop of Canterbury hosted a meeting of faith leaders and faith-based and community organisations at Lambeth Palace, UK to discuss the response of faith communities to environmental crisis and; the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit held recently.

<http://allafrica.com/stories/201003050615.html>

March 6, 2010

Sikhs to Celebrate their New Year on March 14th as Sikh Environment Day

Alliance of Religions and Conservation

The Sikh Council on Religion and Education is inviting Sikhs around the world to celebrate 14th March as Sikh Environment Day.

This date already holds great significance within the Sikh calendar as it celebrates the Gurgaddi Diwas of the 7th Guru, Guru Har Rai ji, and also because it marks the New Year according to the Nanakshahi Calendar.

"It will provide an opportunity to reflect upon our relationship with nature and mark a day on which we commit to environmental activism as followers of Guru Har Rai ji" said the Chairman of SCORE, Dr Rajwant Singh.

Guru Har Rai Ji, who became Guru in 1644, preached that Sikhs must come to the defence of all that is vulnerable and protect the well being of plants and animals.

The EcoSikh plan

In July 2009, in collaboration with the United Nations, SCORE organised an EcoSikh conclave in New Delhi in which Sikh organisations and leaders declared a five year plan as a Sikh response and commitment to save earth against the threat of environmental destruction. This plan was presented to the UN chief Ban Ki-Moon in November at Windsor Castle, as the culmination of an "international conference organised by ARC and the UNDP, of nine religions to commit to practical action on environmental issues such as global warming.

The [Sikh plan](#), which was created as part of this worldwide movement, includes creating a particular environmentally focused celebration from Sikh history and theology and it focuses on five key areas - assets; education; media/advocacy; eco-twinning (pairing gurdwaras across globe for collaborative work); and celebration.

"Under this Sikh plan, we propose to coordinate an annual EcoSikh holiday season corresponding with Gur Har Rai ji Gurgaddi Diwas," Dr Singh said. "Guru Har Rai Ji's legacy provides one of the most inspiring models for our ecological consciousness. While commemorating and celebrating the important points of his life each year, meditating on our own environmental habits is a profound way to gain spiritual renewal."

What will Sikh Environment Day involve?

During this observance, Sikhs can focus on ecological tips and improvement, and encourage raagis, or others, to perform environmentally themed shabads - hymns from the Sikh holy scriptures. A number of shabads extol the relationship between Sikhism and the environment, and Sikhs will be able to focus on their message during this celebration.

In honour of this day, it is proposed that all communities participate in a tree planting ceremony or various other activities listed below, or further listed in the EcoSikh [Guidebook](#). In addition, we propose that all communities participate in a local environmental clean-up.

"Each community can create their own theme or follow one suggested by the EcoSikh initiative organised through the [website](#). We hope that this particular day will be celebrated and the entire Sikh community will do something in solidarity around the world."

Various celebrations will take place in Punjab and in other parts of India. In North America, several gurdwaras have committed to celebrating this day as a Sikh Environment day. Several Sikh Youth organisations also planning to celebrate this occasion.

What can people do for Sikh Environment Day?

Individuals/Families:

- Plant an EcoSikh garden or tree
- Visit your local parks monthly as time for spiritual reflection and renewal

Gurdwaras/Organisations:

- Ragis sing shabads with environmental themes
- Distribute tree saplings
- Organise a tree planting ceremony or plant saplings of plants in the Gurdwara complex.

Wider Community:

- Become an active part of Earth Day celebrations (April 22nd)
- Join interfaith environmental work camps and celebrations

Who is committed already?

Avtar Singh Makkar, President of Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), has agreed to send announcements to all educational institutions and Gurdwaras in Punjab to mark March 14th as the Sikh Environment day. He also pledged to plant 100,000 trees in SGPC run schools and colleges. In addition, SCORE has requested him to direct all ragis to sing shabads with environment theme from the Golden Temple during the TV broadcasts to encourage Sikhs all across the globe to dedicate this Sunday for environment.

The Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee has also decided to send directives to all the 40 educational institutions in Delhi to celebrate this day and there will be special observance at the Gurdwara Bangla Sahib. Bhai Vir Singh Sahit Sadan and Guru Granth Sahib Resource center will also observe this day in New Delhi. SCORE also plans to announce a committee of prominent Sikh personalities and environmental activists like Baba Sewa Singh, Baba Balbir

Singh Seechewal, Prof. Manjit Singh, and Justice Kuldeep Singh to help coordinate Sikh environmental activism and to work with international bodies like UN.

Harpal Singh, Chairman of Nanhi Chhaan or 'little shade'- a charity that promotes womens' rights along with saving the environment- has joined in this initiative and will provide organisational support. He has appealed Sikhs to adopt “Nanhi Chhaan” and plant a sapling on the 14th of March in honor of Nature’s two great Nurturers – the girl child who is mother to humankind, and trees who are Mother Earth’s greatest gift to life on this plant.

Sikh Youth in Washington have drawn up a plan to make presentations on Sikh environmental teachings on March 14th at the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation. Youth will sing shabads focusing on nature. In addition, they plan to collect funds to support the planting of 100 trees on a Kilometer of road leading to Khadoor Sahib in Punjab, India and other parts of India.

Baba Sewa Singh, a Sikh environmental hero based in Khadoor Sahib, who has planted and nurtured over 100,000 trees in last ten years, has agreed to plant some more to kickstart this celebration. To plant a tree and to water it for four years, the cost is \$25 dollars.

<http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=382>

March 7, 2010

Wanted: an eco prophet

People are drifting into a lethal slumber on climate change. More of the same won't wake them up

By Peter Preston

The Guardian

It's an exceptionally inconvenient truth. [Only one American in three believes that human beings are responsible for climate change](#): a polling result 10% down on where opinion rested the year before. Worse, the number of Americans who believe that climate change is a hoax or a scientific conspiracy – not doubting, just damned blank certain – has doubled since 2008. Add in those who assert that the changes, if any, are of "no significant concern", and you've got 30% of the US denying, scoffing and just walking on by.

Are the issues clearer, the people more committed, here in Britain? Call for the latest evidence from Ipsos Mori – and find that the proportion of UK adults who believe that global warming is

"definitely" a reality [has plummeted from 44% to 31% in the last 12 months](#). Figures like these, on both sides of the Atlantic, are getting more sceptical week by week. The real change of electoral climate is that fewer and fewer voters pay any heed to scientists and politicians.

It isn't hard to collate the factors that drive disillusion. Professors with a colloquial touch writing ["awful" emails](#); a recession so tough that it blows future shock away; a cold, cold winter the Met Office didn't forecast; scientific angst about swine flu revealed as way over the top; dodgy figures, dodgy reporting, dodgy issues way up to UN level.

These are only a few of our least favourite things. Mix them together in the stew of pre-election politics, and the result is lethal inertia. Once upon a quite recent time, David Cameron seemed bent on playing a new green giant. Now he's just another family-friendly campaigner, keen on pressing pounds sterling into sweaty palms. Environmental issues have slithered down the greasy pole of public anxiety. They won't get much of a mention on the hustings in May: no fresh commitments, no crucial pledges. In one sense, the heat may be rising; in another, the heat is off.

And that, of course, is cause for very significant concern. Democracies move in particular ways. Voters have to clamber on board when sacrifices are required. They have to see the need for pain, to sense the danger of doing nothing. They have to lead their leaders as well as follow – once they switch off, nothing good happens easily, if at all.

An Obama stalled on healthcare reform in the Senate isn't going to be able to deliver sweeping global warming policies. He may not be George Bush, but he already seems to know when he's on a loser. And, without him, you can write the Chinese or Indian scripts. You can tell that the follow-ups to Copenhagen will be feebler, not stronger: true cause for despair. Kick away any mass impetus for tackling climate change as schedules of imminent necessity fade and review panels plod across the wastelands of borrowed time.

What's to be done (except wait for a natural disaster that ends all argument – and much else besides)? First, through gritted teeth, say what won't work, what's been tried already and failed.

More jaw and Gore from politicians can't cut it. They have come to seem secondhand sources, merely parroting a frail scientific thesis. That goes, alas, for journalists, too – and for pressure groups issuing lurid warnings or staging angry demos. Those of us who are convinced, who believe in the necessity of action, haven't changed our minds. But we're not the point. The audience that matters is out there, sleeping or drifting. And rousing it will demand something different, not more of the same.

Yet more of the same is exactly what we seem to be getting. More re-examinations of existing evidence, monitored by the people who failed to monitor it last time. More supposedly transparent attempts to say precisely when Himalayan glaciers will melt. More United Nations panels, flying lugubriously hither and yon in the cause of consensus. More declarations signed by hundreds of scientists on behalf of a notional "scientific community" (rather like letters to editors from umpteen economists urging cuts or no cuts).

None of it has a ring of renewed confidence. And the plain fact is that we surely need a prophet, not yet another committee. We need one passionate, persuasive scientist who can connect and convince – not because he preaches apocalypse in gory detail, but in simple, overwhelming terms. We need to be taught to believe by a true believer in a world where belief is the fatal, missing ingredient.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/mar/07/climate-change-inertia-prophet>

March 7, 2010

Green Church

By Carol Matroo
Newsday

Preserving the environment concerns everyone and the Catholic Church of Trinidad and Tobago is doing its part to protect and promote authentic human development and environmental ecology which are inextricably linked.

To protect the earth, the Catholic Church has drawn up a draft framework towards an Environmental Policy for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Port-of-Spain entitled Reconciliation With Creation.

The draft framework was revealed two weeks ago at the Our Lady Fatima RC Church, Bushe Street in Curepe, two weeks ago.

Chairman of the Catholic Commission for Social Justice, Leela Ramdeen, said the church has always urged mankind to care for, preserve, develop and restore the environment because they were given the responsibility to “cultivate and care for” God’s creation.

Ramdeen said the draft framework was a call to reflection and action to address the environmental/ecological crisis which Pope Benedict XVI described as a “moral crisis.”

The Pope, in his peace message for 2010, said “Our earth speaks to us, and we must listen if we want to survive.”

She said the objectives of the draft framework were to bring the gospel and the teachings of the church to bear on the issue of environmental/ecological justice, to raise awareness of the church’s commitment to promote human and environmental ecology, to identify resources and ways in which people could preserve the earth and to motivate individuals and organisations to take responsibility for their environment.

Keynote speaker, agriculturist and COP's shadow minister of agriculture, Wendy Lee Yuen, said as the world's industrialisation was increasing, so, too, were the carbon dioxide emissions.

She said pollution levels had reached unacceptable heights and burning fossil fuel only exacerbated the carbon dioxide level.

Lee Yuen said climate change was bringing rising sea levels, arctic warming, increasing green house gases (carbon dioxide and methane) and frequent cycles of El Nino which contributed to droughts, noting that 2010 was the hottest year recorded thus far because of El Nino.

These factors, she said, were causing a noticeable decline of coastal wetlands, higher risk of flooding, severe heat and drought and increased forest and bush fires. She warned that the grasslands were changing into deserts, the water levels were declining, crops were failing and animal production was being severely depleted.

Lee Yuen Said the oceans were heating up which was fuelling more storms and coral reefs were dying also because of the warming of the oceans and noted that the loss of bio-diversity increased vulnerability to climate change and diseases.

In this country, the Government has stated its policy to advance the use of alternative fuels and has committed to the reforestation of 33,030 acres of land in ten years. Carbon dioxide emissions in TT increased by 278 percent from 1998

<http://www.newsday.co.tt/news/0,116872.html>

March 13, 2010

Evangelicals are seen as key in climate debate

Panel touts nexus between spirituality and environmentalism

By Gary Soulsman
The News Journal

Young people in evangelical churches have likely never heard a sermon linking scripture with a love of creation and caring for the earth.

That explains the slowness of mainline evangelicals in signing onto the movement to lower carbon emissions and avert **climate change**, said the Rev. Richard Cizik, president of the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good.

He's reached that opinion from hundreds of talks he's given on **campuses**, and it's sad news for Americans who believe churches could influence leaders in Congress to address climate change, he said recently in Newark.

Influencing evangelicals is key to swaying Republicans, as they rely on evangelicals for votes, said Cizik, a national leader who has not always been in tune with conservative evangelicals on this issue or the acceptance of gays in civil unions.

In 2008, he stepped down from the lobbying position he held for years as vice president of governmental affairs of the National Association of Evangelicals.

On Wednesday night, Cizik was one of three panelists who talked about spirituality and the environment during the final session in a winter series at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Newark on "Green Matters in the Delaware Region."

Cizik urged more boldness among grassroots environmentalists in engaging with politicians and people of faith. Give up the old credo of "Take, Make, Waste" and replace it with "Borrow, Use, Replenish," he said.

In his view, religion is a powerful motivator of people to speak on issues , and he feels faith has a greater role to play in engaging people around the world on all sorts of matters.

He said people who deny climate change can be gently challenged and with time may be won over, given that a growing number of evangelical leaders are aligning with the climate change cause and signing on with christiansandclimatechange.org. These pastors will bring parishioners on board, he said.

Other **speakers** also addressed the theme of spirituality and caring for the earth. The Rev. Bruce Gillette, co-pastor of Limestone Presbyterian Church, said the church's addition of solar panels has attracted new energy-conscious people to the congregation.

He brought a "green bible" to show audience members, urging them to purchase the bibles for libraries.

A green bible has passages on caring for God's creation highlighted in green.

<http://www.delawareonline.com/article/20100313/LIFE/3130310>

March 14, 2010

Guest editorial: Faith leaders see warming threat

By the Rev. Doug Hunt
Tennessean.com

In December, more than 100 diverse members of the world's faith communities met in Copenhagen with representatives of virtually every nation on earth as official delegates gathered to try to reach an agreement on steps all governments would take to meet a real and major threat to the future of their citizens.

The representatives of faith communities gathered to remind government leaders that Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and nearly all religious and spiritual traditions acknowledge a deep moral obligation to love, appreciate and safeguard the beautiful and verdant planet that our common creator has given to us. Christians call this stewardship. Jews speak of *radah*. Muslims practice *khalifa*. Whatever it is called, people of faith know their connections and feel deeply their responsibility to keep and protect all that God has given.

Also gathered in Copenhagen were people whose concern for the earth is expressed in scientific and mathematical terms: parts per billion or per million metric tons, greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide equivalents, temperature anomalies, uncertainty, confidence intervals, etc. It is enough to make most people's eyes glaze over. It is certainly a different language than that spoken by governments or the people of faith.

But all of these people shared a common understanding: The world we live on and depend on is changing in ways that are threatening the future of our children and grandchildren.

Red ants and crop fungi are in areas where they've never been seen before. The geographic center of blueberry production has shifted from Maine to Quebec, costing jobs. Critical glacier-fed water supplies for hundreds of millions of people worldwide are drying up. The list goes on.

Faith, facts coexist

I accept the overwhelming scientific evidence that the way people are living has changed and is changing our planet. This is not a matter of belief. Religious people know the difference between beliefs that are at the core of their faith and measured observations that are facts.

One cannot measure faith. It is not a matter of observation. Whatever one's views of the "global-warming debate," global changes are happening in ways that imperil the future of all God's creation. As people of faith, we look beyond ourselves and our local rainfall or any ideological debate.

We see the plight of our neighbors, the hardships that the planetary changes are causing and will cause, because love is at the heart of our being spiritual and loving people.

We judge these events in light of our moral obligations and the moral demands of our faith: that we care for each other and the earth.

And people of faith have always acted and spoken in love to help solve these growing problems.

The problems are great, but many of the answers are simple: Use energy more efficiently in our homes, businesses and places of worship; use less energy everywhere; demand that energy be generated from clean, renewable sources; live more sustainably; and pray, not only with our hearts but also with our heads, hands and feet.

Finally, ask elected representatives to take these problems seriously and join us in solving them.

Whatever is happening in "the global-warming debate," the need for action is clearly heating up.

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100314/OPINION01/3140344/1008>

March 19, 2010

Language of Religious Fervor Inflames Climate Change Debate

By Jeremy Lovell
The New York Times

LONDON -- Apocalyptic visions and the muscular language of religious fervor are invading the climate arena, replacing issues of fact with those of faith and bringing high emotion into science -- an area where it should have no place -- politicians and religious leaders complain.

People who say human-induced climate change is a fact that demands urgent action are described as "believers" or "climate evangelists," while those who reject the concept are "deniers," "skeptics" or "atheists." Those in the middle who say they are unconvinced either way are "agnostics."

"The use of this language has become increasingly an issue," said Colin Challen, chairman of the United Kingdom's All Party Parliamentary Climate Change Group, a committee of U.K. lawmakers studying the global climate phenomenon.

"Some people would like that to happen, because in some eyes proving that climate change is man-made becomes as difficult as proving the existence of God," he told E&E.

The contagious, semi-religious linguistic brew is further fueled by climate alarmists, from environmentalists to politicians, warning of looming apocalyptic disasters or seeing themselves pitted in an Armageddon-like struggle between the forces of good and evil.

Both ends of the spectrum are described as zealots, but confusingly, each accuses the other of being "flat Earthers." While the debate is at its most vitriolic in the blogosphere, where opinions and insults are often more frequent than facts and where exchanges rapidly descend into personal abuse, senior politicians are by no means exempt from using the religious metaphor.

"The climate world is divided into three: the climate atheists, the climate agnostics, and the climate evangelicals. I'm a climate agnostic," Indian Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh explained in a recent interview with *The Wall Street Journal*.

Linguistic contagion seen spreading from the U.S.

For Tom Burke of the London-based climate change think tank E3G, the introduction of such religious labels is symptomatic of a far more sinister agenda at work than the simple but emotive issue of lifestyle and sustainability. He claims it is spreading from the United States, where the climate debate is far more politicized and polarized than in many other parts of the world.

"The use of this kind of language has become very prevalent. The parallels with creationism are undeniable. Creationists and climate deniers are the same people. They are from the political and religious right," he said.

"Climate change becomes a question of reason against unreason, and the use of the religious labels -- propagated by lazy journalism -- is all about controlling the agenda through language. It is a classic right-wing ploy," he added. "The deniers who call themselves agnostics are obfuscating. It is a lie and should be exposed as such."

Environmentalists have long used apocalyptic language to promote their causes, which include saving iconic creatures, plants or the planet from the worst human depredations. But they don't talk about financial sacrifices necessary to achieve their ends. Few people even approach the question of whether the current rate of consumption of physical goods and energy in the rich, developed world is in any way sustainable.

But for theologian and environmentalist Martin Palmer, the constant references to potential oblivion have gone much too far and have become self-defeating.

'You can't keep telling people they are guilty'

"They are playing games with very emotive language," said Palmer, the co-founder of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation. "Negative images just don't work. You can't keep telling people they are guilty. They stop listening, and that means nothing gets done."

"In the 1970s and '80s, the environmental movement was utopian: 'Do what we say and everything will be all right.' That was rejected. So they turned inwards and became exclusives, saying, 'We are the only ones with the truth. Unless you follow us, you will be eternally damned.'"

"That doesn't work, either. The church should know. We have been there. We have been utopian and then apocalyptic. We know that the way forward is calm and gentle argument and persuasion. I think you will see within the next two to three years that this violent environmental language will fade away and be replaced by something much more measured and moderate," he said.

Extending the religious metaphor, Palmer likened the trade in carbon emission credits as part of the battle against climate change to the sale by the church in the Middle Ages of so-called indulgences by which rich people could buy their way out of having to do penance for bad deeds.

"It removes from individuals the responsibility for their actions and is morally bankrupt," he said. "We had the Reformation in Europe to get rid of that. We need a reformation of the environmental system."

Some scientists keep the faith

But part of the problem is that the science underlying the whole climate change issue, which was supposed to have been settled three years ago when the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change produced its latest report, has now been brought into question once more.

Climate critics have never accepted the Fourth Assessment Report's conclusions that it is a near certainty that the current bout of climate change is human-induced, and their cause was given a boost late last year due to a series of leaked e-mails from Phil Jones, the head of the University of East Anglia's highly respected climate change unit.

In the e-mails, Jones asked for data to be deleted, said he would fight to ensure certain papers were not published, refused requests for the raw data on which his conclusions were based, and wrote of a "trick" to make seemingly contradictory data suddenly fit the desired outcome that climate change was happening and was primarily human-induced.

The climate skeptics leapt on this information, despite the fact that it was based on highly selective extracts from thousands of e-mails stretching back over several years, as proof that the scientists had been biased in reaching their climate change conclusions.

This view was seemingly supported by later revelations that some of the IPCC's climate report had been based on erroneous data -- particularly its conclusions on the rapid rate of Himalayan glacial melt.

While the University of East Anglia and the IPCC are both being investigated to see what happened and why, climate scientists insist that the science is sound and conclusions remain fundamentally correct.

Sloppy reporting makes the labels stick

But for Oxford University economist and climate specialist Dieter Helm, the scientists made the basic and unforgivable error of allowing their convictions to color their judgments. "Of course there is a place for religion in the climate change debate -- there is a moral question of what we are doing to our planet, of which, after all, we are the stewards. But there is absolutely no place for it in science," he said.

"Faith is anathema to science. A scientist should always question his or her hypothesis and should welcome others doing likewise, because if the questions don't prove it to be wrong, then they strengthen it. Some scientists in the climate field have evidently forgotten that fundamental principle," he said.

Andrew Simms of the New Economics Foundation public policy think tank, which was the first to propose the idea of the "green New Deal" to help reboot the world economy and shift it onto a low-carbon development path, said it was understandable but regrettable that religious language had entered the climate change arena.

But like Burke, Challen, Palmer and Helm, he pointed the finger at sloppy reporting of the highly complex issue. "The people who shout the loudest or use the most colorful language and images tend to be the ones who get noticed and reported on," he said.

"But it is a mistake to use a form of religious language, because it is unnecessary and misses the central point that we have 200 years of scientific data that tells us we are playing a very dangerous game with our environment. This is a matter of fact. It should not be muddied by faith," he said.

<http://www.nytimes.com/cwire/2010/03/19/19climatewire-language-of-religious-fervor-inflames-climat-42978.html>

March 22, 2010

World Water Day 2010 Highlights Solutions and Calls for Action to Improve Water Quality Worldwide

United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi (Kenya) - Investment in safe water will have high returns in ensuring a healthy ecosystem and human society, says a new report released today by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) during the global World Water Day celebrations in Nairobi.

An investment of US\$20 million in low-cost water technologies, such as drip irrigation and treadle pumps, could lift 100 million poor farming families out of extreme poverty, according to the report, *Clearing the Waters: A Focus on Water Quality Solutions*'.

It adds that repairing leaky water and sewage networks can also secure not only supplies but reduce pollution and generate employment. In some developing countries, 50-60 per cent of treated water is lost to leaks and globally an average of 35 per cent is lost. By some estimates, saving just half of this amount would supply water to 90 million people without further investment.

But while there are solutions, much more needs to be done, notes the UNEP report. The facts are:

- Globally, 2 million tons of sewage and industrial and agricultural waste are poured into the world's waters every day;
- At least 1.8 million children under five years-old die every year from water-related diseases, or one every 20 seconds;
- Every day, millions of tons of inadequately treated sewage and industrial agricultural wastes are poured into the world's waters;
- More people die as a result of polluted water than are killed by all forms of violence, including wars;
- Over half of the world's hospital beds are occupied with people suffering from illnesses linked with contaminated water.

Adeel Zafar, Chair of UN-Water said: "Water quality impacts the lives of millions of people worldwide every year - a majority of them under the age of 5. We are happy that this year's World Water Day puts great emphasis on this delicate issue which is so much reflected in the Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs stress clearly the importance of safe water and sanitation. UN-Water, as the coordination mechanism the United Nations community, puts great

emphasis to support worldwide efforts for improving water quality and restoring degraded water ecosystems."

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UNEP, said: "Human activity over the past 50 years is responsible for unprecedented pollution, and the quality of the world's water resources is increasingly challenged. World Water Day highlights how the work of improving and sustaining the world's water quality is everyone's responsibility. It may seem like an overwhelming challenge but there are enough solutions where human ingenuity allied to technology and investments in nature's purification systems such as wetlands, forests and mangroves can deliver clean water for a healthy world."

The Chair of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, His Royal Highness Prince Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands said in his key note speech that "Each year, World Water Day gains more momentum and spurs thousands of local initiatives around the world - in schools, in churches, in communities. Its emphasis on local action is what gives World Water its power and beauty. We know that no single global instrument can ensure our most important common good is saved. Water must be protected locally."

Under the theme '*Clean Water for a Healthy World*', World Water Day 2010 will see a series of initiatives organized around the globe to raise awareness and emphasize the key importance of good water quality in improving human well-being.

The global event aims to bring attention to the state of water quality around the world, and is a call for action on pollution prevention, clean-up, and restoration of waterways in order to sustain healthy ecosystems and human well-being.

At the three-day flagship event in Nairobi on World Water from 20 to 22 March, policy makers, scientists and eminent personalities will discuss how to address the challenges of degrading water quality around the world, release new research and visit sites in Kenya to understand the critical importance of water quality for ecosystem functioning, human well-being and livelihoods.

Central to World Water Day 2010 is the launch of the UN-Water Statement, a consensus document of 26 UN agencies and other partners, scientists, and practitioners, pointing out the state of the world's water and defining the will and the way forward. In the morning a panel of international scientists will present and release a scientific communiqué on global water quality and a high-level panel will convene in the afternoon to respond to the *UN-Water Statement on Water Quality* as part of the World Water Day proceedings in Nairobi.

The outcomes of the event will be presented into key global political processes and meetings such as the UN General Assembly; the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD); the Convention on Biological Diversity; and Stockholm World Water Week.

More specifically, UNEP's report '*Clearing the Waters*' report also feeds into the discussion by detailing how water quality is as important as water quantity for satisfying human and

environmental needs, yet has received far less investment, scientific support, and public attention.

Prepared in collaboration with the Pacific Institute, one of the world's leading non-profit research organizations on freshwater issues, the UNEP report is part of the World Water Day 2010 effort to bring global attention to the need for clean, safe water - and action and policy to address water pollution.

The report calls for worldwide action to:

- Increase awareness to change individual behavior around what we put into our water;
- Promote policies that improve water quality with education and advocacy;
- Increase enforcement of the regulations put in place to protect water quality;
- Put investor and consumer pressure on corporations that pollute waterways.

'Clearing the Waters' emphasizes the urgent need to act to improve and safeguard water quality:

- Human health, the planet's ecosystems, our livelihoods, and our future all depend on clean, safe water - yet every year, the world's lakes, rivers, and deltas take in the equivalent of the entire human population - the weight of 6.8 billion people - in the form of pollution.
- In the last three decades of the 20th century, populations of freshwater species fell 50 per cent on average, a rate two-thirds greater than that of terrestrial and marine species. In recent years, the biodiversity of freshwater ecosystems has been degraded more than any other ecosystem, including tropical rainforests.
- One of the most significant sources of water pollution is lack of adequate sanitation. Worldwide, the World Health Organization and UNICEF estimate that 2.6 billion people - 280 million of them children under five - live without improved sanitation, and each year more than 1.5 million children die from diarrhea caused by infectious waterborne diseases. It is a crisis of local challenges with global repercussions.
- Worldwide, it is estimated that industry is responsible for dumping 300-400 million tons of heavy metals, solvents, toxic sludge, and other waste into waters each year. New contaminants, such as discarded pharmaceuticals, also threaten water quality and human and ecosystem health.
- The planet's most widespread water-quality problem is nutrient enrichment. Largely caused by nitrogen and phosphorus from agricultural runoff and human and industrial waste, nutrient enrichment results in excessive plant (principally algae) growth and decay that robs the water of oxygen needed for many aquatic organisms to survive.

The report notes that it is almost always cheaper to prevent pollution than clean it up - and poor water quality has significant economic costs, from ecosystem and human-health costs and impacts on economic activities to increased water treatment costs and reduced property values.

For example, economic losses as a result of health impacts from the lack of water and sanitation in Africa are estimated at US\$28.4 billion, or about 5 percent of GDP. And sanitation and

drinking water investments have high rates of return: for every US\$ 1 invested, there is a projected US\$3-US\$34 economic development return.

Freshwater ecosystems sustain a large number of identified species, including a quarter of known vertebrates. Such systems provide more than US\$75 billion in goods and ecosystem services for people, but are increasingly threatened by a host of water quality problems.

Also on World Water Day, UNEP and UN-Habitat launched the report '*Sick Water - The Central Role of Wastewater Management in Sustainable Development*', which shows that an estimated 90 percent of all wastewater in developing countries is currently discharged untreated directly into rivers, lakes or the oceans. Currently, an estimated 245,000 kilometers of marine ecosystems are affected with a clear impact on fisheries, livelihoods and the overall food chain.

World Water Day supports the United Nations' declaration of 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity, working to reduce the constant loss of biological diversity worldwide. UNEP is the coordinating agency for World Water Day 2010 on behalf of UN-Water, collaborating with 26 members from the UN System and external partners representing various organizations and civil society.

Notes to Editors:

About World Water Day:

The UN General Assembly designated the first World Water Day in 1993, and each subsequent year the March 22 event has highlighted a specific aspect of freshwater sustainability. Over the years, World Water Days have focused on transboundary waters, sanitation, coping with water scarcity, and water and culture. The annual World Water Day is coordinated by UN-Water, a coordination mechanism of 26 UN agencies working on water. UNEP with its strong environmental focus was designated the lead for World Water Day 2010.

For 2010, '*Clean Water for a Healthy World*' initiatives around the world focus on water quality challenges and solutions, with the central event organized by UNEP in Nairobi, Kenya on 20-22 March.

The World Water Day 2010 theme of "*Clean Water for a Healthy World*" calls attention to Millennium Development Goal No.7, to ensure environmental sustainability, particularly in:

-integrating principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reversing the loss of environmental resources (Target 1);

-significantly reducing biodiversity loss and rate of loss (Target 2);

-halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2015 (Target 3); and

-achieving significant improvements in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 (Target 4).

Worldwide, events are planned to mark World Water Day 2010 and activities on water quality to further "*Clean Water for a Healthy World*" will be ongoing throughout the year.

For a list of international events, to add an event and to access outreach materials and further information, visit www.unwater.org/worldwaterday.

For more information on how individuals can participate in World Water Day 2010 and address challenges to the world's water quality, visit: www.worldwaterday2010.info.

About the Nairobi World Water Day event:

The flagship celebration of World Water Day at the UNEP/UN-Habitat headquarters in Nairobi on 20-22 March is jointly hosted by UNEP, UN-Habitat, the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB), and the Government of Kenya.

The event will bring together scientists from around the world for a panel on '*Water Quality Challenges and Responses*' and will also include site visits to Lake Victoria, Kibera/Nairobi River and the Kenyan Coast in order to illustrate the critical importance of water quality for ecosystem functioning, human well-being and livelihoods.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon will deliver a message for World Water Day 2010, and the afternoon's keynote address will be delivered by His Royal Highness Prince Willem Alexander of Orange, Netherlands, who serves as the Chair of UNSGAB.

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March 22, 2010

Time to Cure Global Tide of Sick Water

Turning Two Millions Tons of Waste - Equal to Over Two Billion Tons of Wastewater - into Economic Resource Could Benefit Human Health, Agriculture and the Environment

United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi (Kenya) - Transforming wastewater from a major health and environmental hazard into a clean, safe and economically-attractive resource is emerging as a key challenge in the 21st century.

It is a challenge that will continue to intensify as the world undergoes rapid urbanization, industrialization and increasing demand for meat and other foods unless decisive action is taken says a new United Nations report released today.

Urban populations are projected to nearly double in 40 years, from current 3.4 billion to over six billion people - but already most cities lack adequate wastewater management due to aging, absent or inadequate sewage infrastructure.

The new report, called *Sick Water?*, says some two million tons of waste, estimated to equal two or more billion tons of wastewater (see notes to editors) is being discharged daily into rivers and seas spreading disease to humans and damaging key ecosystems such as coral reefs and fisheries.

Wastewater is a cocktail of fertilizer run-off and sewage disposal alongside animal, industrial, agricultural and other wastes.

The report says that the sheer scale of dirty water means more people now die from contaminated and polluted water than from all forms of violence including wars. Dirty water is also a key factor in the rise of de-oxygenated dead zones that have been emerging in seas and oceans across the globe.

Yet many of the substances that make wastewater a pollutant - for example nitrogen and phosphorus- can also be useful as fertilizers for agriculture. Wastewater can also generate gases to fuel small power stations or be used for cooking.

The report notes that already some 10 per cent of the world's population is being supplied with food grown using wastewater for irrigation and fertilizer and with better management and training of farmers this could be increased substantially.

The report, launched to coincide with World Water Day, goes so far as to say that the concentration of nutrients in wastewater "could supply much of the nitrogen and much of the phosphorous and potassium normally required for crop production. Other valuable micro-nutrients and organic matter contained in the effluent would also provide benefits".

Some Solutions

The report underlines that reducing the volume and concentrations of wastewater will require multiple actions ranging from reducing run-off from livestock and croplands to better treatment of human wastes.

Some solutions may involve water recycling systems and multi-million or multi-billion dollar water sewage treatment works: the report cites the success of those installed in the Bali coastal resort of Nusa Dua in Indonesia.

Others may involve investing and re-investing in nature's natural purification systems which include wetlands, mangroves and salt marshes.

Studies in the Mississippi valley of the United States indicate that the value of a restored wetland may be as high as over \$1,000 a hectare if its full range of services, from water filtration to recreational use, is factored in.

Establishing markets and economic instruments for such services could offer the kind of financial incentives that favour conservation and restoration over draining wetlands for farmland.

Other solutions can be small-scale: The report cites the coral coast of Fiji where it was estimated that up to 40 per cent of harmful nutrients being discharged into the marine environment were from pigs, which produce three times more concentrated nitrogen waste than humans.

Sawdust beds which soak up the liquid run-off from pig pens have now been introduced, and soiled sawdust is shipped to nearby farms as fertilizer. Emissions to coastal waters have been cut and the farmers are pleased too.

This is because the more comfortable sawdust beds seem to make the pigs happier and thus bigger, so farmers have more meat to sell.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), said: "If the world is to thrive, let alone to survive on a planet of six billion people heading to over nine billion by 2050, we need to get collectively smarter and more intelligent about how we manage waste including wastewaters".

"The facts and figures are stark - pollution from wastewater is quite literally killing people, indeed at least 1.8 million children die annually as a result of contaminated water. The impacts on the wider environment and in particular the marine environment are also sobering," he added.

"But the report also points to the abundant Green Economy opportunities for turning a mounting challenge into an opportunity with multiple benefits. These include the savings from reduced fertilizer costs for farmers and, incentives for conserving ecological infrastructure such as wetlands alongside new business and employment opportunities in engineering and natural resource management," Mr Steiner said.

Mrs Anna Tibajuka, Executive Director of UN-Habitat, said: "Urban and industrial wastewater composed of sediment, nutrients, organic matter, trace metals and pesticides, among others, adversely affects the entire food chain and thus human health".

"Many water and sanitation utilities, especially in developing countries, are forced to spend more financial resources in water treatment due to increased pollution. Excess nutrients and

wastewater can also lead to uncontrolled growth of algae and aquatic plants such as water hyacinth which cause practical problems for marine transportation, fishing and at intakes for water, hydro power and irrigation schemes," she added.

"It is my hope that activities taking place globally today will raise public awareness of the water quality challenges facing humanity, and the need to commit to concrete remedial actions at all levels," said Mrs Tibajuka.

Christian Nellemann, a lead author on the report, added: "Some estimates suggest that around 2 million tons of waste are spilled into sewage systems every day: this may be producing well over two billion tons of polluted water every single day, 365 days a year, right into our freshwaters and oceans".

The Rapid Response Assessment, entitled "*Sick water? The central role of wastewater management in sustainable development*", has been compiled by a special taskforce consisting of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), and the UN Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB).

It has also involved experts from UN Water and UNEP's GRID Arendal in Norway and was launched today at UNEP headquarters and at the World Urban Forum in Rio de Janeiro in support of this year's World Water Day with the theme Clean Water for a Healthy World.

The report shows that the impact of poor wastewater management and degrading sewage systems is not only costing billions of dollars and degrading ecosystems, it is also challenging the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, sustainable development, jobs, labour productivity and the health of hundreds of millions of people worldwide.

Conversely, a recent report by the UNEP Green Economy Initiative underlined the economic benefits of investing in this resource. It argues that every dollar invested in safe water and sanitation has a pay back of \$3 to \$34 depending on the region and the technology deployed.

Some Facts and Figures from the Report

- At least 1.8 million children under five years-old die every year from water related disease, which is one child every 20 seconds.
- It is estimated that close to 90 per cent of diarrhoea cases, killing some 2.2 million people every year, is caused by unsafe drinking water and poor hygiene.
- Over 50 per cent of malnutrition cases globally are associated with diarrhoea or intestinal worm infections. Diarrhoeal diseases come second after respiratory infections in terms of labour productivity lost due to illness.
- Over half the world's hospitals beds are occupied with people suffering from illnesses linked with contaminated water.

- Almost 900 million people currently lack access to safe drinking water, and an estimated 2.6 billion people lack access to basic sanitation. South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa have the highest proportion, with around 221 million and 330 million respectively living without basic sanitation.
- 90 per cent of the wastewater in developing countries discharged daily is untreated. 80% of all marine pollution is land based - most of it wastewater, damaging coral reefs and fishing grounds
- Each day each one of us uses - and discards - some 150-600 litres of water: 60-150 litres per person per day in developing countries to 500-800 litre per person per day in the industrialized world
- People in the industrialized world generate 5 times more wastewater per person than in developing countries - but treat over 90% of the wastewater compared to only a few percent in developing countries
- Improved wastewater management has resulted in significant environmental improvements in many European rivers, but dead zones in the oceans are still spreading worldwide
- Agriculture accounts for some 70-90% of all water consumed, mainly for irrigation. But large amounts also return to rivers in terms of run-off - near half of all organic matter in wastewater comes from agriculture
- Industrial wastes, pesticides from agriculture and tailings from mining also create serious health risks and threats to water resources, costing billions of dollars to monitor, much more to clean.
- Use of bottled water is increasing, but it takes 3 litres of water to produce one litre of bottled water - and in the USA alone an additional 17 million barrels of oil.
- Worldwide 200 000 million litres of water are produced every year, creating also an enormous waste problem from spent plastic bottles.
-
- 20 million tons of phosphate is mined to fertilize crops, and there are concerns that natural phosphate may become scarcer over the coming decades.
- Nearly half of the agricultural phosphate applied is washed away and ends up rivers and oceans where it plays a part in triggering algae blooms that in turn damage ecosystems and fish stocks
- The area of dead zones - locations of reduced or absent oxygen levels - has now grown to cover 245,000 km² of the marine environment including in North America; the Caribbean, Europe and Asia.

- Wastewater also generates methane, a climate gas 21 times more powerful than CO₂. It is also generating nitrous oxide which is 310 times more powerful than CO₂.
- It is estimated that wastewater-linked emissions of methane and nitrous oxide will rise by 25 per cent and 50 per cent respectively in just a decade.
- Climate change may aggravate the problem with droughts concentrating wastewater pollution in rivers and lakes and increased flooding overwhelming ageing sewage infrastructure in cities and towns.

The report provides six major recommendations:

- Countries should adopt a multisectoral approach, including ecosystem management, to cope with rising wastewater production
- Countries must establish national plans from water source to ocean and create national to local strategies. Over 70% of the water is consumed by agriculture for irrigation.
- Financing and investment are urgently needed and must address design, ecosystem restoration, construction, operation and maintenance of waste water infrastructure. Public management of the water supply and wastewater management have provided best results for broad public benefit, with private sector mainly beneficial in improving operation and maintenance
- Communities and nations should plan for increasing incidents of extreme weather and rising urbanization in the future.
- For effective waste water management, social, cultural, environmental and economical aspects must be carefully considered
- Education has a crucial role to play in water and wastewater management, helping to ensure water, nutrients and future opportunities for employment and development are not wasted.

Notes to Editors

The report "*Sick water ? the central role of wastewater management for sustainable development*" can be accessed at www.unep.org or at www.grida.no including high and low resolution graphics for free use in publications. Credits and sources for the photographs can be found at the back of the report.

2 billion tons of wastewater versus two million tons of waste: The two million tons relates to the dry weight of the solids and other materials entering rivers and the marine environment. Two billion tons or more estimates the weight of both the solids and the contaminated water itself.

The calculation is:-2 million tons of waste and 1,500 km³ of wastewater per year which is 4.1 km³ per day - which is 2 billion tons or more daily depending on the definition of wastewater.

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=617&ArticleID=6504&l=en>

March 25, 2010

Conservative Evangelicals embrace God and green

Why some right-leaning evangelical Christians have become true believers in climate change. God and green go together, these conservatives say.

By Gregory M. Lamb
The Christian Science Monitor

The cultural revolution of the 1960s and '70s included the birth of the environmental movement. That's when "there was a deep split, and the right stole God and the left stole green," says Jonathan Merritt, a 20-something evangelical Christian who sees himself as a political conservative but also as an environmentalist. "I think God and green go together, and I think they belong together."

While many Christian [denominations enthusiastically support efforts](#) to combat climate change, evangelical Christians, who tend to be both theologically and politically conservative, have been caught up in an internal tussle over the issue in which skeptics seem to hold the upper hand.

But a new generation of Evangelicals such as Mr. Merritt – who, he argues, carry less "baggage" from the 20th-century's cultural wars – are making a spirited effort to show that their religious beliefs and their environmental concerns are not only compatible but inextricably linked.

"I'm an environmentalist because I'm a Christian and not in spite of that fact," says Merritt, an author and speaker whose book, "Green Like God: Unlocking the Divine Plan for Our Planet," will be published on Earth Day, April 21.

Conservative US Protestants are among those Christians most likely to be skeptical that human-induced climate change is taking place. In a poll last year, only 34 percent of white Evangelicals agreed there is solid evidence that Earth is warming because of human activity. In contrast, 48 percent of white mainline Protestants agreed, according to the survey, released by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

Green evangelicalism

On the other hand, the students at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, who tend to come from conservative Christian backgrounds, are "definitely" more likely to accept human-induced climate change, says Susan Bratton, chair of the environmental science department at Baylor.

They've grown up hearing the environmental message and are "probably the greenest generation we've ever had here," adds Dr. Bratton, who has had seminary training and teaches a course on Christian environmental ethics.

Whether this "green evangelicalism" will continue to gain followers may depend on people like Merritt and Katharine Hayhoe and Andrew Farley, a married couple who are evangelical Christians and teach at Texas Tech University in Lubbock.

Dr. Hayhoe, a research professor in the geosciences department, contributed to the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report released in 2007, as well as a US government report on climate change requested by the Bush administration and released last summer. Dr. Farley teaches linguistics and a New Testament course, while also serving as a pastor at a local nondenominational evangelical church.

Answering skeptical questions

Farley, who's a conservative Republican, says he was "a very hard-nosed skeptic" about climate change until he began discussing the subject with Hayhoe, a supporter of action. "She would show me the data," he recalls. "And after being presented with the data, I would lose the argument." After a while, "I became increasingly convinced [and said to myself] 'I see it now.' "

Farley began referring people at his church to Hayhoe when they had questions about climate change.

Hayhoe, who speaks to many school and church groups, says she's realized that "people have a common set of questions. And they're very good questions, and questions that should be asked."

They include theories they've heard, such as that climate change is caused by sun cycles, that the [Earth is cooling](#) rather than warming, and that even if the Earth is warming, humans have nothing to do with it. "Once you provide people with answers, that's the information that they need to make up their own minds," she says.

"The more [scientists] look at climate change, the more we realize it's accelerating," she says. Spring arrives one to two weeks earlier in the US Northeast than it did 30 years ago. "The center for blueberry production has actually shifted out of Maine into Canada because the winters are warmer now." And just this year, kudzu – the invasive vine once confined to the US South – has been reported in Canada for the first time, she says.

Together, Hayhoe and Farley wrote a book, "A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions." Reactions to it have come from those who remain skeptics as well as from those who felt the couple didn't sound a loud enough alarm about the need to take action.

"I think we're right where we want to be – in the middle," Hayhoe says.

Their goal is to "present the scientific facts to Christians with the data and let them sit down and make up their own minds," Farley says. He doesn't preach about climate change from his pulpit, though – or about politics or social issues, for that matter. "I'm not going to pull out temperature charts and graphs at church," he says. "We become a social group and not a church at that point."

The often-cited passage in Genesis about humans having "dominion" over the earth doesn't mean "let's destroy it," he says. "That's silly. That's absurd."

Love for humanity should be underlie concern for the environment, says Farley, who earlier wrote the book "The Naked Gospel: The Truth You May Never Hear in Church," in which he talks about "living life from a heartfelt motivation."

Two recent events have Hayhoe, Farley, and Merritt scrambling to meet new skepticism about climate change and the environment. [So-called "Climategate,"](#) based on stolen e-mails, has caused some to doubt a portion of the data in the IPCC report. And ["Snowmagedon,"](#) the record-breaking February snowstorms on the East Coast, seems to some to throw a fat snowball at the idea of "global warming."

"Climategate didn't do us any favors," Farley concedes. But the e-mails don't change the basic conclusions of a vast number of scientists "who have published in peer-reviewed journals of all kinds" study after study showing that climate change is real, he says. "The message that needs to be shouted clearly to everyone is that this is real, this is happening."

There's a big difference between ever-changing weather events, such as this year's big snowstorms, and slow-moving climate change, which is measured over decades, Hayhoe says. But unusually large snowstorms actually fit the pattern of more extreme weather predicted by climate-change models: "What is 'normal' is changing. Extremes in weather are becoming more frequent, [whether] drought or heat wave or rainfall events," she says. "Here in Lubbock three years ago, we had the longest dry period in history, over 110 days without rain. And then the very next year, we had the most rain we've ever had in a 24-hour period."

"You can't say any one event is due to climate change," she says. "But we see this pattern all across the US, all across the world, where these extremes are getting more and more frequent in both directions."

Hayhoe, Farley, and Merritt all note that Evangelicals don't have to agree with scientists on every issue, such as when the earth was created or whether humans evolved from lower forms of life, in order to believe that climate change is happening and needs to be addressed.

Embracing the environment

Merritt hopes that even those Evangelicals who can't bring themselves to accept human-induced climate change will accept other parts of the environmental message to care for God's creation.

Harming God's creation is as destructive as "tearing a page out of the Bible," Merritt says. "We are asked by God to act to preserve the planet and to protect the people who depend on the planet's resources." The command in the book of Genesis for humans to care for the world "has never been revoked, ever, in Scripture," he says. From the very beginning of the Bible "we get a very clear picture that God has gone green, and He's never looked back."

The reason Evangelicals should care about climate change is "not because we worship the earth," Hayhoe says. It's recognizing that the impact is likely to be most severe in some of the most impoverished areas of the world.

"Doing something about climate change is loving our global neighbor," she says. "It's about caring about people who are already hurting around the world. And it's about caring for our children and future generations, who are going to inherit this earth that God has given us."

<http://www.csmonitor.com/Environment/2010/0325/Conservative-Evangelicals-embrace-God-and-green>

March 30, 2010

Nuns face guns, impunity in trying to save Amazon

By Bradley Brooks
Associated Press

PDT CARLINDA, Brazil (AP) -- The gunmen arrived in the Amazon dusk, circling the house where Sister Leonora was hiding, rifles and pistols poking out the windows of three muddy pickup trucks.

A violent death was meant for the diminutive 64-year-old Roman Catholic nun, who has spent decades defending poor, landless workers — and collecting countless threats from ranchers she blocked from stealing Amazon land.

Leonora Brunetto faced the fate of Brazil's renowned rain forest protector Chico Mendes and American nun Dorothy Stang, whose accused killer is scheduled for retrial Wednesday in the jungle city of Belem.

But before the gunmen could put her among the 1,200 activists, small farmers, judges, priests and others killed over preserving the rain forest since Mendes' murder in 1988, a car full of landless workers pulled up to defend Brunetto.

The gunmen left, opting to take their shot at the gray-haired woman another day. One of those who came to her rescue, though, was shot dead the next afternoon. As in many of the cases, his killer still walks free.

Impunity in the Amazon because of a weak judicial system and corruption among local officials is endemic, a problem not only for people like Brunetto, but for the Brazilian government trying to preserve a rain forest the size of the U.S. west of the Mississippi. More than 20 percent of the forest already has been destroyed.

Rancher Vitalmiro Moura, who is accused of ordering Stang's murder in 2005, served three years in prison before being acquitted in a retrial. Now prosecutors are trying to get a conviction again in a third trial, which his defense team is seeking to delay.

Among hundreds of cases of activist killings, Moura is the only accused mastermind imprisoned while he awaits retrial, according to the Catholic Land Pastoral, a watchdog group that tracks rural violence in Latin America's largest nation.

He has said he had nothing to do with Stang's killing and had no involvement with the land dispute that led to her death.

Stang prosecutor Edson Souza said bringing killers to justice and stopping the bloodshed is the only way Brazil will halt the destruction of the jungle.

"Without a doubt, leaders like Dorothy are targeted," Souza said. "If they get away with killing leaders like Dorothy, the poor rightly assume they could easily be murdered as well."

The main cause of deforestation, the government says, are ranchers who illegally clear jungle to graze cattle and grow soy — often using threats and violence to remove the poor farmers eking a living there.

The Brazilian government aims to give land titles to poor farmers, who some argue are less destructive to the forests because they have small plots and do less clearing. But the process has required people like Stang and Brunetto, who help locals stand up to intimidation against their claims on unused land.

The episode in 2007 of gunmen circling Brunetto's safe house was just one of many brushes with death she recounted as she showed The Associated Press around an area of Mato Grosso state where she works, raising the spirits of those who camp on unused property and wait years for titles.

A Brazilian who studied to join the convent from age 12, Brunetto used to travel only with armed military police. But she has stopped.

"I have many friends under death threats, but they have no protection," she said. "How can I lead people if I have protection and they don't? Besides, it's the people who protect me most."

Mato Grosso — "thick jungle" in Portuguese — was once rain forest but is now the breadbasket of Brazil with its vast soy plantations and cattle ranches.

The ranchers and farmers who rule the state live well, employing legions of landless farmworkers for a pittance. Those workers face hunger and disease in makeshift shelters built from scrap wood and black plastic, with no electricity or running water.

"A few with much, and many with so little," Brunetto said. She spoke at a dusty camp of squatters, who live at the edge of a local farmer's land they say is unproductive — and thus, according to Brazil's constitution, available for redistribution. "How can you fold your arms in front of this injustice? I can't."

Brunetto, 5 feet (1.5 meters) tall and 110 pounds (50 kilograms), walks through the camps in jeans and leather sandals, firmly shaking hands and giving hugs. She patiently listens as a shirtless man tells her about hothouse-grown plants residents sell for 50 cents each, then turns to a nearly toothless woman who worries about getting enough food to eat.

The squatters are star-struck.

"Sister Leonora is a warrior for the people," said Linda Maria de Jesus, a 59-year-old camp resident who was on the verge of tears at seeing Brunetto. "She is threatened; she is in a battle just like us. It raises our spirits to have her here."

Brunetto is rarely out of the watchful gaze of one hulking — though unarmed — poor farmer or another. They pick her up at bus stations, drive her 100 miles (160 kilometers) then hand her off like a sacred package to another rural worker, who will take her on to her destination.

She meets with local, state and federal officials to press the numerous cases of small farmers fighting for land. She helps impoverished, illiterate people work their way through the onerous process of winning a title to a piece of property.

"I'm always looking over my shoulder wherever I go," Brunetto said after offering the squatters praise for their makeshift plant nursery.

Souza, the prosecutor, has seen numerous killers walk free in neighboring Para, the Amazon region's most violent state, where the 73-year-old Stang was gunned down on a muddy dirt road. He argues she was ordered killed by Moura and fellow rancher Regivaldo Galvao because she was blocking them from obtaining land the government had given to a group of poor farmers.

The confessed gunman who shot her is serving a 27-year sentence in prison. Two other men were convicted as accomplices in 2005 and given 17-year sentences. Galvao has managed to remain free — but is scheduled to go to trial at the end of April.

Brazil is trying to bring law to the Amazon, mostly through increased environmental agent patrols the government says resulted in the lowest recorded levels of deforestation in 2009.

What remains to be seen is what can be done to protect those protecting the forest.

"I cannot lie and say I'm not scared," Brunetto said. "But at the same time I know God is with us. My two great protections are God and these people we help."

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2010/03/29/international/i230314D28.DTL>

March 31, 2010

Free flow for Bhagirathi as govt shelves 2 dams in upper reaches

By Nitin Sethi
The Times of India

NEW DELHI: Bhagirathi, one of the key tributaries of the Ganga, will now flow untamed and unchecked through the year for at least part of its stretch. In a decision that shows heightened sensitivity towards the environment and may have consequences for other hydroelectric projects,

the government has decided not to proceed with two projects -- the 381MW Bhaironghati and 480MW Pala-Maneri hydroelectric plants -- planned on the river that originates at Gaumukh.

There are indications that even the ongoing 600MW project at Loharinag-Pala may be shut down, with the government analyzing the environmental [costs](#) of discontinuing work on the mega dam.

The decision, taken last week by a three-member group set up by the PM, was prompted by religio-political and environmental considerations, and marks a big shift from the days when the government would disregard dissent on dams.

The group led by [finance](#) minister Pranab Mukherjee and comprising ministers for power and environment, Sushil Shinde and Jairam Ramesh respectively, has, in fact, decided to turn the entire 55-km stretch from Gaumukh to Loharinag-Pala as an eco-sensitive zone; in other words, a "no-go" area for dams.

In case the Loharinag-Pala project also gets a thumbs-down, the 'no dam' stretch will get extended to 155km -- a big victory for environmental activists and locals who have protested against the dangers of damming the lifeline of Uttarakhand.

Confirming the decision taken on March 25, environment minister Jairam Ramesh said, "It was taken out of respect for sentiments of faith and culture as well as technical questions raised about the impact of the dams."

The move by Congress is bound to resonate positively with a large section of Hindu votebank in the Gangetic belt as well as local communities in Uttarakhand and green groups that have been protesting against an array of dams being built on tributaries of the Ganga throughout the Uttarakhand hills. While dozens of other small and medium sized dams being built over other tributaries to Ganga might continue to raise the hackles of local communities and environmentalists, UPA's decision to stop construction on Bhagirathi is bound to go down as a signal of attitudinal change in government towards river management and hydro-projects.

It comes months after the first radical shift in policy-making when Ramesh had ordered an assessment of the cumulative impact of all planned hydro-projects on the river Teesta -- the lifeline of Sikkim. Ramesh had told TOI, "After Teesta, the government should look at cumulative assessment of projects on other river basins, such as that of Alaknanda."

The meeting on March 25 -- attended by the three ministers, the CMD of NTPC, power secretary and environment secretary -- noted that environment issues and religious sentiments were involved in the concern about the impact of such projects on the river's flow.

While the decision on the yet-to-start projects was easy, minutes of the meeting show that considerable deliberation occurred on the Loharinag-Pala project on which Rs 600 crore has already been spent.

But it was noted that a decision to maintain an uninterrupted flow of 16 cumecs of water at the

Loharinag-Pala barrage had been taken earlier by the power ministry in order to respect social and religious sentiments attached to the river. This automatically entailed that the dam would need to be shut down for five months a year when the water levels go down in summer.

Questions on the [financial](#) viability too weighed against the project when the decision was taken to constitute a committee of experts drawn from IIT, Central Water Commission, NTPC and the environment ministry to submit a report within six weeks on the possible environmental consequences of abandoning the project midway.

Listening to a petition in May 2009, the Uttarakhand high court had asked the NGRBA to decide the fate of the dams on the river. In October 2009, the National Ganga River Basin Authority chaired by the PM had asked a committee comprising the environment and power secretaries to assess the social and ecological impact of the dams. The report was submitted shortly after, recommending that plans for the two projects be shelved but indicated that the ongoing project be continued in view of the [investments](#) already made.

The environment minister then met experts and non-official members on board NGRBA in January 2010 to discuss the report. Another team sent by the ministry for site inspection found violations of environmental clearance conditions at the dam site.

With the power and environment ministry still not agreeing on the three dams, in February, the PM indicated that the matter be resolved by Pranab Mukherjee along with the ministers of power and environment.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Free-flow-for-Bhagirathi-as-govt-shelves-2-dams-in-upper-reaches/articleshow/5744691.cms>

April 1, 2010

Taking on Tarmageddon

The tar sands are the most destructive project on earth – and the campaign to shut them down is gathering momentum. Jess Worth reports from the thick of it.

By Jess Worth
NewInternationalist

‘If local indigenous communities tell us they don’t want the Sunrise Project, then of course we won’t do it,’ Peter Mather, boss of BP UK, said to me earnestly.

I could barely believe my ears. Was the oil giant, poised to enter the tar sands for the first time, really claiming it would be prepared to back down in the face of local opposition? My strange evening had just got stranger.

I was in Oxford's swanky Randolph Hotel. It was last October, and I'd gone with a group of student activists to BP's flagship graduate recruitment event. The company had really pulled the stops out, lavishing free wine and canapés on around 100 engineering and geology students, perhaps in the hope of giving them a taste of what life could be like if they worked for the transnational.

The fact that the head of BP UK himself was there to deliver the slick presentation told us how important this event was. The oil industry as a whole is facing a huge human resource crisis, with the average age of employees 49 years and the average retirement age 55. The industry is currently an estimated 100,000 people short.¹ Getting good staff is key to a company's survival.

So Peter Mather can't have been best pleased when – as soon as he started speaking to Oxford's *crème de la crème* about how dynamic, green and successful his company was – two of our gang jumped up, took the stage, and delivered an alternative presentation. 'There is no clearer demonstration of BP's determination to ignore the risks of climate change than its decision to invest in Canada's tar sands,' they told the bemused audience who, like most people in Britain, seemed largely unaware that the tar sands even existed.

'Extracting oil from these sludgy deposits produces three to five times as much greenhouse gas as conventional oil,' the young campaigners continued, laying out some of the jaw-dropping facts surrounding what has come to be known as the most destructive project on earth.

'The tar sands are the biggest industrial development in the world, and the second fastest source of deforestation. They are leaving a hole the size of England in the Canadian wilderness. The lakes of toxic waste sludge are visible from space!'

Questions from the floor were dominated by concerns about the environmental and human impact of tar sands. Why was BP – which had so famously rebranded itself as 'Beyond Petroleum' – choosing to enter the most carbon-intensive fossil fuel development on the planet, with a massive 200,000 barrels per day extraction project known as 'Sunrise'? Peter Mather's defence was spirited but unconvincing.

Afterwards, I cornered him. Sunrise had been put on hold the year before due to the plummeting price of oil. BP still hadn't taken the final decision to proceed. Mather wouldn't be drawn on when this would be, but when I pushed him on the widespread opposition amongst local First Nations communities, he made the extraordinary claim that if they didn't want the project, it wouldn't go ahead. 'Let's put that theory to the test...', I thought to myself.

Our brush with BP last October marked the opening salvo in the newest battlefield to shut down the tar sands. Since then, opposition has mushroomed and the company, although still sitting on the fence about a start-date, has come out fighting. Right now, both sides are rallying their troops

for what is shaping up to be a defining moment in the history of humanity's doomed love affair with oil.

Toxic sacrifice

I first became aware of the tar sands a year ago, when I attended an indigenous climate summit in Alaska and met a group of activists from the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN), a trailblazing organization that links and supports struggles by indigenous communities against environmental destruction and the fossil fuel industry.

One of them – Clayton Thomas-Muller – showed me photos on his laptop of what he called the 'toxic sacrifice zone' in northern Alberta. It blew my mind. The vast black scars that had replaced swathes of pristine boreal forest – the world's second-most important carbon sink after the Amazon. The tens of thousands of workers, flown in from around the world, living in work camps and in the boomtown of Fort McMurray which is experiencing intense social problems as a result. The tailings ponds of waste so poisonous that when 1,600 ducks accidentally landed on one they all died instantly.² The cancers, respiratory disease and other illnesses being experienced by the local First Nations communities on whose ancestral land all this is taking place. (See 'I'll die doing this', page 12.)

'How could this be happening?' I wondered, incredulous. 'And in Canada, of all places?' I'd always thought of Canada as the US's far more sensible, progressive, environmentally responsible neighbour. It came as a real shock to discover the Canadian Government was positioning the country as the new Saudi Arabia. (See 'Canada's curse', page 8). 'How could you not have known?' asked Eriel Tchekwie Deranger, another member of the IEN crew, equally incredulous – she has been fighting the tar sands and its tragic impact on her community all her adult life (see page 12).

I was embarrassed at my ignorance, and felt a responsibility to do something. When I got back to Oxford, I did a bit of digging and discovered that, while the tar sands are being extracted in Alberta, they are being funded, to a significant degree, by British banks, financial institutions and corporations. Shell, BP and the Royal Bank of Scotland are all major players, investing heavily in this last, desperate attempt to scrape the bottom of the oil barrel now conventional sources are running dry.

Furthermore, I learnt, the project could tip us over the edge into climate catastrophe all by itself. Scientists and civil society organizations around the world have called for atmospheric carbon to be stabilized at below 350 parts per million (ppm) in order to avoid the worst impacts of runaway climate change. Current levels are already at 387ppm and rising at about 2ppm annually. The full exploitation of the massive Canadian tar sands and US tar shale reserves (see 'Rock that burns' p. 16) could increase atmospheric carbon in the region of between 49 and 65ppm.³

If the tar sands aren't curbed, I realized, it's hard to see how we have a chance of stabilizing the climate before it's too late. And right now, indigenous people are dying due to pollution from this 'bloody oil'. It's a question of climate justice. We have no choice – we have to shut the tar sands down.

So, since returning, I have thrown myself into the effort to internationalize the campaign. Along with a growing band of ‘tarsandistas’ I have helped organize visits to Britain by Clayton, Eriel and others from affected First Nations communities. They have travelled the country, telling their story at activist gatherings, student conferences, Parliamentary meetings and cultural events. They have led protests and encouraged organizations to take on the campaign.

Awareness about the tar sands in Britain has exploded, and the Canadian press has hung on our every move, reporting to their public – many of whom are mortified – that Canada’s reputation is taking a battering across the pond.

What are Tar Sands?

Tar sands are basically oily soil. They are sticky deposits of bitumen mixed with sand and clay, which require enormous quantities of energy and water, and several stages of industrial processing, to extract and turn into useable crude oil.

Canada’s tar sands

- · Canada’s tar sands are the biggest energy project in the world, currently producing 1.3 million barrels of oil a day.
- · Largely located in Alberta, the tar sands cover 140,000 km² – an area larger than England.
- · Canada has the second largest oil reserves in the world, after Saudi Arabia.
- · Canada is the biggest supplier of oil to the US, the world’s largest oil consumer.

‘Back to Petroleum’

The effort to sever Britain’s links with the tar sands will reach a crescendo in the next few months. A coalition of shareholders in Shell and BP has filed resolutions at both companies’ Annual General Meetings, questioning the wisdom of investing in such an unsustainable and risky enterprise, and pointing out that potential First Nations lawsuits and pending climate legislation in the US and elsewhere could make tar sands the costliest mistake Big Oil ever made.

Furthermore, industry analysts are starting to question the economics underpinning tar sands oil. The rationale has always been that, although tar sands are much more expensive to exploit than conventional crude, the price of oil will continue to rise as production elsewhere peaks, meaning bumper profits on the enormous upfront investment in the medium- to long-term. But there is growing evidence that global oil demand may peak in the next decade, as consumers and industry refuse to pay over a certain price per barrel and turn instead to efficiency savings and alternative energy sources.⁴ The foregone conclusion that humanity will always be addicted to oil may, in fact, be wrong.

As shareholders hold meetings behind closed doors, trying to decide whether to support the tar sands resolutions, a coalition of NGOs and trade unions – of which New Internationalist is part – is encouraging people all over the world to ask their pension funds, insurance companies and

banks to cast their votes (see page 20 for how you can do this). Meanwhile, representatives from affected First Nations communities are making plans to be at the AGMs in person to put BP and Shell on the spot over indigenous rights.

At the same time, campaigners are increasingly turning to direct action to target these companies. Last September, Greenpeace blockaded Shell's massive Albian Sands mine in Alberta, disrupting work for 30 hours – followed swiftly by another action which occupied a Shell construction site. In Britain, activists are gearing up for a 'Fortnight of Shame' in the run-up to BP's AGM (see page 20).

The two oil giants have responded very differently to this sudden escalation of pressure. Shell, already heavily invested in extraction projects and in it for the long haul, surprised everyone by announcing in late January that it had scaled back its plans for expansion⁵ – although it will still be increasing production by a planet-cooking 100,000 barrels of tar sands oil a day.⁶

BP, however, seems to have belatedly discovered a taste for bitumen. Until now the only major oil multinational to stay out of the tar sands, it has clearly decided to go Back to Petroleum – with a vengeance. In the same week as Shell was announcing its change of heart, Anne Drinkwater, the head of BP Canada, flew to London. Joining forces with my sparring partner Peter Mather, they unleashed a high-level charm offensive, giving Sunrise the hard-sell to investors and NGOs. A few days later, it was reported that the company is bidding to buy another, even bigger, tar sands lease.⁷

Greenwashing the ungreenable

How on earth can BP, a company that has spent millions of PR dollars shoring up its claims to be producing 'energy that is affordable, secure and doesn't damage the environment', justify this move into Tarmageddon? By claiming the Sunrise Project will be 'green', of course – a last-ditch strategy increasingly being employed by major tar sands operators and the Canadian Government, all of whom are spinning furiously in the face of criticism of their ecosystem-trashing ways.

Needless to say, it's nonsense. There's plenty of evidence to suggest the Sunrise method of mining deeper deposits, known as 'in situ', is even more energy- and water-intensive than the much uglier surface mines, and its greenhouse gas emissions will be up to three times higher. Solemn promises to introduce carbon capture and storage (CCS) sometime in the future have been branded a 'dangerous myth' by WWF and The Co-operative, who conclude that this unproven technology is unlikely to reduce emissions from the tar sands significantly until at least 2050.⁸ And CCS, even if it worked, would do nothing to prevent the toxic by-products that are killing people in indigenous communities downstream.

BP claims that because Sunrise is not a surface-mining operation there will be no tailings ponds and minimal damage to the ecosystem. This is also just plain wrong. The fragmentation of the boreal forest by well-pads, pipelines and processing facilities for this type of operation devastates bird and animal habitats.⁹ Alberta's caribou herds, according to the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, are 'almost doomed' as a result.¹⁰

Furthermore, there is still a serious risk of water pollution. Sunrise, like many 'in situ' projects, is right on top of Canada's biggest aquifer. BP cannot guarantee it won't be contaminated, given that accidental steam blowouts keep occurring in similar developments. Rick Boucher, vice-president of the local Métis Nation, fears that 'it's just a matter of time before an accident causes injury or death, and pollution of this massive underground freshwater system.'¹¹

There is no way to 'green' the tar sands – we have to leave them in the ground. So now the task at hand is to force BP to drop its plans for Sunrise. Because if this were to happen, it would not simply mean that one potential project amongst many had been thwarted. If a combination of investor, public and First Nations pressure is successfully mobilized against BP it would send shock-waves through the entire oil industry and could even spell the beginning of the end for this particularly filthy source of fuel.

The effort to shut down the tar sands is shaping up to be one of the iconic struggles of our age – and it is starting to spread beyond Canada to every country that has major industrial and financial interests in the sprawling gigaproject. The stakes couldn't be higher. Do we want oil from tar sands, or do we want a future? It's as simple as that.

Tar sands facts

Future expansion

- · \$86 billion has been invested since 2000 in the construction of mines, upgraders, pipelines, refineries and steam plants, with \$125bn in development underway or planned.¹
- · By 2020 Canada's tar sands could produce more greenhouse gases than Austria, Portugal, Ireland or Denmark.
- · The plan is for production to increase from today's 1.3 million barrels per day to 3-5 million by 2030.

Resource-intensive

Tar sands are the most energy-intensive fossil fuel in commercial production:

- · The extraction process emits three to five times more CO₂ than conventional oil.²
 - · Enough natural gas is used in the tar sands every day to heat 3.2 million Canadian homes for 24 hours. The development will be using enough gas to heat all 11.5 million Canadian homes by 2012.³
 - · It takes 3 to 7 barrels of water to produce a single barrel of oil. That's between 230 and 530 million cubic metres a year. By comparison, the city of Toronto, with 2.5 million residents, uses 450 million cubic metres a year.
 - · Giant toxic 'tailings ponds' of waste cover 130 square km and are visible from space.
1. Unless indicated otherwise, all statistics are taken from 'Dirty oil: how the tar sands are fueling the global climate crisis' by Andrew Nikiforuk, Greenpeace, September 2009
 2. Environment Canada, 2007, National Inventory Report Greenhouse Gas Sources and Sinks in Canada 1990-2005

3. 'Oil Sands Fever: the environmental implications of Canada's Oil Sands Rush', Dan Woynillowicz, Pembina Institute, November 2005, p.15
1. <http://sublimemagazine.com/view/a/29/Going,Going,Gone....html>
2. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/syncrude-back-in-court-over-hundreds-of-dead-ducks/article1485073/>
3. Based on calculations made in the report 'Unconventional Oil – Scraping the bottom of the barrel?', WWF, July 2009, page 42. See: http://assets.panda.org/downloads/unconventionaloilfinal_lowres.pdf
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April 3, 2010

There's nothing like a dunking in dirty water

By Jason Koutsoukis

The Sydney Morning Herald

Qasr Al-Yahud - One of the best places to observe miracles these days is on the banks of the River Jordan, where, the Bible says, John baptised Jesus Christ and declared him the Messiah.

The miracle today is that every Easter thousands of people try to emulate Jesus and dunk themselves in water so foul.

For the fabled tributary that flows from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea - chosen by Rupert Murdoch for the recent baptism of his daughters Grace and Chloe - is now little more than an unholy brew of raw sewage, chemical run-off and brackish agricultural leftovers.

No matter, say the hordes of Christian pilgrims who have been flocking this week to Qasr al-Yahud, purported to be the exact site of Jesus' baptism.

Before stripping down to his underpants, John Ferraro, 30, a Romanian engineer, told the *Herald* of his firm belief that this was the cleanest water in the world. "This is the water that Jesus was washed in," he said. "This water belongs to God. Why would God want to make anyone sick with this holy water?"

Watching a euphoric Mr Ferraro splash around the River Jordan as if it was his bathtub, few could doubt his sincerity. But when he started gargling the muddy concoction, some might reasonably have questioned his mental health.

"Beautiful," Mr Ferraro exclaimed. "This is one of the most special moments of my life." And his friend Marian Revoka, 52, also from Romania, could not wait to join him.

"This is where Jesus began the journey to bring us all a better life," Ms Revoka said. "We are in a sacred place."

Back at the Jerusalem Medical Laboratory in Sultan Suleiman Street, in East Jerusalem, Wail Siaj was not so sure about the water's nourishing properties.

"This is a very dirty mixture," Dr Siaj said, examining droplets of a river water sample under his microscope. "Lots of very unhealthy looking organisms."

On behalf of the *Herald*, Dr Siaj is growing a culture that will help him identify what kinds of organisms are in the water.

"The very high likelihood of the presence of *E.coli* means that it can come from only one source - human stools."

The Middle East organiser for Friends of the Earth, Mira Edelstein, who is leading a campaign in Israel to rehabilitate the Jordan, said the waterway is an environmental catastrophe.

After the diversion of 90 per cent of the 1.3 billion cubic metres of water that would normally flow down the river each year by the governments of Syria, Jordan and Israel, Ms Edelstein said all that is left is basically 100 million cubic metres of untreated sewage.

"With Israel, Jordan and Syria each grabbing as much clean water as they can, it is ironically the sewage that is keeping the river alive today," she said.

The Israeli environmental organisation, Zalul, said the area along the river with the poorest water quality is the baptism site of Qasr al-Yehud and that pilgrims entering the river do so at great risk to their health.

The faithful are not deterred.

"We're not drinking the water," said a Romanian tour guide, who would give only her first name, Ramona. "I went to Kings Canyon in Australia where the water wasn't so clean and I survived."

Melia Yokic, 40, a priest from Belgrade, was diving in the water, enjoying his 10th visit.

The Israeli authorities open the gates to Qasr al-Yahud at special times of the year and Easter is among the busiest. On Tuesday alone they received 3000 pilgrims. "I'm here all the way from Wollongong," said John Turgrul, 73, a mechanic. "Very special," he said.

So would he be dunking his head all the way under? "I'm not so sure," Mr Turgrul said. "Let's see what the wife does first."

<http://www.smh.com.au/world/theres-nothing-like-a-dunking-in-dirty-water-20100402-rjxe.html>

April 5, 2010

Taiwanese urged to worship online to protect environment

By AFP

The Independent Environment

Taiwan's government on Friday urged the public to stop burning incense sticks and ritual money in honour of the dead and opt instead for online worshipping to better protect the [environment](#)

The call came ahead of Monday's Tomb Sweeping Festival, when ethnic Chinese traditionally visit the graves of their ancestors to burn incense and paper offerings.

The practice not only worsens the island's air pollution but could also cause fires, warned the cabinet-level [Environmental](#) Protection Administration.

"We can now choose to pay homage to our ancestors in a modern and environmentally friendly way by worshipping online or donating the money meant for the offerings to charities," it said in a statement.

Taiwan has vowed to cut its greenhouse gases to 2008 levels by 2020.

Studies have found that burning paper money releases a large amount of carbon dioxide, one of the main gases held responsible for [global climate](#) change.

Other substances released when paper money is burned include benzene, methylbenzene and ethylbenzene - which can cause cancer and other diseases.

The practice originated in Taoism, whose followers believe burning paper [money](#) - and everything from paper cars to paper Viagra - will ensure their dead ancestors are comfortable in the after-life.

Environmental agencies have also offered to collect the paper money from households and temples to burn in state incinerators that can treat the exhaust.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/taiwanese-urged-to-worship-online-to-protect-environment-1935981.html>

April 6, 2010

Church asked to join climate change program

By Ellalyn B. De Vera
Manilla Bulletin Publishing Corporation

As it acknowledges the influence of the Roman Catholic Church in calling for significant and immediate action on pressing environmental issues, the Climate Change Commission (CCC) Tuesday asked the church and civil society to actively participate in the creation of the National Framework Strategy and Program on Climate Change.

"We are asking you to participate dynamically in forming the National Framework Strategy for the preservation of Mother Earth," said Presidential Adviser on Global Warming and Climate Change Secretary Heherson Alvarez, also vice chairman of the Commission, during the second leg of the Climate Change Congress of the Philippines (CCCP) in San Mateo, Rizal.

The CCC was created under the Republic Act 9729 or the Philippine Climate Change Act of 2009, which primarily aims to mainstream the formulation of a government climate change

policy through a National Framework Strategy and Program on Climate Change that will serve as the country's blueprint "for climate change planning, research and development, extension, and monitoring of activities to protect vulnerable communities from the adverse effects of climate change."

RA 9729 states that the Framework shall be formulated through extensive consultations of stakeholders, and based on climate change vulnerabilities, specific adaptation needs, and mitigation potential, and in accordance with the international agreements.

The first CCCP-led national consultation on climate change was held in the Visayas last March.

The CCCP, a civil society group under the auspices of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), is convened by Cagayan de Oro Bishop Antonio J. Ledesma and co-convened by former Commission on Elections Chairman Christian Monsod.

Earlier, the CCC signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the CCCP, the Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for the joint conduct of the Inter-Island Consultations on Climate Change, results of which will be submitted to the CCC as inputs for the Framework Strategy.

Alvarez stressed that with the Commission's campaign on decarbonization, local government units (LGUs) should also strictly implement proper waste disposal in the Metropolis, which he called "a factory of methane."

"We are asking the developed countries for deep and early cut to save the Earth from disasters brought about by climate change, but here in the country we cannot even dispose our garbage properly," he said.

He pointed out that improper garbage disposal produces methane, which is 21 times more disastrous than carbon dioxide, greenhouse gases that we release into the atmosphere which trap heat, causing global warming and climate change.

<http://www.mb.com.ph/articles/251413/church-asked-join-climate-change-program>

April 6, 2010

Hindus ask rich nations to do more for environment

Merinews

Hindus want affluent countries of the world to do more for environment in view of the global ecological crisis.

Acclaimed Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement in Nevada, United States of America, said that richer nations should lead the way and show responsibility by cutting greenhouse gases and atmospheric ozone concentrations and tackling global warming.

Zed, who is president of Universal Society of Hinduism, argued that world's poor were most vulnerable to the environmental problems resulting from climate change. Senseless uses of natural resources, extravagance, greed, etc, were some of the major causes of this ecological crisis.

Rajan Zed further said that religions should also come forward to do their share of tackling global warming and persuading others on this issue. "We as leaders of various religions of the world should fulfill our obligations by voicing the environmental issues. Religions should not stay silent spectators to threatening ecological crisis faced by humanity," Zed stressed and urged all world religious leaders, religions and denominations to openly bless environmental causes and develop a global partnership on this subject.

Zed pointed out that ancient Hindu scriptures, especially Atharva-Veda, were highly respectful of mother nature.

<http://www.merineews.com/article/hindus-ask-rich-nations-to-do-more-for-environment/15803250.shtml>

April 15, 2010

Environment: A Different Kind of Green

By Kafil Yamin
Inter Press Service

BOGOR, Indonesia - The colour green has long been associated with Islam, but if some recent Muslim visitors here could have their way, it's a link that could intensify some more in the future.

For three years now, representatives of Muslim communities across the globe have been holding an annual conference on climate change in an effort to stage a new kind of 'Green Revolution'.

And while the meeting that was held here Apr. 9 to 10 failed to form an umbrella group that

would take care primarily of coordinating Islamic green initiatives worldwide, it nevertheless produced the 'Bogor Declaration' that among others urges the influential Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to set up a special council on climate change.

Proponents of the annual gathering have pointed out that with Muslims making up one-fifth of the world's population, coordinated action among them toward a greener planet could only have a profound impact on easing global warming woes.

They also say that Muslims should have a stronger voice in global discussions on climate change, and should take the initiative to implement environmentally sound policies in their own communities.

Mahmoud Akeef, one of the initiators of the Muslim Action on Climate Change, told IPS that a faith-based plan for the environment makes perfect sense. He pointed out, "We have examples of best practice of taking care of the environment in the past. The Koran and examples shown by Prophet Mohammad carry the strong message about the unavoidable need to keep nature balanced."

Last year's conference, held in Istanbul, even resulted in a seven-year action plan that Indonesian environmental activist Fachrudin Mangunjaya says was inspired by "Joseph's proposition to make preparation for the seven-year drought that he interpreted from the Pharaoh's dream".

An international 'waqf' (alms) institution is supposed to be established to finance the implementation of that plan, which includes the 'Green Hajj' project that aims to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, more environmentally friendly.

Research by Dr Mawli Izzidie, a senior lecturer in Islamic Studies at the University of Wales, Lampeter, has found that around 100 million plastic bottles are left on the annual Hajj sites in Mecca every year, as well as in hotels and Hajj camps around the Ka'bah compound.

"The packaging of food consumed by three million pilgrims is carelessly discarded," noted Mawli, a key figure behind the seven-year action plan. "This has to change. Two years from now, we are determined to make Hajj pilgrimage free of plastic bottles."

The plan also calls for 'environmental' labelling of 'halal' goods. Explained Mawli: "This will categorise the environmental effects that goods have and each will be graded as to how green they are."

But while the participants at the meeting here were unable to flesh out the 'Green Hajj' some more, they did manage to declare Bogor as the latest among the so-called 'Muslim Green Cities'.

Previously, Sala in Morocco, Darul Ifta in Egypt, and Medina in Saudi Arabia had also been named as such.

Being named a 'Muslim Green City' does not necessarily mean the place is already one, but refers more to what it can and should become.

While huge trees still grace Bogor, for example, this West Javanese city shows signs of pressure from an increasing population, unchecked industrial development, and poor urban planning.

Locals also dub Bogor as 'kota seribu angkot', which means "city with thousands of 'angkot'," or minivans. These popular angkot clog Bogor's streets and pollute the air with their fumes.

Those at the conference, though, seemed optimistic about Bogor's chances of cleaning itself up. Akeef also said, "We will develop our own model of green city in Muslim countries -- a city that has low carbon dioxide emission, low carbon food, clean transportation that use clean energy."

Still, seven years may be too short for a Green Revolution to take place, since it is not easy change individuals' daily behaviour.

Major Muslim-initiated environmental projects often have to look outside the Muslim world for support as well. The Muslim Action Plan for Climate Change itself has as its main supporters the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, Earth-Mate Dialogue Centre and Association of Religion and Conservation.

Here in Indonesia, an exemplary Muslim grassroots project that puts Islamic teaching on the environment into practice also won support not only from a Muslim organisation, but from the World Bank and some secular non- government groups.

In the last five years, the project has seen 'pesantren' or Muslim boarding schools getting involved in land rehabilitation, in cooperation with tens of thousands of villagers. The 'pesantren' have also incorporated into their curricula teachings that reflect human beings' close relationship with the land, including agriculture and animal husbandry.

Local Muslim activist Amany Lubis, however, said that perhaps Muslims should just focus on the work itself.

"Why don't we just do what we are supposed to do?" she asked. "When we start doing the good things, we don't have to think who support us, where they come from, or why most Muslims have poor environmental awareness."

"Just do it," she said.

<http://www.ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=51052>

April 19, 2010

World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth Kicks Off in Bolivia

By Robert S. Eshelman
The Huffington Post

International climate change negotiations will take a significant turn this week when environmental justice and indigenous rights organizations from 150 nations join government representatives and several heads of state for the [World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth](#).

Bolivian President Evo Morales, who proposed hosting the conference in early January following the failure of UN climate talks in Copenhagen to produce a sufficient comprehensive climate agreement, will open the conference on Tuesday. Panel discussions will follow, continuing through to the close of the conference on Thursday, with participants including Bill McKibben, NASA scientist Jim Hansen, Martin Khor, G77 + China negotiator Lumumba Di Aping, and Vandana Shiva. Throughout the conference, seventeen working groups will convene to discuss issues ranging from deforestation and climate migrants to the rights of indigenous peoples and developing technologies for poor and low-lying nations to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

The goal of the conference, taking place just outside of Cochabamba, Bolivia, is multi-faceted: to analyze the structural causes of climate change, propose alternative models for living more harmoniously within the ecosystem, discuss the Bolivian Government's proposal for a Universal Declaration for the Rights of Mother Earth, build a mechanism on an international referendum on climate change, and develop a proposal for an international Climate Justice Court.

The *Guardian's* dependable environment correspondent John Vidal, along with Andres Schipani, take stock of what lies ahead during the conference and its potential impact on international climate negotiations. They [quote](#) Bolivia's ambassador to the U.N. Pablo Salon:

“The only way to get climate negotiations back on track, not just for Bolivia or other countries, but for all of life, biodiversity, our Mother Earth, is to put civil society back into the process. The only thing that can save mankind from a [climate] tragedy is the exercise of global democracy.” The Bolivian climate conference occurs at a pivotal moment in international climate change negotiations. The UNFCCC process has come under attack, particularly by the United States and several European countries, which have criticized its consensus-based decision making process, calling it unwieldy and empowering small nations such as the Sudan or Bolivia to hold-up implementation of the Copenhagen Accord.

As the Bolivian conference gets underway, another conference is coming to a close. The U.S. State Department, this week convened a two-day meeting of the [Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate](#), a group comprised of the 17 leading global economies. The U.S. is seeking to link any commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to other leading economies' commitments to do the same, particularly China, India, and Brazil. This is a significant departure from the historic burden placed upon rich nations under the Kyoto Protocol to limit their greenhouse gas emissions, while developing nations need only reduce the carbon intensity of their economies.

Writing in the *Miami Herald*, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Energy Secretary Steven Chu [discuss](#) the role of the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas in addressing climate change.

While the U.S. will use the MEF and the ECPA to spotlight how small group and bilateral discussions among leading economies, rather than the 192-nation U.N. process, is the best way forward on climate negotiations, participants at the Bolivian conference argue that the conversation about, and the process for, developing strategies to address climate change needs to be expanded, not narrowed, bringing more voices into the debate around climate change.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-s-eshelman/world-peoples-conference_b_543211.html

April 22, 2010

Green Economy Takes Centre Stage at UNEP 2010 Champions of the Earth Awards

Winners from Afghanistan, China, Guyana, Japan and the Maldives are Recognized as Pillars of Transition to a 21st Century Green Economy

United Nations Environment Programme

Seoul (Republic of Korea) - The 2010 Champions of the Earth, the United Nations' highest awards for environmental leadership, were announced today.

The six winners, drawn from the worlds of government, science, business and entertainment, each exemplify how action, inspiration, personal commitment and creativity can catalyze a transition to a low carbon, resource efficient 21st-century Green Economy.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director, today announced the winners of this year's UNEP Champions of the Earth awards as:

- The President of Guyana and passionate forestry and ecosystem infrastructure proponent, **Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo**
- The President of the Maldives and international climate change campaigner, **His Excellency Mohamed Nasheed**
- Afghanistan's Director General of the National Environmental Protection Agency and avid sustainability advocate, **Prince Mostapha Zaher**
- Japanese earth scientist and pioneer of research into how the oceans cycle carbon, **Dr. Taro Takahashi**
- Chinese actress and popular green life-style guru, **Ms. Zhou Xun**
- American venture capitalist, green energy entrepreneur and co-founder of Sun Microsystems, **Vinod Khosla**.

The trophies were presented at a gala event in Seoul, Republic of Korea during Earth Day and in conjunction with the Business for the Environment Global Summit (B4E), which is being attended by more than 1,000 representatives from business, government, and civil society.

Mr. Steiner said: "The six winners represent some of the key pillars upon which society can build Green Growth and a development path to unite rather than divide six billion people. Entrepreneur Vinod Khosla has made it a personal mission to realize a low-carbon path by establishing investments in clean and renewable energy start-ups."

"President Nasheed is not only an articulate voice for the vulnerable and the poor facing the challenges of global warming, but a politician who is showcasing to the rest of the world how a transition to climate neutrality can be achieved and how all nations, no matter how big or how small, can contribute."

"Dr Takahashi has pioneered the science of climate change as it relates to the seas and oceans. In doing so, his work not only underlines the threats but also the policy choices governments and investors must make to ensure the marine realm remains healthy, productive and an ally against climate change."

"Prince Zaher has transformed environmental policy and laid the foundation for sustainability in one of the most challenging countries on the planet at this moment in history. He has balanced the day-to-day realities of Afghanistan with a determination that his country will have clean air and healthy water - backed by laws - upon which a sustainable and peaceful society can be built."

"Zhou Xun is an actress and one of, if not the, most popular and acclaimed celebrities in China. Her well publicized statements, advice and life-style choices are influencing millions of fans to become more environmentally-conscious citizens and consumers."

"Last but not least, President Jagdeo is a powerful advocate of the need to conserve and more intelligently manage the planet's natural and nature-based assets. He has recognized more than most the multiple Green Economy benefits of forests in terms of combating climate change, but also in terms of development; employment; improved water supplies and the conservation of biodiversity," said Mr. Steiner.

The awards, first established in 2004, recognize achievements in areas of: Entrepreneurial Vision, Policy and Leadership, Science and Innovation, Inspiration and Action, and a special category for 2010, Biodiversity and Ecosystems Management.

The Champions of the Earth is an international environment award given out every year by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The award recognizes individuals who embody commitment and vision towards environmental leadership through their action and their influence. To date, the award has recognized 34 outstanding environmental leaders.

ENTREPRENEURIAL VISION - Khosla Ventures / Vinod Khosla

A legendary venture capitalist and the co-founder of Sun Microsystems, Vinod Khosla has been dubbed Silicon Valley's 'Mr. Green'. In September 2009, Khosla's venture capital firm, Khosla Ventures, announced it had raised US\$1.1 billion in a "green fund" that would be used to spur development of renewable energy and other clean technologies.

The fund came at a time when venture capital investments in green technology were just beginning to recover from a precipitous fall prompted by the global economic collapse in 2008. Of the US\$1.1 billion, US\$800 million will place investments in more established technologies while US\$275 million will be used to make smaller investments in earlier stage technology companies. At the time of its announcement, the fund was the largest launched since 2007 and one of the largest ever launched for clean technologies.

Mr. Khosla has begun several environmental start-ups to try to reduce the world's dependence on petroleum. He says the burgeoning revolution in oil alternatives will be bigger - far bigger - than the internet revolution of yesteryear.

In his personal life, Khosla is carbon-neutral. He offsets his own carbon emissions with TerraPass.com and Carbonfund.org, and says he will soon be carbon-negative.

In January 2010, Bill Gates announced he has invested in Khosla's green technology fund. When asked about Khosla, Gates said: "He is backing some great entrepreneurs. I get some exposure to them as part of that. Innovation is called for in a big way."

POLICY AND LEADERSHIP - President Mohamed Nasheed, Maldives

His Excellency Mohamed Nasheed has been the President of the Maldives since 2008. He has received global recognition for his efforts to curb climate change and raise awareness of environmental issues, particularly as it related to island-nations.

He featured prominently in the international media in the run-up to, and during, the United Nations climate change conference in Copenhagen in December. During that time, he even convened an underwater cabinet meeting on the ocean floor to highlight the grave climate change-related threats to the Maldives.

President Nasheed has pledged to make the Maldives the world's first carbon-neutral country by 2020. He has warned that Maldivians may be forced to seek a new homeland should rising sea levels make the Maldivians' archipelago uninhabitable.

Moreover, he is campaigning for the protection of coral reefs that helped save his country from the devastating 2005 tsunami by absorbing the brunt of the powerful earthquake-triggered wave.

President Nasheed, a former journalist who was jailed several times for his articles, formed the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) while in self-proclaimed exile. He returned to the Maldives in 2005 to begin promoting the MDP. In 2008, President Nasheed won the country's first ever multiparty presidential election by popular vote.

He has received several awards in recognition of his pioneering environmental work: Time Magazine named him a 2009 Hero of the Environment, and 'The Age of Stupid', the film on the devastating effects of climate change, presented him with an award at the film's global premiere in New York City during Global Climate Week in September 2009.

President Nasheed continues to urge various leaders from developing or vulnerable countries like the Maldives to break away from carbon-based growth and to embrace green technologies for a carbon neutral future.

SCIENCE AND INNOVATION - Dr. Taro Takahashi, Earth Scientist, Japan

After earning a degree in engineering, a doctorate in Earth Science and a professorship at Queens College and Columbia University, Dr. Taro Takahashi is now a Senior Scholar at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory of Columbia University.

Dr. Takahashi has devoted five decades of his life to discovering how carbon cycles through oceans, land and atmosphere, and his work is the foundation upon which all carbon-cycle research is now built.

Dr. Takahashi found that the majority of global CO₂ resided in the ocean. He also made many important observations of oceanic absorption and its variation depending on water temperature and seasons.

Dr. Takahashi explains that his main research "is aimed at understanding the fate of industrial CO₂ released in the air" and hopes that his study "will lead to a better understanding and hence

to a reliable prediction of the oceans' capacity to absorb industrial CO₂". The idea is to estimate the extent of the capacity of the oceans as a climate regulator.

With financial support from the Ford Company, which recognized him with the Ford Award in 2004, he has been studying how climate change may alter interactions between land and oceans, as well as the solutions for mitigating these alterations.

"He initiated the methods we all use," said Richard Feely, an oceanographer at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration who studies El Niño and carbon cycling. "Just about everyone who has worked with him has benefited from his wisdom and advice."

INSPIRATION AND ACTION

1. **Prince Mostapha Zaher, Afghanistan**
2. **Zhou Xun, Actor and Environment Advocate, China**
3. **Prince Mostapha Zaher, Afghanistan**

Afghanistan's 46-year-old Director General of the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), Prince Mostapha Zaher has laid the foundation for a sustainable and peaceful future in Afghanistan. For the past five years, he has worked tirelessly for the environment in a country ravaged by 25 years of war and continues to find ways to bring clean, efficient and cost-effective solutions to the citizens of one of the world's poorest nations.

In 2004, after the fall of the Taliban, Zaher and his family returned to his homeland where he gave up his post as Ambassador to Italy to take up the job as Director General of the newly formed NEPA. The opportunity revived Zaher's lifelong dream of turning the royal hunting grounds into a nature reserve open to all Afghans.

Since taking the post, he has rewritten the nation's environmental laws, including an act in the Constitution declaring it the responsibility of every Afghan citizen to "protect the environment, conserve the environment, and to hand it over to the next generation in the most pristine condition possible".

In 2008, he attended the Washington International Renewable Energy Conference (WIREC), where he pledged to improve air quality in Kabul between 10-12 per cent by the year 2012. His commitments work in tandem with Afghanistan's Environment Act of 2006. At the same time, NEPA announced it would allocate at least 3 per cent of its core budget to environmental research and development.

In partnership with the Ministry of Energy and Water and the international community, NEPA hopes to apply cutting edge solar and wind technology to address environmental concerns in Afghanistan.

Zhou Xun

Zhou Xun, one of China's most popular actresses, spends much of her time promoting 'tips for green living' through Our Part, a campaign she runs jointly with the United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP). The actress encourages people to reduce their carbon footprint through simple changes in lifestyle, something that can make a huge difference in a country the size of China.

Zhou Xun points out that if every car-owning family in China drove just 200 km less in a year, carbon dioxide emissions would be cut by 460,000 tons. She also states that small efforts like unplugging appliances can make a huge impact in China, a country with 300 million TV sets and 500 million mobile phones.

She works on reducing her own carbon footprint and follows her tips in her own day-to-day life. She takes her own chopsticks, mugs and shopping bags with her wherever she goes and tries to convince others to use reusable products. She plants three trees for every 200 km of her car travel and is planting many more to offset her flights from 2008. And when it's feasible, she bikes or walks to her destinations.

Zhou Xun was named a UNDP Goodwill Ambassador for China in 2008 with a special focus of promoting environmental sustainability and will be the Green Ambassador for the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai.

SPECIAL CATEGORY (Biodiversity & Ecosystems Management)

President Bharrat Jagdeo, Guyana

Guyana's 45-year old President Bharrat Jagdeo has gained international recognition for his position on environmental issues within his country and on the global scale.

As the President of a country with 40 million acres of untouched rainforest, Mr. Jagdeo has been working on inviting donors and investors to pay for the protection of the forests through the sale of carbon credits, or investments in eco-tourism and pharmaceutical discoveries. With the money he expects to generate from this trade, President Jagdeo plans to improve the country's coastal infrastructure to protect it from the potential rise in sea levels.

He has proposed that the UN Reduced Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) program adopts Guyana's model on forest management and has encouraged the rest of the world to live in a way "where protecting forests is more economically prudent than cutting them down".

He served as Guyana's Prime Minister and Minister of Finance prior to winning the presidency in 2001 and 2006.

Notes to Editors:

The Champions of the Earth awards were established in 2004 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The award recognizes individuals who embody commitment and vision towards environmental leadership through their action and their influence.

To date, the award has recognized 34 outstanding environmental leaders including Al Gore, Brazil's former Environment Minister Marina Silva, Sudanese researcher Dr. Balgis Osman-Elasha and Olympic Committee Chair Jacques Rogge, among others.

The 2010 prize categories are: Entrepreneurial Vision, Policy and Leadership, Science and Innovation, Inspiration and Action, and a special category, Biodiversity and Ecosystems Management.

This year, members of the public had the opportunity to nominate people online for the prize. More than 100 nominations were submitted from around the world. The nominees were then shortlisted and the finalists were chosen through an internal review.

Thanks to a new partnership with LG Electronics Inc., this year's Champions of the Earth Awards will come for the first time with a monetary prize of US\$40,000 for each of the category winners. In addition to the especially commissioned trophy created by renowned Chinese artist, Yuan Xikun, the cash prize serves as an incentive and resource for growing and replicating the laureates' work and their impact on the communities they serve.

Quotes from the 2010 Champions of the Earth:

As he accepted the Award, President Nasheed said: "I am delighted to accept this prize on behalf of the whole Maldives. It goes to show that by doing the right thing, a small country can make a big impact on the world stage. The climate crisis threatens us all. What happens to the Maldives today, happens to the rest of the world tomorrow. We are all Maldivians now."

See 'Further Resources' for the speeches by the winners and by UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner.

For more information on the Champions of the Earth awards, visit: www.unep.org/champions

For more information on UNEP's work on the green economy, visit: www.unep.org/greeneconomy

About the B4E Summit:

B4E is the biggest annual gathering of leaders from business, government, NGOs and the media, which aims to foster dialogue and business-driven action towards a global Green Economy.

The summit, which takes place this year in Seoul (Republic of Korea) on 21-23 April, is co-hosted by UNEP, the UN Global Compact, and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF). It will bring together hundreds of business leaders to address topics such as resource efficiency, renewable energies, new business models and climate policy and strategies.

For more information on the B4E summit, visit: www.b4esummit.com

For more information on UNEP's work on the green economy, visit:

www.unep.org/greeneconomy

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=620&ArticleID=6538&l=en>

April 22, 2010

Celebrate the Earth: A Christian Science perspective

By Georgianna Pfost
Christian Science Monitor

For the 40th annual [Earth Day](#), individuals and organizations around the globe are holding observances over several days, with April 25 highlighted as the “global day of celebration.”

Yet as our planet faces climate change, oceanic pollution, and other widespread environmental challenges, some may wonder if even a month of special activities can really help. I’ve wondered that, too, while volunteering for various environmental causes. Such activities often help inform and initiate sparks of interest in an issue, but to bring wider awareness and healing requires a higher sense both of action and of celebration. As [Albert Einstein reportedly noted](#), “The significant problems we have cannot be solved at the same level of thinking with which we created them.”

Action – bringing about change – is more efficient and effective with a wider and clearer picture of where we are and where we’re going. It’s easier to find the way through a maze after previewing a map or climbing a ladder for a better view. Similarly, our goodwilled activities to help Earth are more effective when our thinking climbs higher.

The famous photos of Earth from space helped shift thought and environmental activism from the national to the global level (and became symbols of Earth Day). But it’s possible and critical to continue higher, beyond the material to the spiritual, and that’s where celebration comes in.

Celebrating doesn't mean just having a party or other festivities. It also means to honor or extol, to raise "to heavenly glory." So, to truly celebrate Earth involves lifting our concept of it from that of an endangered physical planet in a material universe to being a spiritual idea in the universe of Spirit's (God's) creation.

[Mary Baker Eddy](#), the founder of the Monitor, [pointed to this higher sense of Earth](#) when she described it as "a type of eternity and immortality, which are likewise without beginning or end. To material sense, earth is matter; to spiritual sense, it is a compound idea" ("Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," p. 585).

Celebrating Earth by spiritualizing our thought of it before acting is like looking at a map before entering the maze. It corrects our perspective and facilitates problem solving, surer steps, and swifter passage.

An experience I had while working in an environmental nonprofit gave a small example of how such a celebratory lift in thought leads to more efficient and effective activity. I arrived at the office late one afternoon quite fatigued, expecting to need only to select slides for an educational program and participate in a brief project meeting before the evening board meeting.

Unfortunately, I found that the person who'd volunteered to draft the 20-minute slide program script hadn't done so, and the completed program had to be presented at that evening's meeting. I usually wrote first drafts by hand and then edited and reedited them, but there was no time for that.

So I sat down at the computer with a brief thought of gratitude for the organization's work and the rough outline at hand. To my surprise (and despite the fatigue), I found the words flowing freely. I was not thinking the words as I typed them but was simply watching them appear on the screen.

Shortly, I had finished a draft, made minor edits, and printed out the script. Another participant in the subsequent project meeting graciously helped me select slides while we talked, and I was able to present the completed program at the board meeting. It was approved with virtually no changes and used for several years as an educational tool.

What I glimpsed was that even the briefest of true "celebrations" lifts the object (program, project, or person) "to heavenly glory" and enables a higher level of thinking and more effective action. So as we head out to plant trees, clean up litter, or otherwise join in Earth Day activities, let's pause to celebrate first. Celebration isn't frivolous; it's required.

http://www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/Articles-on-Christian-Science/2010/0422/Celebrate-the-Earth?sp_rid=NTI5OTY0NDU3OAS2&sp_mid=4418771

April 23, 2010

Climate-change denial 'can't be option' for any Christians

By Leanne Larmondin
Ecumenical News International

Churches have become a force for change in the environmental movement, but to be more effective they must bridge a “tragic divide” between evangelical Christians and the traditional “mainline” denominations, a conference in Toronto has heard.

“There’s kind of a caricature, which is not entirely inaccurate, that the evangelicals are concerned with getting ‘right’ with God, and the mainline churches are concerned with taking care of the world, and [addressing] social and environmental issues,” said Loren Wilkinson, a philosophy professor at Regent College, an evangelical institution in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Both stereotypes narrow the Christian Gospel, he said.

“So many evangelical Christians are also, in the United States especially, some of the principal climate-change deniers,” said Wilkinson. “We must understand that care for creation is at the heart and centre of our faith, it’s not a peripheral add-on.”

Wilkinson, who has written books about stewardship of natural resources and caring for creation, suggested that evangelicals should recover the “full meaning of creation” and stop arguing about how and when God created the world.

He was referring to a tendency for some Christians to interpret the Bible’s creation story literally, believing that God created the world in six days, just a few thousand years ago.

The April 14-17 conference, entitled Climate Change and Environmental Decline as a Moral Issue, gathered academics, theologians, scientists and climate change experts to examine the spiritual implications of misusing the earth.

The Rev. David MacDonald, a former member of Canadian parliament and a United Church of Canada minister, observed in one speech that environmental activism has changed in Canada.

“One of the things that pleases me most ... is it’s a different group than the one I would have talked to 20 years ago when I was talking about climate change,” said MacDonald, who was part of the World Council of Churches delegation to the December 2009 United Nations Climate change conference in Copenhagen. “Then, it was mostly just ‘tree huggers’! There are tree huggers here, but there are others too: people who are interested in development issues.”

While many observers view the Copenhagen conference as a failure, MacDonald called it historically important. Instead of the 15 000 people expected to attend, “50 000 people tried to get in the doors, get in the windows”.

If Christians come to understand the importance of environmental decline, added MacDonald, “most of what we have thought about in terms of faith experiences and theology will change dramatically in the next five, 10, 15, 20 years.”

Some conference participants acknowledged that it is easy to despair and get cynical when dealing with climate change. But one speaker urged churches to express optimism.

“We must choose to hope, because when we hope, we look for solutions,” said Willard Metzger, director of church relations for World Vision Canada. “When we hope, we choose to believe that a different path is possible and we start to explore that path.”

http://news.nsw.uca.org.au/2010/climate-change-denial_23-04-2010.htm

April 25, 2010

Hindu mantras & Jewish prayers opened Nevada Earth Day Celebrations

Washington Bangla Radio

Reno (Nevada, USA) - Nevada Earth Day 2010 celebrations here today opened with prayers from ancient Sanskrit and Hebrew scriptures.

Starting with Shanti Mantra in Sanskrit, acclaimed Hindu statesman Rajan Zed read “Prithvi Sukta” (hymn to earth) from *Atharva-Veda* (composed around 1200 BCE), invoking the Goddess Earth.

Zed, who is president of Universal Society of Hinduism, also prayed from *Bhagavad-Gita* (Song of the Lord), where Lord Krishna is quoted as saying, “The brightness of the sun, which lights up the world, the brightness of the moon and of fire—these are my glory. With a drop of my energy I enter the earth and support all creatures. Through the moon, the vessel of life-giving fluid, I nourish all plants.”

Rajan Zed also lighted a lamp before the image of Lord Ganesh and sprinkled Gangajal (sacred water from river Ganga of India) before the invocation. ElizaBeth W. Beyer, Rabbi of local Temple Beth Or, read the Jewish prayers.

According to Travis Souza, one of the Directors of Nevada Econet, the organizers of this Earth Day, participants took positive ideas home about environment. Celebrations included live entertainment, crafts, farmers market, display booths by over 100 non-profit and other organizations/agencies/businesses offering energy conserving and sustainable living products, children’s activities, vendors selling eco-friendly items, etc.

<http://www.washingtonbanglaradio.com/content/4833610-hindu-mantras-jewish-prayers-opened-nevada-earth-day-celebrations>

April-May 2010 Issue

Nature and Society, Nature and City

By Len Puglisi

Nature and Society

In Australian cities will nature and society further diverge, or one day tend to converge?

While the great economic growth bonanza of recent decades continues to hold attention, can we wait on *Popular Science* reporters to excite us with the likes of 'Cities of the Future – 23 Technologies to save our crumbling infrastructure'. Or for other promising technological/scientific advances. Hoping that only the environmentally benign ones will see the light of day?

Then again, suppose we have laudable success in introducing environmental improvements – adopting energy efficiency in building design, construction and use; making water saving initiatives; managing waste better; achieving wider acceptance of public transit and cycling; substantially reducing car travel; using only fuel-efficient cars; providing more parks for apartment dwellers.

Would this formula for action constitute the sum total of where we want to get to with nature in the cities?

It's my sense that Australians have a long way to go in reaching a deeper philosophical and therefore a more sustainable footing for their carriage on planet Earth. The task, in broad, is for more reflection on:

- the rest of nature as an indispensable source of wonder and healing;
- the rest of nature not being there merely for people's use and economic exploitation;
- a right in other species to share the planet and not to be displaced by an appropriation of the Earth's space and natural systems for endless human expansion.

But how to raise this consciousness, especially now that cities are where the majority of people on the planet live?

A greater sense of nature's centrality to human life has emerged from various writers – E.O. Wilson, James Lovelock, Thomas Berry, [FORE@Yale](#), Val Plumwood amongst many others. Musicians, artists, novelists, and scientists too have been inspiring. But it would seem

with little influence on public discourse in Australia, especially when it comes to the remaking of cities.

For a symbolic rendering of architectural space, Glenn Murcutt's 'tread lightly on the Earth' comes readily to mind. But a wider questioning is needed whilst the place of nature in cities is relegated, more commonly, to contractor parks for leisure or wide hard surfaces broken by 'topiared' plants – not the co-dependence that humans and nature traditionally have derived through gardening and landscaping.

This ('Mainstream') era characterized by the dominance of economic solutions ('production and consumption expansion unbounded') has society in thrall. Incorporated in its all-pervasive 'solutions' are attitudes to population growth ('global, or at least Australian numbers and immigration levels are not a concern'); and techno-scientific pulses ('advances are an unquestioned blessing and can be the answer to most if not all problems').

However attractive many of the achievements of this contemporary drive are, questions remain: does it involve too much of a draw-down on the planet's capacity; and can the Earth go on supporting the richness of evolutionary life in which humans have thrived during the Cenozoic Era?

For their part, cities have been heralded as the 'center and symbol of our times', 'the grandest physical expressions of our humanity', and in our neo-liberal myopic world, 'the growth engines of society'.

So it's no surprise that a recurrent theme of city planning is how to fit more people into areas of the highest and most visible concentration of service, business and government activities - typically CBD's and their surrounds. And to do so by the creation of higher density enclaves, often using recent projections of high population growth opportunistically as a justification for 'transforming Australian cities'.

If the perception of nature as under threat is to be a focus of city lives, the task at hand is surely more than a simple choice of 'build up or out', which is how the issue is usually presented.

Eminent nature philosopher, Thomas Berry, observed, 'Because we live in a human-made environment, the challenge is how to keep... immediacy with the natural world and to establish a traditional wisdom that deepens our understanding of the experience'.

In short, we are faced with building a widespread recognition in society of the fecundity and benefits of nature-consciousness.

So will the occasional trip to the outback, or Antarctica, or a walk in a park, or even the occasional view from a high window onto a tidily landscaped patch, be sufficient to the hour? Somehow I doubt it.

Here are some pointers to that 'something more':

* By good luck or design, Australians have created elements of a green world where nature enters our lives as a matter of course. Dating back well before the first world war, and based on practices of egalitarianism, co-operation, wealth distribution, a *modest* abode with access to a nearby patch of nature inviting personal use was considered a fair thing. It would be risky to attempt to replace this achievement holus-bolus with some other admittedly successful alternatives imported from places established in other periods of history.

* Personally, a favorite story of mine is to re-tell a neighbor's inspired comment. She had bought a house with a dozen, already established large trees. After her house had been damaged by a falling, large eucalyptus branch during a wild storm, she ruminated: 'I've thought for a while of taking out the big trees, but where will the birds go?'

* Then the myriad experiences of those who have taken to all kinds of gardening. The many food-producing home gardeners; garden clubs working to restore remnant plant communities, to establish green corridors, or more magically, to bring back the land's built-over natural contours. Or the small-scale school gardening exercise described by writer Denise Gadd that 'snowballed into a full-scale environmental campaign involving the whole school.'

* Talking of residential parks, can we do them better? Architectural journalist, Elizabeth Farrelly can only find one since the 90's that gets the nod in Sydney, Surry Hills Moore Park Gardens: 'its sophisticated and varied composition, myriad walkways, luscious planting, parks, pools and established delis..' Further, can we change our notion of residential subdivisions: start by laying out a park, and then adding houses. It's an approach that has sometimes produced fine settings for housing in Melbourne.

* There are the health dimensions of living with a deeper sense of nature in our lives. E.O.Wilson explores the notion of biophilia, an indication of which is '.....a positive effect of the natural world and other organisms on health.' So is it doing people a favour separating them from ongoing contact with the natural world, especially in city jobs where the outside world can be treated as a distraction?

Then there are the fine works from landscape designers such as Ian McHarg, Michael Hough, and others. Not forgetting (as told by Mary White, Peter Fisher and others) Australia's particular gift to the world of its unique landscapes that deserve to be celebrated, not only in tourist guides but wherever we can have their presence to hand.

Ebenezer Howard's 'Garden Cities' is a wonderful experiment that for today speaks to us of the need for life-work-nature integration. Economic geographer, Kevin O'Connor, with his 'five Melbournes' concept, and other leading exponents of multi-centered city form, could be leading the discussion back to a more practical base for what can be achieved with a local/sub-metropolitan focus.

Working in this way, there's no need to deny the occasional provision of higher density accommodation. Nor does it validate sterile, minimalist landscapes for 'new suburbia', taking up valuable grasslands and market gardens while perhaps moving city edges towards fire-threatened

areas. They are Mainstream's residential ideal, combining the shared interests of wealthier outer-ring residents, edge developers, highway builders, power companies, and the auto and oil industries. But it *does* suggest that population stabilization must soon become a policy objective for Australia's major cities.

Within cities, nature waits to play its part as a source of climate cooling, health and enchantment, including for children, and as a community-based activity. Lived in as nature's home, cities can be society's confident path for interaction with some of the Earth's wider life-support systems. It stands in sharp contrast to the alternative: cities as places that single-mindedly drive Mainstream's economic engine faster, with all the now-familiar attendant threats posed to civilisation.

A. (Len) Puglisi, urban environmental writer.

For further expansion of these comments, materials and references in this article, see '*Nature's home or growth engine: Whereto the city?*' - *New Community Magazine*, v.7, n.3, Spring 2009 (*Borderlands Co-operative*, 03-94822805).

May 1, 2010

A religious take on climate change

By Larry B. Stammer
Los Angeles Times

About 90 people of many faiths gather at a cathedral near downtown Los Angeles to promote what they say is their moral duty to care for the Earth and all of God's creation.

Were it not for the setting in a stately Romanesque cathedral near downtown Los Angeles, the gathering might have been mistaken for a political rally.

Many of the 90 people present signed cards to California's two U.S. senators urging them to support legislation to roll back greenhouse gas emissions in the United States. Others pledged to oppose efforts by oil companies and conservative activists in California to suspend the state's landmark Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006. They signed a "carbon covenant" to oppose illegal logging and deforestation in the developing world.

Yet for most of those last Sunday, the underlying motivation was not political but religious. They said they had a moral duty to care for the Earth and all of God's creation. They called for a widened understanding of what it means to love one's neighbor in a world where choices made on one continent can affect people thousands of miles away, including those in poor countries least able to cope with climate shifts.

The gathering at St. John's Episcopal Cathedral was yet another sign of a maturing religious

environmental activism and sophistication 40 years after the first Earth Day. At that time, religious bodies were virtually silent about "green" issues. Not now. Indeed, longtime environmental advocates such as author Bill McKibben, the keynote speaker at St. John's, said that whatever success there may be in staunching the worst effects of climate change will depend in large part on people of faith.

"We have very few institutions — really no other institutions than churches, synagogues and mosques — left in our culture that can posit some reason for existence other than accumulation," McKibben said in an interview before addressing the group. He said overconsumption, "hyper-individualism" and the wasteful burning of fossil fuels for energy and food production are unraveling the planet's living systems. His latest book, "Eaarth," asserts that the planet is already out of balance and that only by scaling back human activities can the direst consequences of climate change be avoided.

Marty Ostrow, co-producer of "Renewal," a documentary on the religious environmental movement, agreed. "What religion has is the capacity to hold people deeply to these issues in a way the secular movement doesn't," he said before addressing the group.

Called an "evening of interfaith environmental solidarity," the gathering included a ceremony with Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim and Unitarian Universalist participants. They drew on differing beliefs to find common ground in safeguarding the natural order. "Gratitude for the gift of life is the primary wellspring of all religions," the Rev. Peter Rood, rector of Holy Nativity Episcopal Church in Westchester, told the audience.

One immediate concern, participants said, is a campaign by oil companies and conservative activists to qualify an initiative for the November ballot that would suspend the state's 2006 climate change law. Under the statute, California's greenhouse gas emissions are to be capped at 1990 levels by 2020. That equals a 30% reduction below business-as-usual levels, according to Mary Nichols, chairwoman of the state Air Resources Board.

But if the initiative drive succeeds, the law would be suspended until the state's jobless rate dipped to 5.5% or below for four consecutive quarters. That would amount to a de facto repeal of the law, not a suspension, she said, since California has rarely seen unemployment levels that low. The rate stood at 12.6% in March. The air board is responsible for implementing the law.

Opponents and backers of the current law differ about its effects on the state's economy. But those present said their religious beliefs left no doubt where they should stand. "This initiative, if it makes the November ballot, must not pass," said Allis Druffel, Southern California outreach director for California Interfaith Power and Light. The organization, headquartered in San Francisco, promotes energy conservation and efficiency and sustainable energy.

Many local congregations, including Temple Isaiah in West Los Angeles, have undertaken environmental projects. Along with its recycling program, the congregation has installed motion detectors to turn off electric lights when not needed, stopped using blown foam cups and installed waterless urinals and a solar-powered ceremonial light. "We're greening the temple," said Ivy B. Rappaport, co-founder of the congregation's "Green Team."

McKibben's climate change action organization, 350.org, is planning a worldwide effort Oct. 10 to cut back on carbon dioxide emissions. It will include building bike paths, installing solar panels and planting community gardens. The name 350.org is taken from the assertion by leading scientists that 350 parts per million of carbon dioxide is the upper limit to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

McKibben, however, said carbon dioxide levels have already risen to 390 ppm and are increasing at the rate of 2 ppm per year. "We're not going to solve it one light bulb at a time. There's nothing as individuals that we can do that significantly addresses climate change," he said. That will take major new laws that put "a stiff price" on carbon emissions.

"But the message we want to send with these work parties is ... we're getting to work. What about you, our leaders? What are you up to? If we can climb up on the roof of a church and hammer in a solar panel, perhaps you could be bothered to rise to the floor of the Senate and hammer out some legislation. Perhaps you can do your jobs."

<http://www.latimes.com/news/science/environment/la-me-beliefs-green-20100501,0,1047529.story>

May 7, 2010

Silence, God, and the Gulf Coast Oil Spill

By Rev. Fletcher Harper
The Huffington Post

A seminary professor once taught me about the most important passage in the book of Job. From her perspective, the most significant passage was neither Satan's convincing God to try Job's faith by torturing him, nor the graphic descriptions of Job's boils, nor God's verbal counterattack from the whirlwind after Job finally lets God have it.

For Dr. Tribble, the most powerful passage in Job described the initial reactions of Job's comforters to the hideous spectacle their friend had become. Before these friends spend 34 chapters pressing their useless explanations and misplaced faithfulness on a blameless man with a shattered life, their initial actions -- before they open their mouths -- offer more help than their subsequent 600 verses of speech. When they first realize what has happened, they "wept aloud and tore their robes ... They sat with Job on the ground for seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, because they saw that his suffering was very great" (Job 2:12-13).

In the first seven days after the Gulf Coast oil spill, I've heard a lot of responses that fall into two primary categories. One reaction is from various industry experts, who've observed that oil spills are unavoidable. Like Job's comforters, these experts appear to believe that their response is

adequate, and that we need to accept that the price of a steady energy supply is an ongoing litany of environmental and humanitarian disasters. Several of these experts have noted without irony that the US has it good because our environmental laws are so tough -- citing the example of less-regulated countries like Nigeria, which apparently has suffered an Exxon Valdez-equivalent spill every year since 1969. This kind of response is the pastoral equivalent of telling a family that's just lost a loved one in a horrible accident that "stuff happens." It doesn't cut it.

A second, more heartening reaction has been that of the thousands of volunteers who've wanted to act. NPR carried a story about the effectiveness of human and animal hair as an attractor for oil, and described hundreds of barber shops and salons nationwide shipping their trimmings to a central location where volunteers are stuffing the hair into cloth tubes, creating sausage-shaped, hair-filled booms to skim the Gulf's surface and to collect the oil.

In the wake of these two initial reactions -- one avoiding the heart of the matter while the other sought to make it right -- I heard two other stories, one directly related, the other indirectly. The first described Michael Brune, the Sierra Club's Executive Director, taking a helicopter ride to view part of the spill from the air. The report noted that Mr. Brune was silent during the ride, and that he said very little after it. The report went on to relate several of Mr. Brune's words -- and I don't remember even one of them. But I do remember being grateful for his relative silence, and for his allowing himself to be moved. Like the initial reaction of Job's comforters, his sobriety felt more evocative to me than most of the ink that's been spilled on this catastrophe. It created space to recognize the pain of the victims -- human and beyond. People deprived of their livelihoods and culture. A vulnerable coastline battered by a second cataclysm in less than a decade. Sea turtles, fish, birds -- oil-suffocated and washing up dead. These images and this suffering command silence, at least in part. And if we can't manage that silence, I doubt we'll find the humanity to respond in a genuinely decent and effective way.

The second story was on the release of the President's Cancer Panel report, a 200-page report that, according to those who'd seen advance copies, expressed grave concerns about the impacts of thousands of unregulated chemicals on human health. The report described the growing prevalence of certain cancers in children, the fact that "many known or suspected carcinogens are completely unregulated," the warning that "to a disturbing extent, babies are born 'pre-polluted'" because of chemical exposure in the womb. "We wanted to let people know that we're concerned, and that they should be concerned," Professor LaSalle Leffall, Jr., a leader of the Panel and an oncologist and professor of surgery at Howard University, told *The New York Times*.

Silence, followed by the larger view that this report provides, can create the space for the disaster in the Gulf to strike a chord. The world's religious traditions teach that we owe respect and care to the earth, to our own bodies, and to the world's most vulnerable communities. In the wake of the Deepwater disaster it's time to listen to these traditions, to strengthen our resolve, and to act.

For example, numerous classical Jewish sources mandate the proper disposal of waste, and state that noxious products from industrial production be kept far from human habitation (Deuteronomy 23:13-15, *Mishnah* Baba Batra 2:9). The New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ died to redeem people and all of creation (Colossians 1:15-20), and joins with its Jewish

forbearers in affirming repeatedly the goodness of the earth (Genesis 1). Islam teaches that human beings are the "vice-regents" of Allah, responsible for the earth's care, and warns against human self-destructiveness: "Neither kill or destroy yourselves: for verily God hath been to you Most Merciful." (Quran 4:29). Hinduism's Atharva Veda offers a beautiful prayer: "Supreme Lord let there be peace in the sky and in the atmosphere. Let there be peace in the plant world and in the forests. Let the cosmic powers be peaceful. Let the Brahman, the true essence and source of life, be peaceful. Let there be undiluted and fulfilling peace everywhere." Basho, the acclaimed 17th-century Buddhist poet, describes the entire earth as a sanctuary with his succinct offering: "The Temple bell stops. But the sound keeps coming - out of the flowers." And there's more, much more. We just need to be quiet and listen -- and then act.

Nothing can undo the suffering that this oil spill is creating. There will be no immediate balm in Gilead. But we can redeem ourselves by understanding this disaster for what it is -- yet another indication, along with the President's Cancer Panel report, that we need to change course. Developing strong federal policies to create renewable energy and fight climate change, and to regulate and replace the toxins we're spewing into the earth, would be a good start. Do we have the ears to hear, the eyes to see, and the resolve to act?

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-fletcher-harper/gulf-oil-spill_b_567834.html

May 7, 2010

Japan's 'ama' free divers keep their traditions

By Anne McDonald
OurWorld 2.0

Remote lands are often treasure boxes full of local lore. Along the far-flung peninsulas of the Japanese Archipelago, local legend claims that the ama-san, women free divers, were once seafaring gypsies of the north-eastern Asian seas.

Ethno-historians echo the possibility that ama divers travelled with the currents from continental Asia across to southern Japan where they split into two distinct nomadic communities; one travelling to the Pacific Ocean coast, the other moving northwards along the Japan Sea coastline. The legend continues, recounting that one group was carried north by a typhoon, to then be shipwrecked and left to survive on the rocky shores of Noto Peninsula on the Japan Sea.

To this day, descendants of the shipwrecked ama-san continue a seasonal semi-nomadic lifestyle, as shown in the video brief that accompanies this article. In the winter months they stay close to mainland shores, diving for *namako* (sea-cucumber) and oysters.

Come spring, a few elders move to Hegura Island, an outpost island 50 kilometres from the peninsula shores. Younger ama-san follow during the monsoon rains in late June and for three months a year, the ama divers claim their hereditary rights to dive for abalone in the waters

around Hegura Island; local historical records show that the claim was bestowed to their female ancestors by Lord Maeda during the feudal Tokugawa era (1603-1867).

Feudalism was abolished in 1867 and a new era embracing western thought, laws, science and technology swept through the Japanese archipelago. And yet, as it is with many remote areas elsewhere in the world, the tides of change went almost unnoticed in the ama community of Hegura Island. Their rules of social order, fishing rights and resource management based on collectivism and kinship persisted.

Collectivism weaves through island life today as it did in days past. All decisions are made by the collective whole. Where, when and for how many hours diving is permissible, are questions decided by the collective whole.

Techno-pragmatism

Beyond decisions of community-based resource use and management are also questions about technology and lifestyles. Whether to allow automobiles, vending machines and other technologies that may impact island lifestyles are questions that have been on the ama's community agenda in more recent years. Some of the older ama-san say that the discussions their elders had about adopting technologies, a type of debate that was new many decades ago, seem very standard now.

Visual acuity, lung capacity and hunter instinct are the defining elements of ama divers. Technological innovations can potentially alter these natural abilities, and it was this that the ama-san questioned. To what degree do you enhance natural abilities in securing marine resources? Will this potentially lead to exhaustion of the very resources that sustain you?

These questions were first asked at the turn of the 20th century when diving goggles were introduced. Some cautioned about the potential dangers of overfishing resulting from increased visual ability, and therefore the use of goggles was initially limited to one hour per day. As time passed however, goggles became standard diving gear.

The next innovation debate focused on wet suits, followed by flippers (both are used today). Like the goggles, initial concern about potential negative impacts on marine resources faded with time. The next debate was about whether or not to allow oxygen tanks. Collective voting resulted in a 'no' verdict. Five decades have passed since this decision was made, and not once has it been questioned nor challenged among the ama-san of Hegura Island.

There is a hint of pride in their voices and one cannot help but wonder if the decision was influenced by pride in their identity of being free divers, more than a scientifically-based understanding that adoption of oxygen tanks could potentially lead to over-harvesting and eventual exhaustion of the marine resources sustaining their community. Just how much the psychology of cultural identity coloured the collective 'no' of the Hegura Island ama-san is unclear.

Yet, the traditions passed on from mother to daughter are not only about techniques for increasing lung capacity, learning how to read ocean currents, and where to find the best quality abalone. They also include questioning how lifestyles could potentially be changed by indiscriminate adoption of technologies all in the name of progress. So perhaps the decision to reject the use of oxygen tanks grew simply from the sense of belonging that daily interaction in the marine web of life has instilled in the hearts of the ama-san.

This video brief was produced by the United Nations University Media Studio's Kaori Brand in partnership with the [UNU Institute for Advanced Studies](http://www.unu.edu/en/iaes)^[3].

<http://ourworld.unu.edu/en/japans-ama-free-divers-keep-their-traditions/>

May 10, 2010

New Vision Required to Stave Off Dramatic Biodiversity Loss, Says UN Report

United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi - Natural systems that support economies, lives and livelihoods across the planet are at risk of rapid degradation and collapse unless there is swift, radical and creative action to conserve and sustainably use the variety of life on Earth.

This is one principal conclusion of a major new assessment of the current state of biodiversity and the implications of its continued loss for human well-being.

The third edition of *Global Biodiversity Outlook* (GBO-3), produced by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), confirms that the world has failed to meet its target to achieve a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010.

The report is based on scientific assessments, national reports submitted by governments and a study on future scenarios for biodiversity. Subject to an extensive independent scientific review process, the publication of GBO-3 is one of the principal milestones of the UN's International Year of Biodiversity.

The *Outlook* will be a key input into discussions by world leaders and Heads of State at a special high level segment of the United Nations General Assembly on 22 September. Its conclusions will also be central to the negotiations by world governments at the Nagoya Biodiversity Summit in October.

The *Outlook* warns that massive further loss of biodiversity is becoming increasingly likely, and with it, a severe reduction of many essential services to human societies as several "tipping points" are approached, in which ecosystems shift to alternative, less productive states from which it may be difficult or impossible to recover.

Potential tipping points analyzed for GBO-3 include:

- The dieback of large areas of the Amazon forest, due to the interactions of climate change, deforestation and fires, with consequences for the global climate, regional rainfall and widespread species extinctions.
- The shift of many freshwater lakes and other inland water bodies to eutrophic or algae-dominated states, caused by the buildup of nutrients and leading to widespread fish kills and loss of recreational amenities.
- Multiple collapses of coral reef ecosystems, due to a combination of ocean acidification, warmer water leading to bleaching, overfishing and nutrient pollution; and threatening the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of species directly dependent on coral reef resources.

The *Outlook* argues, however, that such outcomes are avoidable if effective and coordinated action is taken to reduce the multiple pressures being imposed on biodiversity. For example, urgent action is needed to reduce land-based pollution and destructive fishing practices that weaken coral reefs, and make them more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification.

The document notes that the linked challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change must be addressed by policymakers with equal priority and in close co-ordination, if the most severe impacts of each are to be avoided. Conserving biodiversity and the ecosystems it underpins can help to store more carbon, reducing further build-up of greenhouse gases; and people will be better able to adapt to unavoidable climate change if ecosystems are made more resilient with the easing of other pressures.

The *Outlook* outlines a possible new strategy for reducing biodiversity loss, learning the lessons from the failure to meet the 2010 target. It includes addressing the underlying causes or indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, such as patterns of consumption, the impacts of increased trade and demographic change. Ending harmful subsidies would also be an important step.

GBO-3 concludes that we can no longer see the continued loss of biodiversity as an issue separate from the core concerns of society. Realizing objectives such as tackling poverty and improving the health, wealth and security of present and future generations will be greatly strengthened if we finally give biodiversity the priority it deserves.

The *Outlook* points out that for a fraction of the money summoned up instantly by the world's governments in 2008-9 to avoid economic meltdown, we can avoid a much more serious and fundamental breakdown in the Earth's life support systems

In his foreword to GBO-3, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon writes: "To tackle the root causes of biodiversity loss, we must give it higher priority in all areas of decision-making and in all economic sectors."

"As this third *Global Biodiversity Outlook* makes clear, conserving biodiversity cannot be an afterthought once other objectives are addressed - it is the foundation on which many of these objectives are built."

"We need a new vision for biological diversity for a healthy planet and a sustainable future for humankind."

UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Achim Steiner, adds that there have been key economic reasons why the 2010 biodiversity targets were not met.

"Many economies remain blind to the huge value of the diversity of animals, plants and other life-forms and their role in healthy and functioning ecosystems from forests and freshwaters to soils, oceans and even the atmosphere," observes Mr. Steiner.

"Many countries are beginning to factor natural capital into some areas of economic and social life with important returns, but this needs rapid and sustained scaling-up."

"Humanity has fabricated the illusion that somehow we can get by without biodiversity or that it is somehow peripheral to our contemporary world: the truth is we need it more than ever on a planet of six billion heading to over nine billion people by 2050."

The Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Ahmed Djoghlaf, says: "The news is not good. We continue to lose biodiversity at a rate never before seen in history - extinction rates may be up to 1,000 times higher than the historical background rate."

"The assessment of the state of the world's biodiversity in 2010, as contained in GBO-3 based on the latest indicators, over 110 national reports submitted to the Convention Secretariat, and scenarios for the 21st Century should serve as a wake-up call for humanity. Business as usual is no longer an option if we are to avoid irreversible damage to the life-support systems of our planet."

"The Convention's new Strategic Plan, to be adopted at the 2010 Nagoya Biodiversity Summit must tackle the underlying causes of biodiversity loss. The linked challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change must be addressed with equal priority and close cooperation. Joint action is needed to implement the Conventions on Biodiversity, Climate Change and to Combat Desertification - the three conventions born of the 1992 Rio Conference. The Rio+20 Summit offers an opportunity to adopt a workplan to achieve this."

KEY FINDINGS:

Biodiversity in 2010

GBO-3 uses multiple lines of evidence to demonstrate that the target set by world governments in 2002, *"to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level"*, has not been met. Based on a special analysis of biodiversity indicators carried out by a panel of scientists, as well as peer-reviewed scientific literature and reports from national governments to the CBD, key findings include:

- None of the twenty-one subsidiary targets accompanying the overall 2010 biodiversity target can be said definitively to have been achieved globally, although some have been partially or locally achieved. Ten of fifteen headline indicators developed by the CBD show trends unfavorable for biodiversity.
- No government claims to have completely met the 2010 biodiversity target at the national level, and around one-fifth state explicitly that it has not been met.
- Species that have been assessed for extinction risk are on average moving closer to extinction, with amphibians facing the greatest risk and coral species deteriorating most rapidly.
- The abundance of vertebrate species, based on assessed populations, fell by nearly one-third on average between 1970 and 2006, and continues to fall globally, with especially severe declines in the tropics and among freshwater species.
- Natural habitats in most parts of the world continue to decline in extent and integrity, notably freshwater wetlands, sea-ice habitats, salt marshes, coral reefs, seagrass beds and shellfish reefs; although there has been significant progress in slowing the rate of loss of tropical forests and mangroves, in some regions.
- Crop and livestock genetic diversity continues to decline in agricultural systems. For example, more than sixty breeds of livestock are reported to have become extinct since 2000.
- The five principal pressures directly driving biodiversity loss (habitat change, over-exploitation, pollution, invasive alien species and climate change) are either constant or increasing in intensity.
- There has been significant progress in the increase of protected areas both on land and in coastal waters. However, 44% of terrestrial eco-regions (areas with a large proportion of shared species and habitat types), and 82% of marine eco-regions, fall below the target of

10% protection. The majority of sites judged to be of special importance to biodiversity also fall outside protected areas.

Biodiversity Futures for the 21st Century

Scientists from a wide range of disciplines came together as part of the preparation of GBO-3 to identify possible future outcomes for biodiversity during the current century, based on observed trends, models and experiments. Their principal conclusions include:

- Projections of the impact of global change on biodiversity show continuing and often accelerating species extinctions, loss of natural habitat, and changes in the distribution and abundance of species, species groups and biomes over the 21st Century.
- There is a high risk of dramatic biodiversity loss and accompanying degradation of a broad range of ecosystem services if the Earth system is pushed beyond certain thresholds or tipping points.
- Earlier assessments have underestimated the potential severity of biodiversity loss based on plausible scenarios, because the impacts of passing tipping points or thresholds of ecosystem change have not previously been taken into account.
- There are greater opportunities than identified in earlier assessments to address the biodiversity crisis while contributing to other social objectives; for example, by reducing the scale of climate change without large-scale deployment of biofuels and accompanying loss of natural habitats.
- Biodiversity and ecosystem changes could be prevented, significantly reduced or even reversed if strong action is applied urgently, comprehensively and appropriately, at international, national and local levels.

Towards a strategy for reducing biodiversity loss

GBO-3 sets out a number of elements that could be considered in a future strategy to reduce biodiversity loss, and avoid the worst impacts of the scenarios analyzed in the *Outlook*. It is likely to form the basis of discussion of the strategic plan currently being considered for the next decade of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and due to be agreed at the 10th meeting of the Conference of Parties to the CBD in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010. The elements include:

- Continued and intensified direct intervention to reduce loss of biodiversity, for example through expanding and strengthening protected areas, and programmes targeted at vulnerable species and habitats;

- Continued and intensified measures to reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity, such as preventing nutrient pollution, cutting off the pathways for introduction alien invasive species, and introducing more sustainable practices in fisheries, forestry and agriculture;
- Much greater efficiency in the use of land, energy, fresh water and materials to meet growing demand from a rising and more prosperous population;
- Use of market incentives, and avoidance of perverse subsidies, to minimize unsustainable resource use and wasteful consumption;
- Strategic planning to reconcile development with the conservation of biodiversity and the maintenance of the multiple services provided by the ecosystems it underpins;
- Restoration of ecosystems to safeguard essential services to human societies, while recognizing that protecting existing ecosystems is generally much more cost-effective than allowing them to degrade in the first place;
- Ensuring that the benefits arising from the use of and access to genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, for example through the development of drugs and cosmetics, are equitably shared with the countries and cultures from which they are obtained;
- Communication, education and awareness-raising to ensure that as far as possible, everyone understands the value of biodiversity and what steps they can take to protect it, including through changes in personal consumption and behavior.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. Global Biodiversity Outlook 3 (GBO-3) , like its two predecessors published in four-yearly intervals since 2002, results from a decision of the Conference of Parties to the CBD [see note 2 below]. It is the product of close collaboration between the Secretariat of the CBD and the United Nations Environment Programme's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC).

The *Outlook* has been produced according to a transparent, rigorous process of review. Two separate drafts were made available for review via the Internet during 2009, and comments from some 200 reviewers were considered. The whole production has been supervised by an Advisory Group, and the second draft was subjected to scientific review by a panel comprising leading scientists from governments, inter-governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations. The principal sources on which GBO-3 is based include:

- An analysis of the current status and trends of biodiversity, carried out by the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership, a network of organizations coordinated by UNEP-WCMC;
- A study of scenarios and models regarding biodiversity in the 21st Century, involving a wide range of scientists under the auspices of the Diversitas network and UNEP-WCMC. This study, "Biodiversity Scenarios: Projections of 21st Century Change in Biodiversity and Associated Ecosystem Services" has also been launched on 10 May and is available at www.cbd.int/gbo3;
- Some 500 peer-reviewed scientific journal articles and assessments from inter-governmental and non-governmental bodies reviewed for the *Outlook*;

110 national reports on biodiversity submitted by governments to the CBD.

The publication of GBO-3 was enabled by financial contributions from Canada, the European Union, Germany, Japan, Spain and the United Kingdom, as well as UNEP.

2. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and entered into force in December 1993. The CBD is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits from utilization of genetic resources. With 193 Parties, the Convention has near universal participation among countries committed to preserving life on Earth. The Convention seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety a supplementary treaty to the Convention seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology. To date, 157 countries and the European Community are party to the Protocol. The Secretariat of the Convention and its Cartagena Protocol is located in Montreal. www.cbd.int/

3. 2010 International Year of Biodiversity The United Nations declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) to raise awareness about the crucial importance of biodiversity, to communicate the human costs of biodiversity loss, and to engage people, particularly youth, throughout the world in the fight to protect all life on Earth. Initiatives will be organized throughout the year to disseminate information, promote the protection of biodiversity and encourage countries, organizations, and individuals to take direct action to reduce biodiversity loss. The focal point for the year is the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. www.cbd.int/2010/welcome/

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LINKS TO ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:

Press release in other languages:

French version: <http://www.unep.org/downloads/GBO/fr.doc>

Russian version: <http://www.unep.org/downloads/GBO/ru.doc>

Chinese version: <http://www.unep.org/downloads/GBO/ch.doc>

Arabic version: <http://www.unep.org/downloads/GBO/ar.doc>

Spanish version: <http://www.unep.org/downloads/GBO/sp.doc>

Full report: Global Biodiversity Outlook-3 in six languages:

<http://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo3/doc/GBO3-final-ar.pdf>

<http://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo3/doc/GBO3-final-en.pdf>

<http://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo3/doc/GBO3-final-es.pdf>

<http://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo3/doc/GBO3-final-fr.pdf>

<http://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo3/doc/GBO3-final-ru.pdf>

<http://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo3/doc/GBO3-final-ar.pdf>

<http://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo3/doc/GBO3-final-zh.pdf>

Executive Summary in English: <http://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo3/doc/GBO3-Summary-final-en.pdf>

Global Biodiversity Outlook-3 Regional Factsheets:

<http://www.unep.org/downloads/GBO/Africa.pdf>

<http://www.unep.org/downloads/GBO/LatinAmerica.pdf>

<http://www.unep.org/downloads/GBO/AsiaPacific.pdf>

<http://www.unep.org/downloads/GBO/WestAsia.pdf>

Download the Video News Release (VNR) in broadcast standard or web standard:

<http://eurovision.net/worldlink/front/view/home.php>

MP4 file of the VNR: <http://idisk.mac.com/mabelle-Public/David/VNR GOV FINAL.mp4>

Information and links regarding the VNRs and B-roll:

http://web.me.com/dcurchod/dccdevbiodiv10/GLOBAL_BIODIVERSITY.html

GBO-3 graphics: www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo3/doc/GBO3-graphs.zip

<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=624&ArticleID=6558&l=en&t=long>

May 10, 2010

Sins Against Nature and God: We Are All Accountable for Ignoring the Global Consequences of Environmental Exploitation

By Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
The Huffington Post

Once again, in a matter only of a few years, the eyes of the world are turned with suspense toward the Gulf Coast. Sadly, the oil spill is following a path similar to Hurricane Katrina and threatening the coast of Louisiana as well as neighboring states.

As citizens of God's creation, we perceive this monumental spill of crude oil in the oceans of our planet as a sign of how far we have moved from the purpose of God's creation.

Our immediate reaction is to pray fervently for the urgent and efficient response to the current crisis, to mourn painfully for the sacrifice of human life as well as for the loss of marine life and wildlife, and to support the people and communities of the region, whose livelihood directly depends on the fisheries of the Gulf.

But as the first bishop of the world's second-largest Christian Church, we also have a responsibility not only to pray, but also to declare that to mistreat the natural environment is to sin against humanity, against all living things, and against our creator God. All of us -- individuals, institutions, and industries alike -- bear responsibility; all of us are accountable for ignoring the global consequences of environmental exploitation. Katrina -- we knew -- was a natural calamity. This time -- we know -- it is a man-made disaster. One deepwater pipe will impact millions of lives in several states as well as countless businesses and industries.

Therefore, we must use every resource at our disposal to contain this disaster. But we must also use every resource to determine liability for the fact that 11 people have died and 5,000 barrels of oil are flowing daily into the delicate ecology of the Gulf of Mexico. In exchange for the benefits and wealth generated by deep underwater drilling, individuals, institutions, and industries assume responsibility for protecting the earth and its creatures from the well-known potential hazards. In this instance, they have clearly failed in those responsibilities; that failure must be acknowledged and strong measures taken to avert future catastrophes.

Although we are halfway around the world from this incident, our interest in it is deeply personal. We visited Louisiana and its bayous only four months after its devastation by Hurricane Katrina and we returned there just last October to convene our Eighth Religion, Science, and the Environment Symposium, "Restoring Balance: The Great Mississippi," in New Orleans. At that time, we noted:

Although the time we have been on the planet is insignificant in the context of the life of the planet itself, we have reached a defining moment in our story.

Let us remember that, whoever we are, we all have our part to play, our sacred responsibility to the future. And let us remember that our responsibility grows alongside our privileges; we are more accountable the higher we stand on the scale of leadership. Our successes or failures, personal and collective, determine the lives of billions. Our decisions, personal and collective, determine the future of the planet.

In the spirit of responsibility, the White House and certain Congressional leaders have declared that, before beginning new offshore drilling for oil, there must be greater understanding of the environmental impact and responsibility for such endeavors. We support this approach. For, as confident as interested parties were that a disaster like this could not occur because of watertight controls and fail-safe mechanisms installed, those controls and mechanisms failed, with the horrific results we witness unfolding each day.

Until such understanding and responsibility have been determined, may God grant us all the strength to curtail the spill, the resources to support the region, and the courage to make the necessary changes so that similar tragedies may be avoided in the future.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew/sins-against-nature-and-g_b_567993.html

May 10, 2010

Hindu statesman Zed launches Global Council on Environment to 'better the universe around us'

Asian News International

Nevada (US) - A new global environment advocacy organization has been launched to “preserve, protect and better the universe around us”.

Named “Global Council on Environment” (GCE), it aims to raise the environment standards of the world. Headquartered in Nevada (USA), religious statesman Rajan Zed is its president while environmental advocate Jim Meiklejohn is secretary.

According to Zed, Council will seek to mobilize world opinion and increase awareness on the issues concerning environment, including its preservation, conservation, protection, economy, history, care, sciences, sustainability, ethics, law, planning, management, engineering, justice, etc.; ecology, global warming, ozone, sustainable development, pollution, climate change, water quality, indoor air quality, biodiversity, desertification, species migration, oil spills, acid rain, hazardous wastes, biological diversity, etc.

GCE will advocate conservation of natural resources, encourage the integration of environmental consideration in development activities and adoption of more sustainable lifestyle, seek to prevent environmental destruction, raise global environment issues, work to save ancient forests and protect oceans and ecosystems, increase public awareness about the consequences of unsustainable activities, etc.

Through its activities, Council intends to nurture life by protecting and restoring biodiversity, preventing pollution and abuse of land-fresh water-air-ocean, promoting peace, reversing destruction of environment, reducing dependence on fossil fuels and exposure to toxic chemicals, protecting oceans from pollution and overfishing, preserve the earth’s biosphere by planting and care for trees, etc., Rajan Zed adds.

It will support alternative and renewable energy sources, creating of innovative and economically viable solutions to environmental problems, etc.

<http://news.oneindia.in/2010/05/10/hindustatesman-zed-launches-global-council-onenvironment.html>

May 11, 2010

More than an oil spill

Disasters helped launch, and have reinvigorated, the environmental movement, but not all such events are equal.

By James William Gibson
The Los Angeles Times

We may well be living with the consequences of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill for the rest of the 21st century. But judging by past environmental disasters, the spill also has the potential to reinvigorate the environmental movement going forward. For more than a century, ecological crises have often strengthened environmental movements.

Take the fight over preserving the scenic Hetch Hetchy Valley just outside Yosemite National Park. The biggest environmental battle of naturalist John Muir's life was one that he lost — the fight to keep the city of San Francisco from erecting a dam on the Tuolumne River and flooding Hetch Hetchy.

The very idea of it appalled Muir: "These temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, seem to have a perfect contempt for nature," Muir wrote at the time. "Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated in the heart of man."

But although the dam was approved by Congress in 1913 and the valley ultimately destroyed, the fight helped embolden a fledgling environmental movement, and the memory of Hetch Hetchy became a rallying cry for future struggles.

In south Florida's Everglades, too, it was crisis that prompted calls for protecting the region. In the early part of the century, vast tracts of the Everglades' subtropical wetlands were dammed and drained for development and agriculture. During the 1930s, Miami newspaper columnist Marjory Stoneman Douglas supported such development as necessary for south Florida. But in the mid-1940s, when devastating fires swept through the region, she had a change of heart.

"The whole Everglades was burning," she wrote in "The Everglades: River of Grass." "What had been a river of grass and sweet water that had given meaning and life and uniqueness to this whole enormous geography through centuries in which man had no place here was made, in one chaotic gesture of greed and ignorance and folly, a river of fire."

The fires, and Douglas' book, turned the tide of public opinion and galvanized the efforts of those who wanted to preserve the natural splendor of the region. Today, more than 60 years later, the Everglades restoration movement is close to finalizing the purchase of lands necessary to restore water flow.

By far the most famous catastrophe to spur change was the November 1969 oil spill in the Santa Barbara Channel, which gave birth to a generation of activists who went on to organize direct action, file lawsuits and help pass the nation's fundamental environmental laws, including a moratorium on offshore oil drilling along the Pacific and North Atlantic coasts.

Of course, not all environmental disasters have spurred such activism. The 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska's Prince William Sound, for example, destroyed fisheries and fouled pristine bays and estuaries. But because it was seen as stemming from negligence on the captain's part along with a solvable technical problem — namely that oil tankers should have double hulls — it led to few calls for more systemic protections.

Whether or not the current gulf spill sparks renewed environmental activism will depend on how it is scrutinized. If its causes are defined narrowly — focusing on the need, say, for a better drill, a better cutoff valve — then the broader movement is unlikely to be spurred to greater action.

Certainly the first focus needs to be containing the flow of oil, but long-term solutions will require examining the disaster more broadly and questioning the wisdom of drilling in the ocean at all. Offshore drilling in deep water may seem technically feasible if each piece of technology is viewed separately, but viewed as a system, the operation will always be prone to unforeseen accidents.

This is why environmentalists should focus on the big picture coming out of this disaster. Ocean drilling puts the nation's fisheries and coastal communities at high risk, and we must ask whether doing so in the name of oil is wise.

On issues of restoration, too, the problems must be broadly defined. Cleanup should not entail merely removing oil from the surface. Truly restoring gulf wetlands and coastal waters should be the goal.

And the United States needs to quicken its transition to solar and wind energy, reducing dependency on oil.

It's too early to say whether the gulf spill will give a new impetus to the environmental movement, but it might. Although the George W. Bush administration dismantled protections, and the Obama administration has been a disappointment, many millions of Americans still strongly support the environmental movement. Moreover, our society has changed since the

Exxon Valdez disaster. Groups within most American religious denominations — Catholic, Protestant, Jewish — now support some version of green theology, on the principle that Earth is God's sacred creation and must be protected. Popular culture also shows growing environmental awareness, as in James Cameron's "Avatar," an allegory about the dangers of destroying what is sacred in nature. And the nation's hunters and fishers have become more involved in protecting wild lands and waters.

All told, a broad-based coalition could motivate politicians to pass visionary environmental legislation and make the gulf spill's legacy a historical turning point.

James William Gibson is a professor of sociology at Cal State Long Beach and the author, most recently, of "A Reenchanted World: The Quest for a New Kinship with Nature."

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-gibson-20100511,0,5441855.story>

May 17, 2010

Sacred Himalayan sites bring together religious leaders, conservationists

WWF

A first-time workshop in Bhutan today is bringing together religious leaders, government officials and conservationists to discuss how to better protect sacred natural sites in the region.

The workshop comes amid renewed interest from religious leaders worldwide in supporting conservation efforts.

For example, during the last two years Malaysia's Muslim preachers have been enlisted in the fight for wildlife conservation, using passages from the Koran to raise awareness and help protect some of the world's most endangered species.

Ahead of the climate talks in 2009, the Christian Orthodox Church's most senior leader in September 2009 issued a statement urging world leaders to join him and his more than 200 million followers in pushing for a strong and fair climate deal.

In many countries, religion and culture have played a significant role in the preservation of not only cultural riches, but also forests, rivers and in some cases mountains in the form of "sacred natural sites" that are revered by the local communities as abodes of their local deities or gods.

These beliefs have directly or indirectly helped in preservation of nature, according to WWF. This kind of reverence is seen amply in Bhutan and in the region but a direct link to nature conservation from these beliefs has never been studied till now.

WWF and its [Living Himalayas Initiative](#) are organizing the workshop, called “Sacred Natural Sites, Biodiversity Conservation & Climate Change in the Eastern Himalayas” in Bhutan from 17-19 May.

“The workshop on Sacred Natural Sites, bio-cultural diversity, and climate change is a first step in the region to get a group of academics, religious leaders and practitioners, government agencies, and conservationists together to discuss the issues and start to take action” said Tariq Aziz, Leader Living Himalayas Initiative.

The overall aim of this workshop is to document the sacred natural sites in the Eastern Himalayan region (Bhutan, India & Nepal) and detail their importance to the conservation of the region’s bio-cultural diversity; to engage faith groups further in practical conservation; and to explore the increasing threats and adaptation needs of faith communities in the face of rapidly changing climatic conditions.

Officials from WWF’s Network, religious leaders, experts in the field of religion and culture and climate change and related government officials from the Eastern Himalayan region are attending this two day meeting.

“In the Himalayas – the whole place is sacred, but there are many more specific places that have an even more special status for the different traditions that are prominent here” said Liza Higgins Zogib, Manager, People and Conservation, WWF International.

Through this effort WWF hopes to gather the varying opinions of the participating groups and find a solution to better protect those sacred natural sites

<http://wwf.panda.org/?193304/Sacred-Himalayan-sites-bring-together-religious-leaders-conservationists>

May 18, 2010

From Ecological Disaster to Constitutional Crisis: the Long Struggle Over the Xingú Dams Comes to a Climax at Belo Monte

By Terence Turner
Counterpunch

Once again, the indigenous peoples of the Xingú valley in the Brazilian Amazon are planning to make the long journey to the town of Altamira, where the Trans-Amazonica highway crosses the Xingú. Their ultimate destination will be the island of Pimental a short distance downriver from the town, where the Brazilian government plans to build a huge hydroelectric dam they call Belo Monte after the nearest Brazilian village. The Indians' bold plan, is to prevent the construction of the dam by building a new village directly on top of the proposed dam site and maintaining their occupation until the government abandons its plans for the dam. The planning for the encampment is being led by the Kayapo, the largest and most politically organized of the indigenous nations of the region, but other indigenous groups are also participating.

The Kayapo, however, are not waiting for the discussion of the plan for the encampment among the 23 indigenous groups of the Xingú Valley to reach consensus. They have already seized the ferry that carries Brazil Route 80, an important link in the Trans-Amazonica highway system, across the Xingú River at the Kayapo village of Piarajú. The ferry and the river crossing are now under guard by armed Kayapo warriors, who have announced that they will continue their blockade until the government negotiates with them about their plans for the Belo Monte dam.

This will not be the first indigenous encampment organized by the Kayapo in their effort to stop the building of dams on the Xingú. In 1989, when the government first set out to implement its plan for a giant hydroelectric complex on the Xingú, with financial support from the World Bank, the Kayapo led a great rally of 40 indigenous nations at Altamira against the scheme, setting up an encampment of several hundred Indians at a Catholic retreat center just outside the town. The five-day rally was extensively covered by national and international media, and succeeded in persuading the World Bank to withdraw its planned loan for the construction of the dams.

After the 1989 Altamira meeting, the Xingú dam scheme remained dormant, but not dead, for two decades. Two years ago it was revived as the centerpiece of the Lula government's Project for Accelerated Development. As a Brazilian activist remarked at the time, "These big dams are like vampires: you pound a stake through their hearts but they rise again from the grave and you have to do it all over again."

The Xingú River is one of the major tributaries of the Amazon. With its numerous affluents it has created a valley larger than Texas that remains perhaps the least disturbed and most diverse ecosystem in Brazilian Amazonia. It is unquestionably the most culturally diverse. 23 indigenous peoples of distinct cultures and languages make their homes there, most of them among the headwaters of the Upper Xingú, which has been made a national park by the Brazilian state. In the Middle Xingú region just to the north (downriver) of the National Park, the large and politically dynamic Kayapo people have their territory, consisting of seven mostly contiguous reserves with a combined area of 150,000 square kilometers (roughly the size of Austria).

Further downriver, between the Kayapo reserves and the mouth of the Xingú where it empties into the Amazon, several other indigenous peoples live in varying degrees of proximity with Brazilian settlers, some of them "river people" who subsist on a technology little different from that of the Indians, but others dwelling in towns they have established along the river and the Trans-Amazonica highway, which crosses the Xingú near the largest town, the regional capital of Altamira.

Over the years, this variegated system of social and cultural groups has evolved a relatively sustainable pattern of coexistence with one another and the even more varied riverine and forest ecosystems of the Xingú valley. All of these systems, however, have now been imperiled by the Federal government's plan to build a series of six giant hydroelectric dams along the Xingu and its largest tributary, the Irirí. The largest of these dams, Belo Monte, is to be the first built. Construction is scheduled to start in January 2011.

The master plan for damming the Amazon river system, which includes Belo Monte and the Xingú dams, was originally created in the 1970s by the military dictatorship then in power. It essentially treats the Amazon as a reservoir of natural resources to be extracted without regard for the destruction of its riverine and forest environment or the displacement and pauperization of its indigenous and local Brazilian inhabitants.

It has come as a shock to many supporters of the democratically elected government of President Lula Ignacio da Silva that Lula seems not only to have revived this authoritarian relic, with its reliance on technologically problematic and inefficient mega-dams, but has made it the centerpiece of his "Accelerated Development Project", the basis of his program to make the Brazilian economy one of the world's greatest, and as such the heart of his economic heritage, and seems intent on carrying it out in defiance of democratic processes and legality. President Inácio Lula da Silva and his chosen successor and chief political ally, Dilma Roussef, have elevated the Belo Monte dam to the status of a master-symbol of the Project for Accelerated Development. They reject all criticism of the dam as threats to the Accelerated Development Project as a whole.

If built, Belo Monte would be the third largest hydroelectric dam complex in the world, comprising one huge dam and two smaller dams, and requiring the diversion of the water from a 60 mile stretch of the river's channel through canals and underground tunnels to two massive arrays of turbines. The whole system would have a peak generating capacity of 11,200 kilowatt hours. Many critics of the project, however, have pointed out that this level of output would be attainable only for four months out of the year at the height of the rainy season. For the remaining eight months, during the dry season, the level of the river falls by thirty feet or more, so that much less water would be available to flow through the turbines, and the average output would fall to an annual rate of only 4,000 kilowatt hours.

This means that the electricity that the dam would generate, measured against the enormous cost of the dam, would be considerably more expensive than that potentially produced by alternative means. Taking into additional consideration the relatively short life-expectancy of dams in the Amazon because of silting and acidic erosion of turbine blades, the Belo Monte dam seems likely to prove to be an economic white elephant.

In other words, Belo Monte does not appear to be economically viable as a stand-alone dam, without another big dam upriver with a large enough reservoir to release a sufficient volume of water during the dry season to keep Belo Monte producing at close to its peak capacity all year. There are plans for such a dam, called Altamira, which would have an enormous reservoir that would flood a vast area of forest. Upriver from that, four other sites have been selected for a whole series of dams that could feed into the Reservoir of the Altamira dam.

The government insists that it envisions Belo Monte as viable by itself, and is currently planning only to build one dam on the Xingú, but its assurances to this effect are widely disbelieved by engineers, ecological critics and indigenous inhabitants alike, who suspect that each dam in the series will become a source of pressure for building another dam above it in the series, in a hydrological "domino effect". The government's credibility is not helped by its twenty-year record of secrecy and misrepresentation of its plans and intentions for the Xingú project.

These economic and technical objections, however, are not the only serious problems of the Belo Monte project. The 60-mile section of river that would be diverted to pass through the turbines and thus drained of its water now passes through two indigenous reservations (Arara and Paquiçamba-Juruna), whose people depend on the river for fish and transportation. The villages they currently occupy would thus become unviable. The Brazilian constitution mandates that indigenous communities must be consulted in advance before development projects are carried out within their reserved territories, and that all local peoples must be given a chance to discuss with responsible officials any government projects that will affect their livelihoods. The government agencies charged with building the dams have defiantly refused to comply with this legal requirement in the cases of the two indigenous communities affected, as they have in those of the other indigenous peoples of the Xingú. They have also failed to produce a satisfactory environmental impact evaluation, which is legally required as the prerequisite for the issue of a license to build the dam. Instead, the license was released, under intense political pressure, in the absence of a completed Environmental Impact Report, in a clear violation of legal requirements.

This instance, and others, of cutting legal corners to push through the dam project have unleashed bitter and portentous confrontations within the government itself. The Brazilian state is far from monolithically behind the Xingú dam Project. The Public Ministry, an autonomous governmental agency empowered to decide on the constitutionality and legality of government projects and actions, has openly denounced the Belo Monte dam project as illegal and in violation of the constitution, and moreover as likely to produce an environmental catastrophe in the Xingú.

On April 7, 2010, the Public Ministry handed down two devastating decisions, one finding the government's plan to hold the auction at Altamira unconstitutional and in violation of several existing laws, and the other charging that the Belo Monte Project would violate the constitutional and legal rights of indigenous peoples whose territories and communities it would either flood or cut off from access to the river. In consequence of these decisions, the Public Ministry called for annulling the government's decision to hold an auction on April 20 for bids by consortiums of private construction companies for the enormous and lucrative job of building Belo Monte. The Attorney General of Brazil, channeling an infuriated Lula, threatened to have the attorneys of the Public Ministry arrested and imprisoned for interfering with the project, but the lawyers of the Public Ministry stood firm. They have not been arrested, but the threat of this illegal attempt at repression of political opposition to state policies remains open and has been repeated by the AG.

President Lula meanwhile defiantly vowed to build Belo Monte regardless of the legal and constitutional obstacles, many of which arise from the government's disregard of the legal procedures that must be followed by any project for the construction of major development

projects in indigenous land or other local communities. His disregard of legal and democratic process struck many as reminiscent of the pre-democratic military regime which had originally conceived the Amazon dam projects. Lula also brushed aside the technological criticisms of the project raised by many engineers, the ecological issues raised by biologists and environmentalists, national Brazilian and international NGOs, and as goes without saying, the protests of indigenous people and local Brazilian settler organizations that the dams would destroy their material base of existence.

In the week before the auction, a courageous Federal judge in Altamira handed down a judgment based on one of the Public Ministry's two briefs annulling the government's decision to hold the auction. This was immediately reversed by the Regional Appeals Court in Brasília. The Altamira court judge then handed down a second order to cancel the auction on the day before it was scheduled to be held. His decision, a 50-page document with extensive legal arguments, precedents and references, was also based squarely on the Public Ministry's documents. In a travesty of due process, this decision was also reversed by the Appeals Court within 24 hours and the auction was held. In neither of the two cases did the Court of Appeals attempt to deal with the legal arguments of the decisions of the lower Altamira court, simply appealing to the extra-legal criterion of Brazil's need for energy and the demands of the Project for Accelerated Development.

This blatant corruption of the legal system by political pressure from the government, with the acquiescence of one of the highest courts of the land, outraged much of Brazil's legal profession and further aroused the opposition of the broad and growing array of elements of Brazilian civil society who have been organizing against Belo Monte and the other planned Xingú dams. Many of these elements joined together in a march in Brasilia on April 12 that targeted all the government ministries implicated in approving the plan for Belo Monte, and called for the cancellation of the project. In this march they were joined by James Cameron, writer and director of Avatar, and members of the cast of the film.

There are clear parallels between the battle of the fictional indigenous people against the attempt by a giant corporation to extract precious minerals from their planet, modeled on the Amazon rain forest, and the struggle of the inhabitants of the Xingú valley against the damming of their rivers to generate power, much of which is intended for the production of minerals such as aluminum for export. In both cases, the collateral damage of the extractive projects threatens to destroy the ecosystem and way of life of the native people, and in both cases, they resist.

James Cameron visited the site of the planned Belo Monte dam, and some of the indigenous villages that it would affect, in March of this year, and was so struck by the similarities in their situation with that of the Navi, the indigenous natives in his film Avatar, that he committed himself to support their movement against the dams. His return to Brazil with members of the cast on April 12, 2010, to take part in the march in Brasilia, was a public affirmation of his support for their cause. Sigourney Weaver, of the Avatar cast, later led a similar march in New York against the Xingú dams.

As this is written, a Kayapo delegation led by Chief "Raoni" (or as he pronounces it, Rop-ni) of the Xingu Kayapo, is travelling through France, Belgium, and Luxembourg, visiting government

ministers and heads of state and appealing for support of the indigenous campaign against the Xingú dams. Other campaigns, some involving other tours by indigenous leaders, are getting under way in other European countries and in North America. The Brazilian government's attempt to push ahead the Xingú dam scheme in the face of the mounting storm of opposition from local settlers, indigenous peoples, environmentalist and human rights NGOs, other sectors of Brazilian civil society and important elements of the state itself (such as significant parts of the judicial system and political opposition) is thus becoming a problem for Brazil's foreign relations. Within Brazil, it has already moved from its original status as a localized problem involving indigenous rights and ecological impacts of a dam in a remote part of the Amazon to a major legal, political and constitutional crisis involving Brazil's political conduct as a democratic state.

At stake in this crisis is Brazil's political ability to reconcile and accommodate the demands of its capital-intensive policy of economic growth, epitomized by its "accelerated development" project, with the principles of constitutional legality and democracy supported by its rapidly growing middle class, in alliance with the indigenous and settler groups of its vast Amazonian interior. An irony of the Xingú dam project is that it has done much to bring this historically unique alliance into political being, and in so doing has inadvertently made a profoundly hopeful contribution to the development of Brazilian democratic civil society. This contribution, however, has only been realized thanks to the courage, leadership and political resourcefulness of the Kayapo, other indigenous groups who have supported them, and the Brazilian social movements of the Xingú Valley.

Whatever the immediate outcome of the struggle over the Belo Monte project, the broad alliance of indigenous peoples, Brazilian settlers and social movements, environmentalists, human rights organizations and elements of the Brazilian state committed to democratic legality and constitutionality in common opposition to the dam scheme the movement has built, will continue the fight against the other dams the government hopes to build in the Xingú, with catastrophic effects on the flora, fauna and human inhabitants of the Xingú valley.

Terry Turner is a cultural anthropologist who has worked with indigenous people in the Amazon for 50 years. He is the president of Survival International USA, and a member of the Brazilian Panel of Specialists on the Belo Monte project, a Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago, and Adjunct Professor at Cornell University. Comments? Write to Terence Turner at tst3@cornell.edu.

This commentary is also posted at [Anthropologyworks](http://www.anthropologyworks.com).

<http://www.counterpunch.org/turner05182010.html>

May 24, 2010

Green Hinduism, a natural fit

At the first global green Hindu event on Saturday, we were reminded of the scriptural imperative to protect our fragile earth

By Kusum Vyas
The Guardian

The United Nations has declared 2010 [international year for biological diversity](#). On Saturday, the [Living Planet Foundation](#) convened what was believed to be the first global "green" Hindu event, calling on Hindus from the UK and abroad to reflect on how they can contribute to preserving biodiversity worldwide. It was a celebration of the rich abundance of distinct plant and animal species across our planet, and a campaign to draw attention to the threats facing the diversity of life on earth.

There is a huge amount at stake. Humanity is inflicting devastation on our beautiful planet, as evidenced by global climate change and [mass species extinctions](#). At the same time we are engaged in a war against nature, scientists are discovering just how much we depend on having an intact ecosystem. But respect for the natural world has always been a part [Hinduism](#), even being built into forms of worship. Thousands of years ago, Hindu sages said we must preserve the environment and the ecological balance of our planet, recognising our own survival depended upon it. Hindu scriptures such as the centuries old [Vedas](#), [Upanishads](#) and [Vedanta](#) are replete with spiritual and poetic references to Mother Earth, where the environment is alive and teeming with life; where trees, mountains and rocks become shrines and the river is respected as a source and support of physical and spiritual life.

In Hinduism, every living thing has an "atman", a soul and at its core, the Hindu faith obliges us to defend our environment. Hinduism recognises that nature and the ecosystems holding the fabric of the planet together create a climate ideal for human life. There is nothing in the Hindu scriptures or the Hindu tradition that suggests biodiversity can be traded as an economic commodity. On the contrary – the Hindu sages warned against ignorance as to how our planet functions and cautioned against exploiting its resources. We should heed their words; if we continue to destroy ecosystems such as the great tropical forests of this world, we will herald our own demise, as well as that of a host of other living beings.

That a fundamental respect for and fear of nature is exemplified in the Hindu tradition makes it all the more horrendous that the government of [India](#) is pushing ahead with plans to drive a [shipping canal](#) through a particularly environmentally sensitive region. In the face of international opposition, India plans to dredge the Gulf of Mannar, the shallow body of water separating India from Sri Lanka. It will blast through the ancient limestone base of the gulf which is home countless endangered species, among them the dugong, the green turtle, and several species of sea snake. The devastation this single act of environmental terrorism will wreak is almost unimaginable.

Not only will a biodiversity hotspot be damaged, so too will be the sacred "bridge", known to Hindus as "Ram Sethu" and to Muslims as "Adam's Bridge". According to Hindu stories, this shoal of limestone is the bridge Lord Ram crossed in order to rescue his wife Sita from the clutches of an evil demon.

At Saturday's meeting Kathy Goldsmith, the environmental campaigner, Ian Stephen of the Zoological Society of London, the Hindu ecologist and author Ranchor Prime, and Hindu priest Dr Raj Pandit Sharma, outlined the devastating consequences of this and other economically-driven projects that endanger our planet's future. They and the Living Planet Foundation implore all people of the world, regardless of their race, creed, political ideology or [religion](#) to join us in our efforts to save our fragile ecosystems such as the Gulf of Mannar.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2010/may/24/green-hindu-environment-india>

May 26, 2010

From Kigali to Haiti - People around the planet gear up for World Environment Day

United Nations Environment Programme

Kigali/Nairobi/Worldwide - From Hollywood stars to schoolchildren, millions of people on every continent will take action for the planet on 5 June for World Environment Day.

Under the theme '*Many Species. One Planet. One Future*', this year's event will celebrate the incredible diversity of life on Earth as part of the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity.

This year's global host, Rwanda - a country of exceptional biodiversity that has made huge strides on environmental protection - will lead the celebrations with three days of keynote events.

Thousands of activities will also be organized worldwide from Hong Kong to Abidjan, with beach clean-ups, concerts, exhibits, film festivals, community events and much more.

Global Celebrations in Rwanda

The 2010 global celebrations in Rwanda will involve three days of events on 3-5 June, culminating in the epic Kwita Izina gorilla-naming ceremony in the world famous Volcanoes National Park on 5 June.

This year's ceremony will be attended by 30,000 people and will involve Rwandan President Paul Kagame, Oscar-nominated actor Don Cheadle and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner, among other high-profile figures who will have the honour of naming the baby gorillas.

2-5 June: UNEP-Bayer youth conference: 'African Youth Standing up for Biodiversity' with youth from across Africa.

3 June:

- Launch of UNEP report: *'Dead Planet, Living Planet - Biodiversity and Ecosystem Restoration for Sustainable Development'*.
- Conference on International Biodiversity & Conservation with Achim Steiner, Ahmed Djoghlaif, the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and Environment Ministers from around Africa.

4 June: Launch of the updated UNEP report and documentary on *'The Last Stand of the Gorilla'*

5 June - World Environment Day:

- Kwita Izina gorilla-naming ceremony in the Volcanoes National Park.
- Launch of the WED Legacy Project: for every activity registered on the WED website, UNEP will donate US\$10 towards gorilla conservation in Rwanda. Energy company Philips will also participate in the project by donating solar home systems that will light 300 houses in Rwanda.
- Designation of Oscar-nominated actor Don Cheadle as UNEP Goodwill Ambassador.

WED events around the world

The celebrations in Rwanda are among the thousands of events that will take place around the globe on 5 June, from Qatar to Korea and from Serbia to Chile, to celebrate WED.

Here are a few WED highlights from every continent:

- **10:10**, a global campaign to reduce carbon emissions by 10 per cent in a year, will be launched publicly on WED, with events planned in Nigeria, Germany, Portugal, France and in cities across the United States.
- **CinemAmbiente**: Italy's top environmental film festival, in Turin, will feature more than 30 documentaries and short films on the environment.
- UNEP Goodwill Ambassador **Gisele Bündchen** will promote WED in her native Brazil in June. She also appears in a Public Service Announcement calling people for action on 5 June.
- National Geographic and GlobeScan will release the **Greendex 2010 survey** on 3 June - a unique survey ranking average consumers in 17 countries according to their environmental impact and green behaviour.
- The keynote event for the Latin America and Caribbean region will be the **WED celebrations in Haiti**, with the launch of the Haiti Global Environment Outlook report.
- Pittsburgh is the host of this year's **North American celebrations**, with more than 130 events and activities including a national conference on water, an Arts and Environment Festival, and the Water Savers Competition whose goal is to see which neighborhoods can save the most water and energy from April to June.
- **Celebrations in Europe** will include major public events in Geneva (Switzerland), Baku (Azerbaijan) and Genoa (Italy), alongside a multitude of events across the continent - among them a circus and poetry slam in Eskilstuna (Sweden) and the screening of a series of environmental films entitled 'Télégrammes Visuels' in Paris (France).

- Events will take place **across Africa**, from Cameroon to Mozambique, with a series of tree plantings, beach clean-ups and poetry contests organized around the continent.
- **West Asian celebrations:** In Bahrain, prominent poets and singers will gather to sing and talk about the environment and biodiversity.
- A wide variety of events will be organized in the **Asia-Pacific** region, from a mangrove clean-up in Jakarta (Indonesia) to the Bangladesh Ocean Festival and No Vehicle Time in Malé (Maldives).

Participate!

World Environment Day is the people's day for environmental action: everyone can take part. The WED 2010 website is more interactive than ever, with daily tips, information and statistics on biodiversity, and a platform where people around the world can register their activities. This year, the public have had a chance to vote for their favourite gorilla name - which will be announced by Don Cheadle on 5 June - and the winner of the WED Blogging Competition will travel to Rwanda to cover the epicentre of the WED celebrations.

Notes to Editors:

WED, organized by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) every year since 1972, is the UN's biggest global celebration for positive environmental action. The 2010 theme focuses on the central importance to humanity of the globe's wealth of species and ecosystems, in support of the 2010 UN International Year of Biodiversity.

This year's host country, Rwanda, was chosen for its combination of environmental richness, including rare species such as the mountain gorilla, allied to pioneering green policies.

Websites for more information:

WED website: <http://www.unep.org/wed/2010/english/>

Our world map of WED activities: <http://www.unep.org/wed/2010/english/activitymap/>

The gorilla-naming competition: <http://www.unep.org/wed/2010/english/GorillaNaming/>

The official website of the gorilla-naming ceremony: <http://www.kwitizina.org/>

The Pittsburgh celebrations: www.unep.org/rona or www.pittsburghwed.com

CinemAmbiente: <http://www.cinemambiente.it/>

10:10 campaign: www.1010global.org

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=624&ArticleID=6579&l=en>

June 1, 2010

Want not, waste not

By Max Carter
The Washington Post

Q: The catastrophic oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is a widening environmental, economic and political crisis. Is it also a moral crisis? How does religion influence our use and abuse of the natural world? Does religion help or harm the environment?

Whether it is the demand for cheap coffee that has in the past encouraged oppressive military and economic activity in Latin America, the demand for exclusive ownership of land that has led to the dispossession of populations and the destruction of the natural environment in the Americas, the Middle East, and elsewhere, or our insatiable appetite for fossil fuels, we "sow the seeds of violence" by our consumptive behavior and lifestyle. It is easy to point the finger at others, but if we didn't have such a desire for "the goodies," companies such as BP wouldn't be engaging in risky behavior. As one who works with college students most of the time, I recognize "risky behavior" when I see it - and it almost always boils down to ones "desires."

The default setting for many Quakers on issues such as the massive oil spill in the Gulf (or any other disaster resulting from our cravings, for that matter) is "WWJWD" - "What Would John Woolman Do?"

Woolman, an 18th century Quaker tailor, orchardist, and mystic from New Jersey, is famous for dedicating his life to addressing the sin of slavery, the abuse of Native Americans, and the demeaning of laborers through unfair economic systems and overwork. Woolman saw clearly that there is a direct line from our own desires and cravings to the justification of so clear an evil as slavery, the dissipation of the original inhabitants of the land in order to steal their property, and the oppression of workers to maximize profits.

Woolman linked the great social evils of his day to a failure to see the interconnection of classic religious values such as a deep and inward spirituality, integrity, simplicity, equality,

community, and peace. If we were attached more to the lasting things of life rather than transient material objects, we might look upon physical possessions with less sense of ultimacy; if we simplified our lives and "made do" with the basic necessities instead of pursuing "wants," there would be plenty to go around; if we saw others as equals, all living in the same community of humanity and nature, we would be more careful about how our decisions affected others; if we recognized that our own lifestyles directly lead to violence done to others and to nature, we might, in Woolman's own words, "Examine the clothing we wear, the food we eat, and the very furnishings of our houses and try whether the seeds of war lie in these, our possessions."

During my life, I have tried to decrease the amount of my dependence on fossil fuels by biking and walking whenever possible and by using alternative energy sources for heating and cooling our home. Yet I, too, have contributed to the Gulf oil spill by using petroleum products on a daily basis and by not altering my lifestyle even more intentionally. I share in the blame.

As we all contemplate the meaning of this disaster, it is my hope that we contemplate the experience of another of my faith tradition's central figures, George Fox, who turned down early release from imprisonment if he would join the militia. Committed to the way of Jesus, he rejected the offer with the reply, "I live in the virtue of that life and power which removes the occasion for war." Perhaps if we all "lived in the virtue of that life and power which removes the occasion for a gluttonous desire for cheap, nonrenewable energy," BP and other companies would not feel the need to engage in such risky behavior.

Being the campus minister I am, it is also my hope that we recognize risky behavior in ourselves, rather than pointing to others as the source of our problems. And when that happens, I am convinced that, almost James Watt-like, we will be in the "Last Days" - and we won't have to worry as much about the earth! Holding ourselves accountable, indeed, is for me one of the signs of the impending millennial reign of peace!

I won't be holding my breath, though!

A recorded Friends minister, Max Carter serves on the Board of the American Friends Service Committee and the Advisory Board of the Earlham School of Religion.

http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/max_carter/2010/06/the_gulf_oil_spill.html

June 3, 2010

A Time for Moral Reckoning

By Jim Wallis

The Huffington Post

I am watching unbelievable pictures of endless swaths of brown oil mixed with the blue waters of the Gulf of Mexico, of dying wetlands and marshes, of miles of contaminated coastlines, of dead birds and animals, of helpless and hopeless Gulf Coast residents sadly witnessing their livelihoods and their lives slipping away. With the explosion and sinking of the [BP oil rig six weeks ago](#), the immediate talk was about environmental threats and technical fixes, economic losses and political blaming, and debates about responsibility for the costs. But with the failure of the latest attempt to stop the spill, and with both BP and the federal government admitting they still really don't know how much oil has already spilled or will spill, a national discussion is beginning about the fundamental moral issues at stake, and perhaps even a national reflection on our whole way of life based on oil dependence and addiction.

[After the failure of "top kills" and "cut and cap" strategies](#), it now appears the gushing of oil into the sea could continue until at least August, or maybe even longer. This could be one of those moments when the nation's attention all turns to the same thing, as in 9/11 and the days after Katrina. To use an over-used phrase, this could be a "teachable moment," but as 9/11 and Katrina demonstrated, we don't necessarily learn the right lessons from teachable moments. This time we had better do so.

First, we have to change our language. This isn't a little "spill," it is an environmental catastrophe -- the potential contamination of a whole gulf (already a third is now off limits for fishing) and hundreds of miles of coastline, and it threatens to expand to an ocean and more coastlines. It will bring the destruction of critical wetlands, endanger countless species, end human ways of life dependent upon the sea, and now, it will increase the danger of a hurricane season that could dump not just water, but waves of oil just miles inland from the coasts.

Theologically, we are witnessing a massive despoiling of God's creation. We were meant to be stewards of the Gulf of Mexico, the wetlands that protect and spawn life, the islands and beaches, and all of God's creatures who inhabit the marine world. But instead, we are watching the destruction of all that. Why? Because of the greed for profits; because of deception and lies; because of both private and public irresponsibility. And at the root, because of an ethic of endless economic growth, fueled by carbon-based fossil fuels, that is ultimately unsustainable and unstable.

It's not just that BP has lied, even though they have -- over and over -- to cover up their behavior and avoid their obligations. It is that BP *is* a lie; what it stands for is a lie. It is a lie that we can continue to live this way, a lie that our style of life is stable and sustainable, a lie that these huge oil companies are really committed to a safe and renewable energy future. BP should indeed be made to pay for this crime against the creation -- likely with its very existence.

But I am also reminded of what G.K. Chesterton once said when asked what was most wrong with the world. He reportedly replied, "I am." Already, we are hearing some [deeper reflection](#) on the [meaning of this daily disaster](#). Almost everyone now apparently agrees with the new direction of a "clean energy economy." And we know that will require a re-wiring of the energy grid (which many hope BP will have no part in). But it will also require a [re-wiring of ourselves](#) - - our demands, requirements, and insatiable desires. [Our oil addiction has led us to environmental destruction](#), endless wars, and the sacrifice of young lives, and it has put our very

souls in jeopardy. *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman recently wondered about the deeper meaning of the Great Recession when he asked, "What if it's telling us that the whole growth model we created over the last fifty years is simply unsustainable economically and ecologically and that 2008 was when we hit the wall -- when Mother Nature and the market both said, 'No More.'" The Great Spill makes the point even more.

There is not one answer to this calamity; there are many: corporate responsibility, for a change; serious government regulation, for a change; public accountability, for a change; and real civic mobilization to protect the endangered waters, coasts, species, and people's livelihoods. But at a deeper level, we literally need a conversion of our habits of the heart, our energy sources, and our lifestyle choices. And somebody will need to lead the way. Who will dare to say that an economy of endless growth must be confronted and converted to an economy of sustainability, to what the Bible calls stewardship. What about the community of faith?

I am told this morning that the smell of oil is already apparent in the parks and playgrounds near the Mississippi coast. Unless this crisis in the Gulf finally [becomes the wake-up call that signals a new national commitment to end our dependence on oil](#), our children may now be smelling their future.

The first step forward is building awareness. Would you forward this blog to your friends?

Jim Wallis is the author of [Rediscovering Values: On Wall Street, Main Street, and Your Street -- A Moral Compass for the New Economy](#), CEO of [Sojourners](#) and blogs at www.godspolitics.com.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-wallis/a-time-for-moral-reckonin_b_599366.html

June 4, 2010

Ghana: The Climate Change Agenda - What Role for Religious Groups?

By Charles Agboklu
AllAfrica Global Media

The issue of climate change has not only become topical globally but also a very essential cross-cutting subject in all socio-economic sectors of the economy including governance. The issue therefore needs to be addressed by national institutions including religious organisations in Ghana.

Although the government may be in the forefront of addressing the concerns of climate change in the country, Faith- Based Institutions need to complement the efforts of government by reaching out to a wider section of the population especially those at the grassroots, with the climate change message.

One of the over-riding reasons why religious organisations should engage in this process is that the subject of Climate Change is a technical one, steeply embedded in scientific theories, calculations and research findings. Given the illiteracy rate of citizens, these concepts could not be easily understood by ordinary people if the subject is not further reduced to their level of understanding, through simple but effective awareness-creating messages. For this purpose religious leaders and agents themselves need to be well educated and informed on the subject of climate change before they could be able to translate the basic tenets of climate change and its effects to congregations.

In this way, the message of climate mitigation and adaptation which is very dear to Africa in her effort to finding solutions, would be simplified and readily assimilated by local people, who are also major stakeholders in the solution process by virtue of some of their detrimental practices in the areas of bush burning, and other harmful agricultural practices.

Advocacy

Advocacy is one area in which religious organisations are known to be very strong and effective. Advocacy is therefore highly recommended as a strategy and a working tool in the arsenal of religious organisations which should be deployed in the communication of basic information on climate change to rural communities.

In Ghana, not much education or sensitisation has gone on at the basic units of the population on Climate Change. The Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology in a case study titled:

"Ghana's Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment" noted the following key lessons learned and which should be addressed:

- . That, Ghana's economy is highly dependent on climate sensitive sectors which have to be watched closely;
- . That, there is a strong relationship between climate and poverty levels;
- . That, data and relevant information for facilitating the appreciation of climate change is woefully inadequate;
- . That, policy makers and businesses need to consider climate change as a priority for poverty reduction programmes

Action

From this National Vulnerability Assessment Report, which also identified 'Capacity Building' as a core focal area, there is the need for faith-based organisations to launch a vigorous campaign on climate change through awareness creation and massive education of the majority of Ghanaians in order for them to appreciate the negative effects of climate change on the environment and the urgent need to address them.

It is therefore recommended that religious leaders and their institutions take a position on the National Climate Change discourse and lead a concerted effort in a massive advocacy campaign locally and internationally that would lead to:

- . Compliance with emission reduction measures and quotas by the polluting countries adopted by international conventions and protocols;
- . Play a watch dog role by ensuring that national adaptation and mitigation projects are budgeted for and duly executed;
- . Ensure that adaptation and mitigation policies and appropriate regulatory and financing mechanisms are formulated by parliament and adequately implemented by the state;
- .n Advocate for the inclusion of Civil Society and Faith-Based Institutions in the implementation and monitoring of national projects;
- . Advocate for the financing of capacity building programmes for FBOS and CSO's.
- . Collaborate with all the relevant state Institutions and Development Partners like MEST, CSIR, EPA, MOFA, UNDP, WORLD BANK, EU and the Universities to advance the cause of climate change mitigation.

Copenhagen Accord

Though the Copenhagen Accord was not universally accepted and therefore not recognised by CSO's in Africa, because it fell outside the UNFCCC negotiating machinery, some African countries including Ghana signed up to it. According to the Ghanaian experts on climate change, there are a lot of opportunities even under the Copenhagen Accord which Ghana as a nation could take advantage of. These include climate projects on adaptation and mitigation, REDD and many others for which funding is being made available. The challenge rather for Ghana, they lamented, is the apparent lack of human resource capacity to even attract and manage these projects successfully and efficiently.

Many FBO's in Ghana have development departments that cater for the socio-economic needs of citizens. It is therefore in their collective interest to take advantage of whatever opportunities inure to the government whether under the present Accord or any future legally binding agreement sealed under the UNFCCC to improve upon the living conditions of Ghanaians. Development partners would do a great deal of good if they partner and collaborate with Faith-based Institutions in the planning and implementation of climate change policies and programmes. That will send a good signal to government that all stakeholders are indeed needed for the effort at finding a lasting solution to national environmental issues.

In so doing, the FBOS will become fully engaged in the process nationally and use their structures on the ground to efficiently disseminate and communicate the issues of climate change to majority of the citizenry. By that, the modest gains that have been achieved under the Millennium Development Goals would not be reversed but rather consolidated.

It is worthwhile for now to go for what we have in hand as a nation under the circumstances and try to make the best out of it for our people. The FBOs will anytime and day support the legally binding agreement sealed under the UNFCCC which the developing world and her allies in the north stand for by supporting any future effort by governments and Civil Society in Africa in that direction.

The writer, Charles Agboklu is Coordinator, Religious Bodies Network on Climate Change [Relbonet], Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana.

<http://allafrica.com/stories/201006040863.html>

June 5, 2010

Churches Urged to Address Challenges on World Environment Day

By Dabin Samuel
The Christian Post

In marking World Environment Day on Saturday, the National Council of Churches in India urged churches, related-organizations and agencies to celebrate and respond to environmental concerns that are due to human activities.

"We as Christian faith-based communities must thank God for the multi-species and bio-diversified environment as gift to the cosmic world," said the Rev. Christopher Rajkumar, secretary of Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation of NCCI.

He, however, reminded Christians that impending environmental challenges must not be forgotten amid celebration.

"Due to personal and individualistic greedy actions of the powerful, parts of important landscape and species are disappearing everyday from this cosmic community. This is a challenge to faith based communities who affirm God as the creator and sustainer of this cosmos. While thanking God we have to take up the challenge too," said Rajkumar.

This year's World Environment Day theme is "Many Species. One Planet. One Future."

Some 100 species out of earth's 30-50 million species are reportedly lost each day under agriculture schemes, cities, industrial developments and dams or through pollution and erosion. Also, a total of 17,291 species are threatened with extinction.

To mark this year's observance, several NGOs and organizations raised awareness on the environment by holding events, street rallies, forums and poster competitions.

World Environment Day presents an opportunity to search for faith responses, said Rajkumar.

"Church must take it as a missiological responsibility to care and save God's earth. Our commitment to the care of the Cosmic should be our mission agenda, because the 'Earth is Gods, and who dwell in it' (Psl 24:1)."

Hundreds of thousands of people from every local congregation and churches from across the country were mobilized for environmental-care actions and activities locally and nationally.

Some of the proposed activities suggested by the NCCI included special prayers, sermons for "Green Sunday," tree planting on church campus, seminars, dialogues, discussions with other secular groups, essays and art competitions.

World Environment Day was first established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1972.

<http://www.christianpost.com/article/20100605/churches-urged-to-address-challenges-on-world-environment-day/>

June 5, 2010

Solar Power for Schoolchildren and US\$85,000 for Gorilla Conservation Among Lasting Legacy of World Environment Day in Rwanda

United Nations Environment Programme

Kigali/Volcanoes National Park -- Schoolchildren and villagers across Rwanda will receive solar power and more than \$85,000 will go to gorilla conservation as part of the lasting legacy of World Environment Day 2010.

Rwanda, this year's global host for WED, organized a vivid celebration in the Volcanoes National Park that brought together a Hollywood star, the Rwandan President, environmentalists and businesses alongside 30,000 people.

During the much-anticipated and widely acclaimed traditional Kwita Izina baby gorilla naming ceremony, this year's People's Choice name, 'Zoya', which was chosen online by around 3,400 people around the planet, was announced by Oscar-nominated actor Don Cheadle.

"WakaWaka", the name given to another baby gorilla, was selected by children from around the world in a global online competition. The name was announced by UNEP Climate Hero and acclaimed wildlife photographer Luo Hong. WakaWaka means "to light up" in Swahili.

The naming ceremony was attended by Mr. Cheadle and Mr. Hong alongside Rwandan President Paul Kagame and Achim Steiner, United Nations Under Secretary General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Mr. Steiner: "We are especially pleased by this year's WED celebrations. Not only is Rwanda a pioneer in Green Economic growth with a true commitment to a cleaner development model, we have joined forces with partners to contribute to gorilla conservation and provide hundreds of solar lights for Rwandan villagers and schoolchildren. WED is not just about the here and now – it is about having a positive impact on our collective future."

The WED Legacy Initiative, launched for WED 2010, was inspired by UNEP's recent report, 'The Last Stand of the Gorilla', which estimated that if current trends continue, gorillas could be lost from their present range in The Greater Congo Basin in 10 to 15 years.

For every activity or positive environmental action organized and registered on the WED website, UNEP will contribute US\$10 towards gorilla conservation through the 'Take a Stand for the Gorilla' initiative. As a result of the thousands of activities organized around the world by individuals, communities, NGOs, businesses and governments, UNEP's WED Legacy fund drive has raised a total of US\$50,000, with all the funds going to the Volcanoes National Park.

In addition, more than US\$35,000 was generously contributed to the WED Legacy Project by UNEP partners inspired by the initiative:

- Mr. Luo Hong, President of the Beijing Holiland Enterprise Investment Management and a long-time supporter of UNEP's International Children's Painting Competition, donated US\$20,000 towards the Legacy Project.
- The UNEP National Committee in the Republic of Korea donated US\$10,000 raised from an online fund-drive involving Korean citizens.
- The Kenya Airways Rwanda Office is making a contribution of US\$5,000.
- Supermarket chain Nakumatt in Rwanda will contribute 1 per cent of its gross sales for the whole month of June to the project.

Inspired by the Government of Rwanda's pursuit of a low-carbon, green path to economic development, energy company Philips is also supporting UNEP's WED Legacy Initiative with a donation of 300 solar home systems.

Fifty of the systems will go to the Rubaya Village in Gichumbi District, a pilot village of a joint poverty and environment project between UNEP and the government of Rwanda. The rest will be distributed to benefit schoolchildren in rural villages where there is no power, enabling them to do their homework at home and complete their education.

Mr. DP Smedema, the Chief Executive Officer of Philips Lighting Africa, said: "We are proud to be partnering with the United Nations Environment Programme for World Environment Day. As

part of Philips' broader drive to improve people's lives, Philips is committed to making affordable, high-quality, energy efficient lighting available to areas where it is most needed. Solar-powered lighting solutions can make a true difference for the people in Rwanda."

In a final wave of WED celebrations in Rwanda, Don Cheadle, who is an internationally respected humanitarian and environmentalist, was appointed Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Environment Programme on 5 June. Mr. Cheadle, who starred in the acclaimed film *Hotel Rwanda* in 2004, is passionate about the link between natural resources and peace. He will advocate sustainable lifestyles, promote the greening of the entertainment industry and other sector, and take part in UNEP public outreach initiatives.

Notes to Editors:

About World Environment Day:

World Environment Day is the people's day for environmental action. Under the theme 'Many Species. One Planet. One Future', this year's event celebrated the incredible diversity of life on Earth as part of the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity.

This year's global host, Rwanda – a country of exceptional biodiversity that has made huge strides on environmental protection – led the celebrations with three days of keynote events. Thousands of activities were also organized worldwide from Hong Kong to Abidjan, with beach clean-ups, concerts, exhibits, film festivals, community events and much more.

About the Kwita Izina gorilla-naming ceremony:

Kwita Izina, the uniquely Rwandan event to name baby gorillas born in the Volcanoes National Park in the past year, was introduced in 2005 with the aim of creating awareness for the conservation of the endangered mountain Gorillas.

This year, the ceremony at the foot of the Virunga Mountains was timed to coincide with World Environment Day on 5 June. For the first time ever, the global community was involved in the event, with more than 800 people voting online for the 'People's Choice' gorilla name.

The winning name, Zoya, was chosen by 1,272 people out of 3,485 people voting online on the WED website from around the planet. Zoya, suggested by a UNEP and You follower on Twitter, refers to 'life' and 'light' in several languages: it means 'shining' in India, 'alive' in Greek, and 'twilight' in Iranian. Zoya narrowly beat the runner-up, Yoda – after the beloved Star Wars character – as well as Ijabo and Hitamo.

The WED website also featured a Kids' Choice vote which was also announced at the Kwita Izina ceremony, with more than 424 children out of 1,146 voting for the winning name 'Waka Waka'.

About UNEP Goodwill Ambassador Don Cheadle:

Don Cheadle, an internationally respected actor, humanitarian and environmentalist, was nominated for an Academy Award in 2004 for his lead role as Rwandan hotel manager Paul Rusesabagina in the widely-acclaimed film 'Hotel Rwanda'. He took part in the traditional Kwita Izina ceremonies for WED 2010, announcing the People's Choice name for one of the baby gorillas.

Mr Cheadle's strong record of humanitarian and environmental advocacy, including active campaigning for genocide victims, earned him the Summit Peace Award in 2007 given out by the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates for his work to stop the genocide and relieve the suffering of the people of Darfur.

He is a strong proponent of clean energy, and he appeared in the UN-wide Seal the Deal campaign's public service announcement on climate change in 2009.

About UNEP Climate Hero Luo Hong:

Luo Hong, Businessman, Photographer, Environmentalist Luo Hong has long devoted himself to natural landscape and wild animal photography. He has been to Eastern and Southern Africa 21 times in the last ten years to photograph wild animals. He has held many exhibitions to raise money for environmental causes and he sponsors UNEP's Painting Competition by Children in China, a hugely successful event with about 1.5 million participants.

He established the Luo Hong Environment Foundation in 2006, setting out to train and reward young talent worldwide for environment protection. He continues to find ways to raise awareness on the environment and share his love for the planet.

About Philips and solar energy:

Philips's support to the Legacy Initiative through solar home systems is part of the company's efforts to offer off-grid lighting solutions in developing economies in this region. Philips, alongside energy company Osram, is also involved in a US\$20 million initiative by UNEP and the Global Environment Facility to accelerate the uptake of low-energy light bulbs and efficient lighting systems around the world.

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<http://new.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=628&ArticleID=6605&language=en>

June 6, 2010

Churches are paying closer attention to connection between humans and animals

Factory farming, green living among topics sparking discussion Animal advocates gain ground in religious circles

By Lisa Black
Chicago Tribune

In Genesis, the Lord created animals, said they were good and then gave man permission to eat them.

While not a universal belief, many Christians traditionally have embraced a biblical stance on animals as a source of companionship, food and labor, but not much else.

"We know from the Bible that God created animals, he cares about them intimately and he wants us to care about them," said Ben DeVries, 30, of Kenosha, Wis., who started a blog, "Not One Sparrow," to encourage his conservative Christian brethren to become more like shepherds than hunters.

During a time when people increasingly treat pets as family members, animal advocates are gaining ground in religious circles. DeVries is among a growing number of people of faith who have joined the appeal for help in promoting causes such as relocating homeless pets, preventing animal cruelty and investigating factory farming practices.

The Humane Society of the United States has started a faith outreach program that, within the past two years, has distributed 7,500 DVDs at church and college campuses on "Eating Mercifully." The DVD and booklets draw on Scripture to remind Christians of their duty to be good stewards of all God's creatures.

But defining what it means to treat animals with compassion ranges wildly across faiths and within denominations. For some, it means trying to end animal abuse, volunteering at an animal shelter, having their pet blessed or pushing for vegetarian diets.

Others seek to fulfill spiritual needs that go beyond a simple desire to treat animals with dignity and kindness. Some religious leaders welcome pets to worship services, memorialize them at death and discuss them as spiritual beings without distinction from humanity — the most controversial ideology and one that is not accepted by mainstream religious faiths.

Emerson Theological Institute, a "new thought" college based in Oakland, Calif., has started to ordain animal chaplains who tend to humans and their kindred pets. In Phoenix, a new, animal-centric church service for people and their (well-behaved) pets recently began.

Some Jewish rabbis celebrate a dog's coming of age with a "bark mitzvah."

"I think it's ridiculous," said Rabbi Byron Sherwin, distinguished service professor with the Spertus Institute in Chicago. "Judaism makes a very clear distinction between animals and human beings. Human beings are not really a kind of animal like any other kind of animal."

He joins Christian leaders who fear that these practices blur a line that sets humans and animals apart.

But Kris Lecakes Haley of Phoenix, an ordained animal chaplain, doesn't think there is a line to blur.

"I think they are all expressions of the divine," she said. "We all have a divine spark within us. Because of that, there is an irrefutable connectedness of all life."

Several Chicago-area churches also adhere to this message, which has drawn new members to their flock, local leaders said.

The approach is becoming more popular, said Gretchen Chlebowski of Unity Church of Oak Park, which offers annual pet blessings in October and memorials for pets who have "transitioned," or died.

"People have such close relationships with their animals," she said. "I think they enjoy finding a spiritual community that acknowledges that."

E. David Cook, a Wheaton College professor who has participated in animal rights discussions at Oxford University, said he believes that the green movement has raised Christian awareness about the environment and animal welfare.

Still, "evangelicals care deeply for the way animals are treated but that doesn't mean we worship animals or put them in front of human beings," Cook said. "If it's a choice between saving Granny and saving my poodle in the fire, Granny wins every time."

Catholic tradition has historically taken a warm view of animals, with pet blessings offered at many churches every October to honor St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and ecology.

Humans still remain top dog, but are not allowed to abuse or exploit animals.

"When we see these horrific things like the mass-produced pork or chickens, where the animal can't be free-ranging, that really does become abusive," said Sister Dawn Nothwehr, a nun and ethics professor at the Catholic Theological Union.

"We have to stop and ask a question — is that a legitimate way to deal with animals?"

Harvard University addresses some of those questions in a course on religion and animals, in which it refers to the intersection between man and beast as an emerging academic field.

Paul Waldau, who teaches the course, said that he believes more churches are paying closer attention to animals, especially as they concern relationships with humans.

"You find even some of the big church assemblies have started to condemn the problems with factory farming," said Waldau, whose nonprofit Animals and Religion Institute is based in Sherborn, Mass.

"Those are hard not only on the pigs and the chickens but they are hard on the workers and communities."

DeVries, a native of Zion who studied theology at Trinity International University in Bannockburn, said he is careful to check his Bible for direction. Yet he believes that many Christians, at least in his own evangelical faith, have historically glossed over verses regarding animals and allowed – even perpetuated – their abuse and neglect.

He created his blog, "Not One Sparrow," as an outgrowth of his master's thesis at Trinity, and has since expanded it to social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to draw attention to the plight of abused or neglected animals. He does not consider himself an animal welfare advocate so much as a "Christian voice for animals" inspired by the New Testament verse, Matthew 10:29, that reads:

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father."

"We are made in God's image and are supposed to model his care," said DeVries, a vegetarian who said he does not push his dietary choice on others.

He hopes to be reunited with his pets in heaven but stops short of taking a firm position because he cannot find any scriptural support for his desire.

"The rest I leave in God's hands," he said.

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<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/religion/ct-met-christian-animals-20100606,0,7867883.story>

June 6, 2010

Churches celebrate bio-diversity on Environment Sunday

Ekklesia

Churches across the UK are celebrating Environment Sunday on 6 June 2010, as the United Nations prepares a biodiversity report which will say that the value of saving "natural goods and services" such as pollination, medicines, clean air and water will be worth between 10 and 100 times the cost of saving the habitats and species which produce them.

The Sunday nearest World Environment Day (<http://www.unep.org/wed/2010/english/>) on 5 June is celebrated as "Environment Sunday" by congregations large and small throughout Britain and Ireland.

The action and reflection group, Christian Ecology Link (CEL), (<http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/>) has been encouraging church members and leaders to do something special for the occasion, and has produced resources for worship, prayer and practical response to a variety of pressing environmental concerns.

CEL was one of the first faith communities to become partners in the 2010 UN International Year of Biodiversity.

A leading world economist and banker, Pavan Sukdev, has been asked by world governments to lead a study on 'The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity' (TEEB) (<http://www.teebweb.org>), due to be published this summer, said: "The destruction of the Natural world was "a landscape of market failures, because the services of nature were nearly always provided for free, and so not valued until they were gone."

The TEEB study is a major international initiative to draw attention to the global economic benefits of biodiversity, to highlight the growing costs of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, and to draw together expertise from the fields of science, economics and policy to enable practical actions moving forward."

Christian Ecology Link has highlighted World Environment Day and Environment Sunday events taking place in Reading, Bradford, Manchester, London, Oxford, Edinburgh, Yorkshire and across the country.

<http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/12328>

June 10, 2010

'Follow the Islamic way to save the world,' Prince Charles urges environmentalists

By Rebecca English
Mail Online

Prince Charles yesterday urged the world to follow Islamic 'spiritual principles' in order to protect the environment.

In an hour-long speech, the heir to the throne argued that man's destruction of the world was contrary to the scriptures of all religions - but particularly those of Islam.

He said the current 'division' between man and nature had been caused not just by industrialisation, but also by our attitude to the environment - which goes against the grain of 'sacred traditions'.

Charles, who is a practising Christian and will become the head of the Church of England when he succeeds to the throne, spoke in depth about his own study of the Koran which, he said, tells its followers that there is 'no separation between man and nature' and says we must always live within our environment's limits.

The prince was speaking to an audience of scholars at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies - which attempts to encourage a better understanding of the culture and civilisation of the religion.

His speech, merging religion with his other favourite subject, the environment, marked the 25th anniversary of the organisation, of which he is patron.

He added: 'The inconvenient truth is that we share this planet with the rest of creation for a very good reason - and that is, we cannot exist on our own without the intricately balanced web of life around us.

'Islam has always taught this and to ignore that lesson is to default on our contract with creation.'

Read more:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1285332/Follow-Islamic-way-save-world-Charles-urges-environmentalists.html#ixzz0qWSIenMR>

HRH Prince Charles speaks on Islam and the Environment

<http://ukinindonesia.fco.gov.uk/en/news/?view=News&id=22350511>

Read the complete speech in here:

<http://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/speechesandarticles/index.html>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1285332/Follow-Islamic-way-save-world-Charles-urges-environmentalists.html>

June 10, 2010

Prince Charles Commends IFEES Project in Zanzibar

The Muslim Council of Britain

Prince Charles commended a project in Zanzibar where IFEES played a major role, in a speech delivered on Islam and the Environment at the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford yesterday under the aegis of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. This project which has received world wide acclaim was the first ever in which environmental ethics derived from the Qur'an was taught.

The Zanzibari fishermen stopped dynamiting coral reefs soon after they participated in the first workshop on Islam and Conservation in 1998. HRH The Prince of Wales says:

"These are schemes that are close to my heart, but the Oxford Centre keeps me informed of many others. Working in Muslim countries, the World Wildlife Fund has found that trying to convey the importance of conservation is much easier if it is transmitted by religious leaders whose reference is Qur'anic teaching. In Zanzibar, they had little success trying to reduce spear-fishing and the use of dragnets, which were destroying the coral reefs. But when the guidance came from the Qur'an, there was a notable change in behaviour. Or in Indonesia and in Malaysia, where former poachers are being deterred in the same way from destroying the last remaining tigers." [www.princeofwales.gov.uk]

For more information about IFEES and please contact David on 07956983609 or 01283 529767, e-mail info@ifees.org.uk or visit the website at www.ifees.org.uk

http://www.mcb.org.uk/features/features.php?ann_id=1962

June 11, 2010

Earth Charter back in the Peace Palace ten years later

Press Release

The Hague - On Tuesday 29 June 2010, an international event will be held in the Peace Palace in The Hague to mark the 10th anniversary of the Earth Charter. Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands will be present, just as she was on 29 June 2000 for the official launch of this highly

influential document setting out values and principles for the world.

The event will be hosted on behalf of organisers Earth Charter International and NCDO by Dutch Minister of State Ruud Lubbers in his capacity as Commissioner of the Earth Charter Initiative. The various parties involved in the Earth Charter will discuss its future role with third-party experts, representatives of the business community and young people. A worldwide campaign under the motto 'It starts with one' has been organized this year to mark the anniversary.

Sustainable future

Against the background of the central anniversary theme 'Dialogue, Collaboration and Action for a Sustainable Future', this event in The Netherlands will focus in particular on the promotion of corporate social responsibility and on innovation and international collaboration using new media. Prominent international figures such as Karen Armstrong, Leonardo Boff, Yolande Kakabadse, Oscar Motomura and Pauline Tangiora will all make a contribution to the plenary meeting. Dutch men and women such as Sylvia Borren, Pieter Broertjes (invited), Ton Dietz, Jos van Gennip, Herman Mulder, Jan Pronk, Awraham Soetendorp, Naema Tahir and Herman Wijffels will either be the moderators of a range of themed workshops or will be giving a presentation.

Attending the event online

The meeting will be streamed around the world live online and viewers in other countries will be able to participate online by text message. The Dutch monthly magazine about international collaboration and development 'IS' will include a special supplement about ten years of the Earth Charter in the forthcoming July edition.

Cultural contributions to the meeting will be provided by the Costa Rican Minister of Culture Manuel Obregon on the piano and by Macaco Tamerice from the Italian eco-society Damanhur with 'Music of the Plants'.

Due to the focus on the future, children have also been expressly invited to the meeting. Inspired by the Earth Charter, Dutch children from Comenius School in The Hague and school pupils from Uganda will be using household waste items to make the set and figures for a live animation, which will be performed before the Queen and the assembled audience.

Earth Charter a soft-law document

The Earth Charter is a declaration by the Earth's citizens about global interdependence and universal responsibility which sets out the fundamental principles for establishing a just, sustainable and peaceful world. According to the preamble to the Charter, those principles serve "as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organisations, businesses, governments and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed". The Earth Charter is the final result of years of worldwide, intercultural dialogue about common goals and values. The drafting of the Earth Charter was one of the largest collaborative processes ever undertaken to

write an international declaration and this is one of the main reasons why the Charter's ethical guidelines have such broad authority.

Thanks to this legitimacy, an increasing number of international lawyers are recognising that the Earth Charter has the status of a 'soft-law' document. 'Soft-law' documents – such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – are seen as a moral compass, but they are not legally binding for governments that recognise and adopt them. 'Soft-law' documents often form the basis for 'hard' legislation.

<http://www.orbisbooks.com/pdf/pressreleaseec.pdf>

June 17, 2010

Bay Area Leaders Call On Legislators To Move Away From Oil

By Bay City News

The San Francisco Appeal

Leaders from Bay Area environmental, business and faith communities issued a call for action Wednesday morning and urged California state legislators to make "homegrown, clean sources of energy" a priority.

The National Wildlife Federation hosted a conference call Wednesday morning where community leaders stressed the need for comprehensive federal climate and clean-energy policy.

The call follows President Barack Obama's first televised national address from the Oval Office on Tuesday, during which he described the need to move away from reliance on oil and toward alternative sources of energy.

Participants said the only way to safeguard against another disaster is to move toward legislation that places a cap on emissions and are looking for action in Washington, D.C. by Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer.

Representatives from various green industries said Obama needs to take "aggressive steps" to scale up manufacturing of clean-energy components such as wind turbines, which are currently mostly built abroad in China and Europe.

"We need to invest in domestic manufacture," said Lisa Hoyos, California coordinator with the Apollo Alliance, a coalition of labor, business, environmental and community leaders that promotes the creation of jobs through investment in clean energy.

Hoyos said that although the state has taken "bold leadership" in driving clean energy policies, the country can't afford to trade its dependency on oil "for new dependence on externally made clean energy systems."

Members from San Francisco faith communities - including Temple Emanu-El and Grace Cathedral - spoke of grassroots efforts to curb oil consumption and persuade state leaders to "take bold action."

Temple Emanu-El's Rabbi Stephen Pearce described campaigns within his congregation to eliminate waste through composting and reduce its carbon footprint by growing its own produce.

Pearce said he has spoken directly with Feinstein, who is a member of the temple, about the urgency of enacting aggressive legislation that will cultivate green jobs here in the U.S. "We're losing that edge by not being more proactive," he said. "It has to start at home."

Grace Cathedral's Reverend Canon Sally Bingham said she advances a religious response to global warming through her role as president of Interfaith Power and Light, which promotes renewable energy, energy efficiency and conservation at roughly 10,000 congregations across the country.

"We have a moral responsibility to make these changes, the time is now," she said. "We must save ourselves from ourselves."

The speakers asked Bay Area residents to "lean on the issue" and get involved by phoning Senator Feinstein's office at (415) 393-0707.

<http://sfappeal.com/alley/2010/06/bay-area-leaders-call-on-legislators-to-move-away-from-oil.php>

June 17, 2010

Leaders of pro-environment Christian group say oil spill shows clean energy is a moral issue

By John Flesher
Associated Press
Baltimore Sun

Leaders of a group that encourages evangelical Christians to care for the environment say the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico raises moral challenges for the country.

The Revs. Jim Ball and Mitchell Hescox, leaders of the Evangelical Environmental Network, are

visiting southern Louisiana to pray with people who have lost jobs because of the spill.

Joining them is the Rev. Galen Carey of the National Association of Evangelicals.

Ball says they took a boat ride off the coast Thursday and were saddened by sights of oil-spattered marshes where birds were nesting.

He says the oil spill is a stain on the nation's stewardship of God's creation, and should inspire people of faith to embrace cleaner energy sources. Ball says how the nation responds to the disaster is a matter of values.

www.baltimoresun.com/news/sns-ap-us-gulf-oil-spill-evangelicals,0,684609.story

June 22, 2010

A Greener Calling: Preaching the Gospel of Green

By Meredith Bryan
O, The Oprah Magazine

Rev. Canon Sally Bingham is an Episcopal priest who preaches energy conservation to people of all faiths. Read the first in *O's* series on a global contingent of eco-conscious faith leaders joining forces.

Windsor Castle, the bucolic weekend retreat of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and her pack of corgis, has witnessed the plague, beheadings, and centuries of state dinners, but it's surely never seen this: a procession of bearded Sikhs in orange turbans, bald Buddhist monks in habits, Jews in top hats and prayer shawls, Japanese Shintos in white *jôes*—even a Greek Orthodox archbishop in a black *kamilafki* hat and floor-length cassock. On an unseasonably warm day last November, a group of British schoolchildren led this diverse troop from the small town of Windsor through the castle's Hogwart's-worthy gate for a vegan feast of stuffed mushrooms and parsnips. It was all part of "Many Heavens, One Earth," an event organized by the United Nations and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), designed to promote environmental evangelism among people of faith—the largest international gathering of its kind.

To some, the term *religious environmentalist* might sound curiously newfangled. Yet most global faiths preach that the planet was divinely created, even if few have been at the vanguard of the movement to protect it from unholy exploitation. Given the politically charged UN climate talks in December, gatherings like this one are likely to become even more important—possibly the basis for a new grassroots environmental movement.

Among the initiatives announced at the event: Chinese Taoists pledged to reduce their use of

incense, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana hopes to plant 200,000 seedlings, Muslims aim to print the Qur'an on sustainable materials, and the Jewish Climate Change Campaign wants to halve collective meat consumption in five years. By the time a Baptist choir from Baltimore took the stage for a rousing rendition of "All Creatures of Our God and King," prompting the multilingual congregation to leap to its feet and cry out for an encore, all things seemed possible.

As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reminded the crowd of 200, faith leaders have the ear—and the hearts—of billions (85 percent of the Earth's population identifies with a religion). "You can, and do, inspire people to change," he said. First, the rev. Canon Sally Bingham (above), an Episcopal priest who preaches energy conservation to people of all faiths, and is the founder and president of the Regeneration Project, whose mission is to deepen the connection between ecology and religion:

Her eco aha! moment: More than 20 years ago, the then 45-year-old stay-at-home mom found herself wondering why the Episcopal clergy didn't preach environmental stewardship. "It seemed like there was a lot of hypocrisy," recalls Bingham. "In the Book of Common Prayer, we pray for reverence for the Earth, but then I would see people throwing trash out the windows of their cars. If the people in the pews who profess a love for God's creation are not protecting it, how can we expect anyone else to?" A reverend at Bingham's church in San Francisco suggested she enroll in seminary to explore these questions; after first completing her undergraduate degree at the University of San Francisco, she did just that. She was ordained as a priest in 1997.

Her work: So far, 10,000 congregations in 30 states have joined the Regeneration Project's Interfaith Power and Light campaign, which Bingham launched in 1998 to help fight global warming. Member churches pledge to reduce their energy consumption by installing energy-efficient lightbulbs and appliances and utilizing technologies like solar power. More important, they commit to educating their flocks. "The congregations serve as examples to the members of their communities," says Bingham.

What's next: Last year Bingham kicked off a new program, Carbon Covenant, which helps members of Interfaith Power and Light support the environmental initiatives of religious communities in the developing world. For example, a group of nuns in Minnesota recently raised \$10,000 to help an Evangelical Lutheran church in Tanzania reforest several acres on Mount Kilimanjaro.

<http://www.oprah.com/world/Religious-Leaders-Who-Are-Eco-Activists>

June 25, 2010

World Religious Leaders Press G8 Nations on MDGs

By Ethan Cole
The Christian Post

Ahead of the G8 meeting in Canada this weekend, religious leaders from diverse faiths and countries issued a statement on Wednesday calling for the fulfillment of the U.N.'s Millennium Development Goals.

Some 80 senior leaders representing nine different faiths – Christian, Aboriginal, Bahai, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Shinto, and Sikh – and hailing from more than 20 countries urged political leaders to fulfill the MDGs.

They pointed out that the MDGs will approach the two-thirds deadline this September.

The MDGs are eight social development and poverty alleviation goals that governments worldwide have committed to fulfill by 2015. They include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and reducing child mortality.

“Military power and economic dominance are the basis for inclusion in a G8 and G20 global leaders’ summit,” the statement by faith leaders reads. “The voices of the other 172 members of the United Nations are absent.”

“In our faith traditions, we strive to listen to the weak and the vulnerable,” it continues. “Their voices must be included in decisions that affect them and all of us.”

The religious leaders, which include the Rev. Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners and the Rev. Dr. Andre Karamaga, general secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches, have called specifically for concrete actions to meet the immediate needs of the world’s most vulnerable, to prioritize long-term environmental sustainability, and to work for peace and remove factors that feed into violent conflict.

A record-high of one billion people, the faith leaders emphasized, are now chronically hungry every day, according to the U.N. World Food Program statistic. Faith leaders said despite differences in their religions, a common tenet is that people should treat others as they want to be treated.

“The suffering of anyone is of concern to us all,” they wrote. “Our prayers and wishes for wisdom and compassion are with our political leaders at this critical moment.”

The G8 summit will take place June 25-27 in Ontario, Canada. The larger G20 summit is also scheduled for June 26-27 in Ontario.

<http://www.christianpost.com/article/20100625/world-religious-leaders-press-g8-nations-on-mdg/>

June 27, 2010

An Evangelical Crusade To Go Green With God

NPR

Listen to the story:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/player/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=128130198&m=128143066>

As the oil continues to spill in the Gulf of Mexico, what to do about off-shore drilling and the regulation of the oil industry is cause for debate in Congress and among coastal residents. Now add to this another dimension: religion.

The Southern Baptist Convention has used notably strong language to call on the government — and its own congregation — to work to prevent such a crisis again.

In a resolution, the Convention called on the government "to act determinatively and with undeterred resolve to end this crisis ... to ensure full corporate accountability for damages, clean-up and restoration ... and to ensure that government and private industry are not again caught without planning for such possibilities."

A Defining Moment

Dr. Russell Moore helped pass that resolution. Moore is the dean of the School of Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and preaches at Highview Baptist Church near Louisville, Ky. He tells NPR's Audie Cornish that calling on government to hold companies responsible for their actions isn't out of character for evangelicals.

"There's really nothing conservative — and certainly nothing evangelical — about a laissez-faire view of a lack of government regulation," Moore says, "because we, as Christians, believe in sin."

"That means if people are sinful, if all of us are sinful, then all of us have to have accountability — and that includes corporations." Moore says. "Simply trusting corporations to go about their business without polluting the water streams and without destroying ecosystems is really a naive and utopian view of human nature. It's not a Christian view of human nature."

On his blog, Moore has posted something of a call-to-arms for evangelical Christians to take action to protect the environment. The Gulf spill has the potential to be a defining moment for evangelicals, he says, much like *Roe v. Wade* activated the evangelical anti-abortion movement.

"Prior to *Roe*, most evangelicals really thought of those issues of life and protecting the unborn as being a Roman Catholic issue," he says. "Somebody else's issue. But then after *Roe v. Wade*, suddenly evangelicals saw what was at stake and became involved."

"This catastrophe in the Gulf could be that kind of defining moment."

Protecting God's Creation

The reason to rally for a green movement is literally all around, Moore says. "God cares about the Creation. He displays himself in nature, and so the more that people are distanced from the Creation itself and the more people become accustomed to treating the Creation as something that is disposable, the more distanced they are from understanding who God is."

Moore has another reason: "People are designed to be dependent on Creation and upon the natural resources around us. In order to love future generations, in order to love cultures, we have to love the ecosystems that support those things."

Moore is originally from Biloxi, Miss., a city directly threatened by the oil spill. "What's happening is that you have entire cultures and communities of people now imperiled," he says, and it's time to love thy neighbor. "I'll have to tell you this is the most traumatized I've ever seen my hometown — and I'm including the devastation of Katrina in that. It's kind of like a slow-motion hurricane with no end in sight."

A Necessary Conversation

None of this means the evangelical community has embraced being green, however. "There are divisions in evangelicalism about how we ought to engage this issue and what it ought to look like," Moore says.

"There are some evangelicals, of course, who hold to a much more libertarian understanding of the relationship between government and protecting natural resources, but I think for the most part, evangelicals are ready to have a conversation about protecting the Creation."

It's a conversation that Moore feels evangelicals need to have.

"Human flourishing means a healthy natural environment, and it simply isn't good for ourselves or for our neighbors to live in a world that is completely paved over and in which every piece of green land is replaced with a Bed, Bath, and Beyond," he says. "That's not how God designed human beings to live."

Moore's call to reassess the "ecological conscience" of evangelical Christians comes at a time when conservatives have criticized environmentalists and defended oil drilling. Former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin has said the oil spill is reason for less regulation rather than more.

It's hard to say which argument individual evangelicals will be drawn to, but Moore says being pulled in different directions is a good thing "if being pulled in directions means that we're thinking through issues from a biblical point of view, rather than from a purely political point of view."

"And just because we agree with some of our political allies on some very important issues, that doesn't mean we agree with those allies on every issue," he adds.

"Evangelicals can't simply be anybody's interest group. We're going to have some disagreements, but we have to have that conversation. And it has to be more complex than simply parroting slogans."

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128130198>

July 6, 2010

British religious activist fighting Peru government's expulsion order for helping Indians

By Carla Salazar
Associated Press Writer
The Baltimore Sun

LIMA, Peru (AP) — A British religious activist is fighting an expulsion order from Peru's government for allegedly inciting unrest among indigenous peoples protesting environmental damage from oil drilling in the Amazon rainforest.

Brother Paul McAuley, a 62-year-old lay activist with the La Salle Christian Brothers who has worked in Peru for two decades, is appealing the order with the backing of the Roman Catholic Church, indigenous and human rights groups.

"I'm very moved by the signs of solidarity and almost spontaneous activities being carried out," he told The Associated Press from Iquitos, capital of the jungle state of Loreto.

That support has included a protest rally in Iquitos and an online appeal via Twitter by the outspoken U.S. actress Q'orianka Kilcher, whose father is a Peruvian Indian and who called McAuley "my mentor and friend."

Peru's government informed McAuley on Friday that it was revoking his residency because he was engaged in activities "that put in risk the security of the state, public order and the national defense."

Peru's Cabinet chief, Javier Velasquez, told reporters in Lima on Monday that McAuley was being expelled because the government could not "accept that foreigners can continue furtively to stir up people to shatter democratic values."

McAuley, who was given until Wednesday to leave the country, denies breaking any laws.

He said Tuesday that he works closely with regional government officials on various projects

and "can't imagine them sitting down with people who are breaking public order."

After moving to Iquitos from Lima a decade ago he founded a nonprofit civic group in 2004 called the Loreto Environmental Network that works on behalf of indigenous groups.

President Alan Garcia's government has since opened up the Amazon to unprecedented mining and oil exploration and drilling. It has done little to impede rampant logging that threatens the existence of indigenous groups, McAuley and other environmentalists say.

In a letter to the Interior Ministry protesting the expulsion order, Amnesty International said it "appears to be one step further in a campaign of intimidation by the government against indigenous communities and human rights defenders who work with them"

Resistance by Amazon Indians to what they considered Garcia's granting carte blanche to multinational oil and mining interests exploded in violence in June 2009 when police tried to dismantle a road blockade by protesters outside the Amazon city of Bagua. At least 33 people were killed, most of them police slain by vengeful Indians.

Velasquez, the government minister, suggested McAuley may have helped stir up such violence.

"The words of a religious authority must obviously be prudent because they can generate a social explosion that no one anticipated," he said in a radio interview Monday.

President Alberto Pizango of AIDSESEP, which represents 65 Amazon indigenous peoples, wrote McAuley on Monday to express solidarity.

"This government only thinks about the earnings of big foreign companies, which have become the main beneficiaries of the state," wrote Pizango, who spent a year in exile after the Bagua incident because the government ordered his arrest.

McAuley has long worked to help Peru's historically downtrodden indigenous organize themselves economically and politically to defend their rights.

He began in Lima by helping them sell handcrafts abroad and, in recent years, traveled deep into the rainforest to give workshops in villages on international and national law that helped empower the Indians politically.

In February, McAuley helped Kichwa Indians file complaints with Peruvian prosecutors charging contamination of the Tigre River and its tributaries, allegedly by 35 years of oil drilling by the Argentine company Pluspetrol.

McAuley told the AP on Tuesday that he is still awaiting a response.

While he said he had no hard data on the alleged contamination, McAuley said studies published by Peru's health ministry in 2005 found that Achuar Indians living along the Corrientes river "all had cadmium and lead in their blood." He blames the oil drilling.

Peruvian environmental activists say the expulsion of McAuley would send the wrong signal to the country's native peoples just as the Garcia government says it wants to negotiate in good faith with them over developing the Amazon for the benefit of all Peruvians.

"This is a very special moment in the history of the Peruvian Amazon. At no time have there been so many projects, so big and being proposed and developed simultaneously," Mariano Castro, a lawyer with the Peruvian Society for Environmental Law, told the AP.

"I think that, effectively, people like Brother Paul cause discomfort in such a scenario."

—

Associated Press Writer Frank Bajak in Bogota, Colombia, contributed to this report.

(This version corrects Peruvian lawyer's family name to Castro instead of Costa.)

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/nation-world/sns-ap-1t-peru-british-activist,0,5446932.story>

July 7, 2010

BP's Gulf oil spill is a sin, visiting clergy say after touring the coast

By Bruce Nolan
The Times-Picayune

Christian, Jewish and Muslim clergy leaders from around the country cruised through the oil-fouled upper reaches of one of the nation's richest seafood nurseries Wednesday, and some came away saying the BP Gulf oil spill looks to them not only like an accident, but also a sin.

Dr. Dan Krutz of the Louisiana Interchurch Conference sings along with the choir during 'Prayers for the Gulf,' an evening for 'reflection, restoration and renewal' at First Grace United

Methodist Church on Wednesday. A coalition of Christian, Jewish and Muslim clergy visited New Orleans to see the oil spill effects.

"From my perspective, it's an insult to God and a sin against creation," said the Rev. Canon Sally Bingham, an Episcopalian priest and environmentalist from San Francisco who heads **Interfaith Power and Light**, a nonprofit agency that helps congregations and communities adopt energy-saving techniques.

Bingham and almost a dozen others motored through the upper reaches of Barataria Bay on Wednesday, a day after assembling at **First Grace United Methodist Church** for a prayer service calling for restoration and renewal of the Gulf Coast.

"This is not a spill; it's a spoilage" of God's creation, the Rev. Jim Wallis, editor of **Sojourners** magazine, told the congregation.

Oil spill a wake-up call

Bingham, Wallis and others framed the oil spill as a wake-up call with not only economic, but also moral dimensions to people of many faiths.

Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, head of the Rabbinical Assembly and its 1,600 Conservative rabbis nationwide, said the larger lesson of the spill is a call to reduce energy dependence on petroleum.

"We all need to turn from short-term gratification ... rather than indulge ourselves with this unlimited consumption," she said.

The Rev. Dan Krutz, of Louisiana Interchurch Conference dips his hands into the oily waters of Barataria Bay as he and other interfaith clergy members, the Rev. Brenda Gierton-Mitchell, Progressive National Baptist Convention, left rear, and Rabbi Julie Schonfeld of the Rabbinical Assembly, in life jacket, get a tour of the Louisiana marshes on Wednesday.

Bingham, Wallis, Schonfeld and other visiting clergy from Washington, Chicago, California and elsewhere assembled in New Orleans on Tuesday for a three-day visit to see first-hand the effects of the spill.

On Wednesday they met Mayor Mitch Landrieu and toured part of the coastal zone to talk to cleanup workers and fishing families, and to see what, if anything, their ministries back home could do to help.

Beyond scouting for relief opportunities, some also work for policy-making bodies within their denominations. They said they wanted to see whether their denominations should press Congress and the White House to alter domestic energy policy.

Caring for environmental is a theological command

The pastors and representatives were assembled by the **Sierra Club**, which regards them as partners in pursuit of its energy agenda. By definition, their faith communities already accept environmental care as a theological command, rather than a matter of mere self-interest.

Still, some were not easily pigeon-holed as conventionally liberal.

The Rev. Chris Seay, pastor of the 1,400-member Ecclesia Church in downtown Houston, described his evangelical community as Bible-centered, anti-abortion, anti-death penalty and environmentally aware. He said his congregation includes oil industry workers, among them a woman now drilling the relief well that is the best hope for killing the runaway BP well 50 miles off the mouth of the Mississippi River.

"We have a remarkable number of people in the oil industry keenly aware of their responsibility to care for the environment," he said.

As for himself, "Many of the times I think God has spoken to me most clearly, I've been on Galveston Island looking out at the Gulf."

Oil spill an offense against creation, clergy say

In various ways Jews, Christian and Muslim leaders on Tuesday invoked their sacred texts to frame the spill as more than an isolated industrial accident, but as offense against creation, and a consequence of industrial society's addictive reliance on oil, with the hazards that brings.

Mahmoud Sarmini, a New Orleans-area doctor and a Muslim, cited a passage in the Qur'an referring to man as God's viceroy on earth, with its implications for humans' responsibility for creation.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the **Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism**, a public-policy group, referred to Jewish tradition holding that creation is only on loan from God to man, and only for wise use.

And in an interview before the service, Seay said "all things that exist were birthed by God ... and if God birthed them and loved them that much, that we do have a responsibility to care well for them."

After the tour, several in the group said they saw the spill as a "wake-up" call for a change in energy policy.

"That doesn't mean we don't need to use fossil fuel, or drill for oil until we get ourselves off," Saperstein said. "But we have to move more quickly to get off, and while we relying on these fossil fuels we have to be much more insistent that there be safety precautions."

The visiting clergy's response -- that the spill is symptomatic of overconsumption and disregard for the environment -- has not often been heard in local pulpits, where many parishioners have made livings in the petroleum industry for two generations.

Faith communities' responses locally have been much more focused on providing on-the-ground relief to families devastated by the spill's economic effects.

Bruce Nolan can be reached at bnolan@timespicayune.com or 504.826.3344.

http://www.nola.com/news/gulf-oil-spill/index.ssf/2010/07/bps_gulf_oil_spill_is_a_sin_vi.html

July 7, 2010

Green religion movement hopes spill wins converts

By John Flesher
AP Environmental Writer
Miami Herald

Where would Jesus drill?

Religious leaders who consider environmental protection a godly mission are making the Gulf of Mexico oil spill a rallying cry, hoping it inspires people of faith to support cleaner energy while changing their personal lives to consume less and contemplate more.

"This is one of those rare moments when you can really focus people's attention on what's happening to God's creation," said Walt Grazer, head of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment.

Activists in the movement often described as "green religion" or "eco-theology" are using blogs and news conferences to get the word out. Some are visiting the Gulf, inspecting oil-spattered wetlands and praying with idled fishermen and other victims.

And believers in the stricken coastal regions are looking at the consequences of the oil's reach and asking what good can come out of it.

During worship services on a recent Sunday, pastor Eddie Painter of Barataria Baptist Church in the fishing village of Lafitte told his congregation a silver lining in the tragedy might be renewed government commitment to restoring the region's battered coastal marshlands.

"I actually didn't think I would be as deeply affected as I was by seeing oil in the water, the birds with oil stains, the marsh grass that had turned a shiny brown," said the Rev. Jim Ball of the Evangelical Environmental Network, who recently toured Louisiana's Barataria Bay by boat.

Another delegation was scheduled to arrive in New Orleans on Tuesday for an interfaith prayer service and tour. Among the participants are Jim Wallis of the progressive Christian group

Sojourners and Rabbi David N. Saperstein of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. Both have served on President Barack Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

Their appearance is being coordinated with the Sierra Club, which has forged alliances with organized religion since its former director, Carl Pope, acknowledged in a 1997 speech the environmental movement had erred by shunning such ties.

"Different people have credibility with different segments of the population," said Lindsey Moseley, the group's Washington representative. "The oil spill is ultimately a matter of values, which for many people are rooted in deeply held religious beliefs."

Organizations including the National Council of Churches and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have issued statements calling for soul-searching. Some are providing ecologically themed online resources - prayers, liturgy, scripture readings - for use in worship services.

"We have used God's creation without regard for the impact our rapacity had on the other creatures with whom we share our earthly home," reads a model prayer on the Council of Churches' website.

The push for an ecological Great Awakening since the oil spill began in April has come from liberals as well as theologically conservative groups such as the Evangelical Environmental Network, which previously sponsored an ad campaign with the slogan "What Would Jesus Drive?" that called for more fuel-efficient vehicles.

In a resolution this month, the Southern Baptist Convention declared that humanity's "God-given dominion over the creation is not unlimited, as though we were gods and not creatures" and called for "energy policies based on prudence, conservation, accountability and safety."

"Caring for creation is an extension of loving your neighbor as yourself," said Russell Moore, dean of Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Ky., who wrote the statement.

Disagreements persist, especially over public policies like climate-change legislation.

Painter, the Lafitte preacher, criticized the Obama administration's fight for a moratorium on offshore drilling, saying it would worsen unemployment in the struggling community.

"I think we're called to be good stewards of God's creation," said Painter, who's also a part-time crab fisherman. "But I have no patience with people who are using the situation to push a political agenda."

But some scholars say their response to the oil spill at least suggests an emerging agreement that environmental issues are fair game in houses of worship where they were long ignored.

"Very few of the world's religions were making any statements about the environment 20 years ago, and now virtually all of them have," said Mary Evelyn Tucker, a historian of religion and

founder of Yale University's Forum on Religion and Ecology. "The challenge is to put them into practice."

Even people with no specific religious beliefs are recognizing a spiritual dimension in the Gulf tragedy and taking a deeper look at their energy use, Tucker said.

"There is a yearning for meaning and purpose and being able to contribute to something larger than ourselves," she said.

The disaster may help replace longstanding divisions based on dogma or culture with "a new kind of consensus that isn't liberal or conservative, left or right, but focuses on stewardship of creation, care for the poor and accountability for corporate leaders," Wallis said.

Moore, a native of "God-fearing, pro-defense, Republican-voting" Biloxi, Miss., said the creation care message is resonating in his home state as oil spoils its Gulf coastline and batters its economy.

For progressive believers, it's an easy sell. But many conservatives consider eco-theology a distraction from the church's primary mission of winning souls - or even a stalking horse for socialism or earth worship.

In Louisiana, where loyalty to the oil and gas industry remains strong despite the BP disaster, opposition to fossil fuels sometimes doesn't go over well.

"God put the oil there. He put it there for us to take dominion over and use responsibly," said Gene Mills, director of the Louisiana Family Forum.

Ball said it's understandable that some believers would embrace creation stewardship in theory while resisting specific measures that change their way of life. But making fundamental change is what religious commitment is all about, he added.

"As Christians we have the freedom to do God's will," he said. "We're not helpless, we're not hopeless."

National Religious Partnership for the Environment: <http://www.nrpe.org/>

Evangelical Environmental Network: <http://creationcare.org/>

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism: <http://rac.org/>

Sojourners: <http://www.sojo.net/>

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2010/07/07/v-fullstory/1719303/green-religion-movement-hopes.html#ixzz0t0yDggnT>

July 9, 2010

Oil Spill: A Great Awakening?

By Brenda Peterson
Huffington Post

An ex-priest I know just returned from visiting his old parish in Louisiana. "Even with oil destroying their marshes and livelihoods," the man who used to be Father Joseph, told me, "many of the faithful are still posting Facebook pledges to Support Offshore Drilling."

Father Joe is a tall, lean man who has moved to the more eco-friendly Northwest. "Maybe it will take this oil spill to launch another Great Awakening among religions," he suggested.

"Yeah," I laughed. "And maybe it will take a triple digit heat wave along the East Coast to pass climate change legislation."

We launched into an "eco-theology" dialogue asking: *Are the godly going green?*

There are signs and wonders everywhere. A recent Associated Press headline proclaims: "[Green Religion Movement Hopes Spill Wins Converts.](#)"

A young Southern Baptist, James Merritt, just published a book on Earth Day -- *Green Like God: Unlocking the Divine Plan for Our Planet*. Of the split between conservatives and liberals on the environment, Merritt says, "the right stole God and the left stole green . . . I think God and green go together."

But Green evangelicals have a tough row to hoe -- or spill to stop. There is still much resistance. Only 34 percent of white evangelicals believe that climate change is human-caused. A federal appeals court in Louisiana just turned down Obama's moratorium on deep-water drilling in the Gulf. Conservative evangelicals -- especially in the South -- are skeptical of what they see as "earth worship."

I told Father Joe, "My Southern Baptist Sunday School teacher, Mrs. Eula, always taught us that we were in this Earth, but not *of* it. She said that Baptists do not worship creation -- we worship the Creator."

My teacher also taught, "God is super-natural, or above nature." According to Mrs. Eula, God was far beyond His creation. True paradise was not here in this sin-stained world -- it was in heaven.

This was my first moment of doubt. "You mean God doesn't live here anymore?" I demanded of Mrs. Eula.

I wondered if God was like a landlord who'd moved on to a better neighborhood, so didn't repair what was not working in His world. Did God just want to suck souls out of the Earth for heaven - - and leave our dead bodies behind? Was this Earth just a big, dead body? And since paradise was already lost when we left the Garden of Eden, why would God care if we ruined this world?

That version of God prefigures British Petroleum today. Like an absentee landlord with a god-complex, this corporation cares only for oil, not where it comes from. It shows contempt for the oceans and "small people" who live by these waters.

Father Joe concluded our eco-spirituality conversation with what might have been the best sermon I ever heard. "Well," he said in his mellifluous Louisiana drawl, "if God so loved the world -- why can't we?"

It does seem this Gulf ecological nightmare is now waking up evangelicals. Their revelation is not a burning bush, but a burning oil rig. Conservative evangelicals are praying with Gulf fishermen and trying to save oil-stained marshes as much as their souls. They are reconnecting the Creator with Creation.

A new generation of eco-evangelicals could be a fourth Great Awakening in this country. The first Awakening coincided with the American Revolution, the second with the abolitionist movement, and the third with the social gospel of humanitarian activism. Could green religion be the next movement? Instead of evangelicals fixating on a Rapturous end-of-the-world Revelation, could we see a save-the-world green evolution?

Consider this an invitation, like the pulpit call evangelical preachers issue at the end of their sermons. Please join the rest of us sweltering, oil-stained souls in the modern miracle of cleaning up and conserving our Earth. Can we at last bow down together and also include the earth in our definition of the Divine? Can worship and prayer also embrace oil spill clean-ups and rescuing sea turtles from the burning hellfires of Gulf waters?

What if churches and sermons recognized the oil staining out Gulf as a call to repent? To clean up and conserve? Change our lives. Stop drilling holes in our world. What if, instead of being transfixed on the afterlife, we actually fought against losing our paradises -- like these soulful Gulf waters? The Garden of Eden is still here on earth, though struggling to survive our abandonment.

We are still in the thrall of this terrible gusher. Over 300 million gallons have sullied our Gulf and now there is fear that the spill might taint the Eastern seaboard and spread as far as Europe.

The Internet is abuzz with claims that this is an "oil spill apocalypse" and perhaps a sign of Tribulations, or End Times. Here is my plea to all true believers: The tribulations are now. We're still here. Please lend a hand. Come home.

Brenda Peterson is the author of the recent memoir I Want To Be Left Behind: Finding Rapture Here on Earth. For more: www.IWantToBeLeftBehind.com

To get involved and pass around:

"Conservative Evangelicals embrace God and green" *Christian Science Monitor*,
<http://www.csmonitor.com/layout/set/print/content/view/print/287774>

Evangelical Environmental Network, "National Day of Prayer for the Gulf," July 18th
<http://prayerforcreationcare.creationcare.org/>

Catholic Conservation Center, <http://conservation.catholic.org/>

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism: <http://rac.org/>

National Religious Partnership for the Environment: <http://www.nrpe.org>

Ecological Buddhism: <http://www.ecobuddhism.org/>

Muslim Environment Watch: <http://muslimenvironment.wordpress.com/category/environment-from-islamic-perspective/islam-environment-from-islamic-perspective/>

Earth Ministry: <http://earthministry.org/>

Follow Brenda Peterson on Twitter: www.twitter.com/BrendaSPeterson

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brenda-peterson/oil-spill-a-great-awakeni_b_641160.html?ir=Green

July 18, 2010

Hindus ask world to wake up to continual lead poisoning of Roma in Kosovo

By Ani

The Gaea Times

Hindus are calling the world to wake-up to the reported tragedy of Roma people continually suffering from lead poisoning in northern Kosovo for nearly about a decade.

Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement in Nevada (USA) today, said that it was highly shocking to learn that that the world let this environmental health and humanitarian disaster happen in 21st century Europe, which boasted of its human rights record. Zed described it as simply inhuman.

According to reports, lead poisoning caused severe and sometimes irreversible organ and brain damage, including death and abortion, to Roma and other families relocated to these camps in a polluted area near a lead smelter in Mitrovica temporarily (some say for maximum 45 days) in 1999 by the United Nations following the Kosovo war on land reportedly highly contaminated with lead, zinc, arsenic and other metals. They still remain on this toxic land, thus further aggravating already existing health problems.

Zed, who is president of Universal Society of Hinduism, further said that United Nations, European Union, Kosovo Government, World Health Organization and others involved should formally apologize to affected families besides compensating each victim (family of the victim in case the person died due to lead contamination) with minimum one million Euros each.

Rajan Zed stressed that an independent enquiry should be instituted into this reportedly preventable disaster. Immediately relocate affected families from this so called toxic wasteland, arrange thorough medical treatment for them, find them safe permanent housing, improve their health condition, and provide them livelihood support, Zed adds.

Europe's most persecuted and discriminated community, Roma were reportedly facing apartheid conditions in Europe. Roma reportedly regularly encountered social exclusion, racism, substandard education, hostility, joblessness, rampant illness, inadequate housing, lower life expectancy, unrest, living on desperate margins, stereotypes, mistrust, rights violations, discrimination, marginalization, appalling living conditions, prejudice, human rights abuse, etc., Zed pointed out.

Rajan Zed argued that references to Roma people in Europe reportedly went as far back as ninth century CE and asked, "How many more centuries Roma have to reside in Europe to prove that they are 'real and equal' Europeans like any other."

<http://breakingnews.gaeatimes.com/2010/07/18/hindus-ask-world-to-wake-up-to-continual-lead-poisoning-of-roma-in-kosovo-40218/>

July 19, 2010

Hindu statesman Zed asks the world to re-evaluate its economic growth strategy

Merinews

World should re-evaluate its economic growth outlook to save it from environmental crisis, stresses Hindu statesman Rajan Zed.

Zed, who is President of Universal Society of Hinduism, in a statement in Nevada (USA) today, said that speedy economic development might not bring us the "real success" we were all

seeking. A happy and healthier world should be the focus while deciding which road to take on growth and prosperity.

Our consumption culture and blind fascination with statistics involving industrial production, gross domestic product, investment promotion, etc., might lead us to a risky and polluted world, Rajan Zed warned.

Zed emphasized the need of working together for better future of the humankind. To effectively curb environmental degradation and save the planet, religions of the world had to come together to form a joint global strategy.

Rajan Zed pointed out that consumerism had almost acquired the status of a religion for many of us in the world. Saint Augustine (Letter 211) said, "It is better to need less than to have more." Hinduism told us that joy and renunciation needed each other and renunciation was not deprivation, it was freedom. Three opening words of *Isha Upanishad*: "tena tyaktena bhunjita" said it all—"By renouncing it {the world}, enjoy it."

Zed further said that excessive human greed, which was a transgression of spiritual and moral law, blinded the mind and it might bring bigger crisis in the future. All the religions condemned greed and we needed to build a new world free from greed. Zed quoted ancient Hindu scripture, *Bhagavad-Gita* (Song of the Lord), which says: there are three gates to self-destructive hell—greed, anger, and desire. Abandon these three. A person freed from these three gates of darkness, seeks what is best and attains life's highest goal.

<http://www.merineews.com/article/hindu-statesman-zed-asks-world-to-re-evaluate-economic-growth/15826681.shtml>

July 29, 2010

UNEP Sasakawa Prize open: US \$200,000 for innovative green project

United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi - The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and The Nippon Foundation today officially launched the 2011 UNEP Sasakawa Prize to find the most innovative environmental project in the developing world - with a cash prize of US\$ 200,000 awaiting the winner.

The UNEP Sasakawa Prize is awarded every year to a grassroots organisation judged to have made an outstanding contribution to the protection and management of the environment, and to social development. The theme for this year's prize is "Forests for People, Forests for Green Growth" in support of the United Nations International Year of Forests in 2011.

Of particular interest to this year's jury will be projects that:

- Promote the conservation and sustainable management of forests
- Contribute to a meaningful reduction in carbon emissions caused by deforestation or forest degradation
- Maintain forest ecosystems to improve resilience to climate change
- Support development among forest-dependent communities
- Conserve biodiversity and help protect ecosystems in forests

The UNEP Sasakawa Prize is designed to nurture innovation and research in green solutions to environmental challenges by offering financial support to the winner. The jury is especially interested in sustainable projects that can be scaled up or replicated elsewhere, thus helping to inspire others to take a greater interest in protecting our environment and to increase its scope of beneficiary, especially in the under-served rural communities.

By helping these entrepreneurs scale-up their activities, the prize is able to boost local economies and help tackle poverty and marginalization, while promoting the sustainable use of resources and ecosystems.

The winner of the 2011 UNEP Sasakawa Prize will receive the prestigious award at a special ceremony to be held at the meeting of the UNEP Governing Council from 21 - 25 February 2011 in Nairobi, Kenya.

First awarded in 1984, the UNEP Sasakawa Prize has helped nurture a wide range of grassroots environmental initiatives across the world, spurring fledgling projects onto great success.

One of the recipients of last year's Prize was Nuru Design; a project that brings innovative lighting solutions to rural communities in Rwanda, Kenya and India. By replacing kerosene and firewood lamps with solar-powered lights, Nuru Design not only helps reduce the high levels of CO₂ produced by traditional lamps, but also tackled the health and literacy problems caused by a lack of access to affordable lighting. Thanks to Nuru Design's efforts, over 3,000 households in Rwanda are switching from kerosene to Nuru lights every month.

It is this kind of innovative, inspirational project that the UNEP Sasakawa judges hope to reward in 2011.

Nominations will be accepted until 30 September 2010 via the UNEP Sasakawa Prize website: www.unep.org/sasakawa

For more information, please contact: Lucita Jasmin, Head of Special Events, UNEP Division of Communication and Public Information, Email: lucita.jasmin@unep.org

<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=630&ArticleID=6689&l=en>

August 8, 2010

W.Va. churches taking 'hard walk' on mining

Council's position unpopular in state dependent on coal

By Sean D. Hamill
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- The Rev. Dennis Sparks calls it "the hard walk."

That's what you have to do when your religious organization decides to take a position -- in, of all places, West Virginia -- saying mountaintop removal mining is against God's will, but also raises money for the families of miners who died in accidents, and organizes a meeting to cool the debate over coal issues.

As a result, it has been loved and loathed by mining interests and mine families, acting as both an agitator on issues and friendly comforter in times of crisis. But it still manages to act as an intermediary, as it did at the extraordinary meeting it arranged in January with Gov. Joe Manchin, environmentalists and the United Mine Workers to talk about nonviolent communication.

"That's the hard walk we have to take, because it is hard to walk between those" positions and actions the West Virginia Council of Churches has taken on coal, said Rev. Sparks, the council's executive director for the past eight years.

"So when the Upper Big Branch disaster happened I didn't say, 'Gee, I've been criticized by some mining companies, or some miner, because of our position on mountaintop removal, so I'm not going down there,' " he said.

"You set aside whatever political differences you have when a crisis happens and you help."

Some of that help will be realized starting as early as this week when the council begins sending out checks from the \$870,000 it raised -- at Gov. Manchin's request -- for the families of the 29 men who died and the two men who were injured in the April 5 Upper Big Branch Mine explosion.

"From that standpoint, it's a very credible and very good organization," Bill Raney, president of the West Virginia Coal Association, said of the fundraising.

"But for an organization to be opposed to the way many of its members make their living [in mountaintop mining] as I've told them, that just doesn't make any sense to me."

If it might seem perilous for the council to take such seemingly contradictory positions on the most sensitive economic issue in West Virginia, you have to realize that this isn't just any not-for-profit religious group.

The 130-year-old council is the oldest, largest and, arguably, the most powerful religious umbrella group in the state, representing nearly 3,000 Christian churches of various denominations with nearly 600,000 parishioners among them -- or roughly one out of every three residents of the state.

"There's no doubt they can influence a few people in the House and the Senate down here," said Ted Hapney, the United Mine Workers' representative for West Virginia.

Much of that influence is due to the council's history and size. But over the past five years, it also has been, in part, because of the close relationship between Rev. Sparks and Gov. Manchin, who attends a council member church.

"One of the reasons a lot of groups that might not normally respond to us is they know the governor will take my call," Rev. Sparks said.

Although the council is best known in the state as a trusted social service organization -- supporting children's health care, helping veterans transition back into society, natural disaster recovery, among other efforts -- over the past decade it also has become increasingly involved in environmental debates.

In the late 1990s, it advocated fighting global warming and began looking into the environmental impact of mountaintop removal mining, but stopped short of calling for its end.

But in September 2007, after a yearlong debate, the council stepped fully into the coal debate by taking a policy stance against mountaintop removal mining.

Although there were clearly some parishioners and even some pastors upset with it, not one of the member churches lodged an official protest opposing the stance.

Officially, Rev. Sparks and other council members like to point out, the policy simply calls for "the strictest possible enforcement" of the Surface Mining and Reclamation Control Act and the Clean Water Act.

But they acknowledge -- sometimes indirectly -- that if the laws were interpreted and enforced the way they believe they should be, mountaintop removal mining would largely end. That's

because mining companies would not be allowed to move rubble left behind from the process into the valleys next to the sites, covering streams.

"That may be. But I'm not going to say that. We'll leave [the coal companies] to say that," said Bishop William Boyd Grove, the retired bishop of the United Methodist Church of West Virginia, who helped write the council's policy.

The coal companies do say that.

"They don't seem to care about the jobs that would be lost because of this" if their statement was followed, said Mr. Raney of the Coal Association, which represents most of the coal companies that operate in the state.

The statement cites four Bible passages to support the council's stance that "we cannot stand by while our mountains are being devastated," including Psalms 24:1 that says: "The Earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; and the world, and they that dwell therein."

But Mr. Raney, who also attends a council member church, sees it differently.

"I think [mountaintop removal] is right in the eyes of the Lord," said Mr. Raney. "He gave us stewardship of the land, and he put those resources in the mountains for us to use."

If the statement upset coal interests, it heartened environmentalists, even if they thought the council could have gone much further.

"I'd like to see a stronger stance," said Vernon Haltom, co-director of the Coal River Mountain Watch, one of the environmental groups that have been involved in protests against mountaintop removal. "But I understand for them that's probably the strongest stance they could take."

Starting in February 2009, activists began adopting tactics used in battles over the old-growth forest logging in the Western United States, chaining themselves to dump trucks, cranes or some other piece of coal mining equipment.

They also did protest marches and sit-ins, and, for the first time, "tree-sits" were used, in which a protester would climb to the top of a tall tree near a mountaintop removal site and live for days or weeks at a time, preventing the blasting that precedes the mining.

As a result, "there's a lot of tension on both sides," said Sgt. Mike Smith, commander of the West Virginia State Police's Whitesville detachment, which covers the area where most of the protests have taken place.

"The miners feel these folks are coming in trying to take their jobs away and criticize their way of life, and the environmentalists feel they're here to save the world."

More than 100 people were arrested making anti-mountaintop removal protests from February 2009 until April 2010, when the protests were largely put on hold in the wake of the Upper Big Branch disaster.

But as the protests heated up last year, on June 23, 2009, in one infamous case widely viewed on YouTube.com, the wife of a miner slapped a well-known anti-mountaintop removal activist, Judy Bonds, during a march.

Two weeks later, on July 4, a group of pro-mining residents came out to an environmentalist picnic on Kayford Mountain, and one of them made a throat-slashing gesture that also was captured and posted on YouTube.

On top of that, Rev. Sparks said he and others began to notice that even statements from politicians seemed to OK the increasingly violent conduct, and they began to fear the worst.

"The tensions were running so high, all of us could see how someone could get killed," said country music star Kathy Mattea, who grew up in South Charleston and became involved in the mountaintop removal debate three years ago. Not coincidentally, her most recent album is titled "Coal."

Two years ago, she met Rev. Sparks and was impressed with his and the council's work around coal issues.

Last winter together they asked Gov. Manchin to sit down with leaders from both sides to talk about the increasingly violent rhetoric and potential for violence in the coal fields. They even offered to bring in an expert on nonviolent communication, John Kinyon, from California.

The governor -- who supports mountaintop removal -- agreed for one basic reason, said Jim Pitrolo, the governor's legislative and policy director.

"I don't know if there was a concern of immediate violence. He was more concerned with both sides talking to each other," Mr. Pitrolo said.

So on Jan. 24 at the governor's mansion, Gov. Manchin, his wife, Gayle, and Mr. Pitrolo met with Rev. Sparks, Mr. Kinyon, Ms. Mattea, activist Si Kahn, Mr. Hapney from the UMW, Mr. Haltom and Maria Gunnoe from the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition. Mr. Raney was invited but couldn't attend.

At the beginning of the extraordinary meeting, the group was told that Gov. Manchin and his wife would be able to stay for only an hour or two.

But after a grilled chicken and asparagus dinner, the group began an informal conversation -- moderated by Mr. Kinyon -- that lasted four hours. The governor and his wife stayed the entire time.

"The conversation was very interesting," Mr. Pitrolo said when asked what compelled the governor and his wife to stay late into the evening.

But Ms. Gunnoe, who has faced threats herself because of her anti-mountaintop removal stance, said: "I can't help but think the governor stayed because he really wasn't aware of the real threats of violence we live with every day."

The meeting had at least one immediate impact. The next day Gov. Manchin made a public statement about the increasing tension: "There is no place in West Virginia for violence. I won't tolerate violence and my West Virginia State Police won't tolerate it. We must have peaceful dialogue about these passionate issues."

For his part, Rev. Sparks, who hopes to host another similar meeting in the future, said his favorite result of the meeting was the meeting itself: "Everyone was talking and listening to each other."

Has it solved the problems over the debate of mountaintop removal?

"No," Rev. Sparks said, "but it was a start."

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<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/10220/1078592-455.stm>

August 8, 2010

Zed urges Hindus for vow of animal compassion on Naga-panchami

OneIndia

Nevada (US) (ANI): Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, sending Naga-panchami greetings to one billion Hindus of the world, has appealed to them to take a vow of compassion to all animals and treat them with kindness and respect.

Zed, who is the president of Universal Society of Hinduism, in a release in Nevada (USA) today, wished that all Hindus be blessed and their prayers answered on the auspicious occasion of Naga-panchami festival, which fell on August 14 this year.

Naga-panchami, which is observed on the fifth day of the bright half of Sravana, commemorates the victorious return of Lord Krishna from Yamuna after overcoming serpent Kaliya. It is a celebration in honor of snakes, who are revered on this day and offerings are made of milk, flour, cooked food, etc., to them.

Rajan Zed stressed that non-violence was a greatest virtue in Hinduism and Hindus even did not plough fields on Naga-panchami day over the concern that a snake might be accidentally killed.

Zed suggested to Hindus: focus on inner search, stay pure, explore the vast wisdom of scriptures, make spirituality more attractive to youth and children, stay away from the greed, and always keep God in your life.

http://news.oneindia.in/2010/08/08/zedurges-hindus-for-vow-of-animal-compassion-on-nagapancha.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+oneindia-all-news+%28Oneindia+-+News%29

August 9, 2010

Pakistan floods: disaster is the worst in the UN's history

By Neil Tweedie
The Telegraph

The United Nations has rated the floods in Pakistan as the greatest humanitarian crisis in recent history with more people affected than the South-East Asian tsunami and the recent earthquakes in Kashmir and Haiti combined.

Although the current 1,600 death toll in [Pakistan](#) represents a tiny fraction of the estimated 610,000 people killed in the three previous events, some two million more people - 13.8 million - have suffered losses requiring long or short-term help.

Maurizio Giuliano, a spokesman for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said: "This disaster is worse than the tsunami, the 2005 Pakistan earthquake and the Haiti earthquake."

The comparison illustrates the scale of the crisis facing Pakistan as its inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy battles to mitigate the effects of the flooding.

The disaster zone stretches from the Swat Valley in the north, where 600,000 people are in need of help, to Sindh in the south.

Billions of pounds will be needed to rebuild affected areas but western nations have pledged only tens of millions in aid. Radical Islamic groups are jockeying to fill the vacuum left by government incompetence and relative international indifference.

Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, formerly North-West Frontier Province and scene of a bloody Taliban insurgency, has been devastated by swollen rivers. The steel girder bridge over the Khyali River in Charsadda which built by the British at the height of the Raj is a jagged stump. It was a vital gateway to the region and its loss has hampered the aid effort.

"There are people here who are 80 and who will tell you that they have seen nothing like it in their lives," said Arif Jabbar Khan, leading the Oxfam team in the town. "This was a productive agricultural area with a big middle class who have now lost everything. The effect of that will be enormously destabilizing. There was a riot in town as people demanded food."

Beneath it, the brown waters of the swollen Khyali, three times its normal width, thundered southward over what had been homes and farms.

The problems here are being replicated across Pakistan. Of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's population of 1.7 million, some one million have been made destitute by the flooding. The government has managed to distribute 10,000 food packs in the 10 days since the disaster. They will feed just 80,000 people.

Flood victims stand around homeless, aimless, their clothes covered in sticky red mud. The river thunders on, oblivious.

"The reaction in the west to this crisis has been lukewarm so far," said Mr Khan. "The governments there need to understand what is going on." Meanwhile Mr Khan must get on with the basics, pouring chlorine into wells to prevent the spread of e-coli and cholera, and organizing payments to families so that they can buy food in Charsadda's still-functioning market.

The nearby city of Peshawar relies on the area for much of its food, and prices are now rocketing in the markets there – as they are along the length of Pakistan.

Still more people are still dying in Pakistan's remote mountainous northern provinces, swept away in the torrent or buried in landslides.

The government in Islamabad has admitted that cannot cope with such a catastrophe, but the international response has been lukewarm.

Yousuf Raza Gilani, Pakistan's prime minister, left to deal with the crisis while his president, Asif Ali Zardari, toured Britain and France, said the floods would set Pakistan back years.

Jean-Maurice Ripert, the United Nations special envoy for the disaster, said the scale of funding for Pakistan's recovery could only escalate. He said: "The emergency phase will require hundreds of millions of dollars and the recovery and reconstruction part will require billions of dollars."

Angry survivors have attacked government officials in flood-hit areas. The government's fear of a backlash is believed to be behind the blocking of two independent TV channels, Geo and Ary, which have been critical of President Asif Ali Zardari for going ahead with a European tour as large parts of his country suffered inundation.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/7935485/Pakistan-floods-disaster-is-the-worst-in-the-UNs-history.html>

August 9, 2010

Eat, pray, love: A new green gospel

By Mallory McDuff
USA Today

This summer I've been waiting for the opening of the movie *Eat, Pray, Love* with an anticipation that is a bit different from my hope that Congress would find effective strategies to address climate change. The difference? I don't think I'll be disappointed with the movie's ending.

I'm a Christian, an environmentalist, an academic and a pop-culture junkie. And I think the three verbs in the movie's title — eat, pray, love — might provide direction for the thousands of believers from diverse faith traditions who advocated for a religious response to global warming in three stories that unfolded this summer.

Despite sincere prayer and informed lobbying, people of faith have watched: (1) the Senate's inability to tackle the real problem of climate change, (2) the lack of progress at the [United Nations](#) Climate Change Conference and (3) the failure of the oil spill along the Gulf Coast to create a national demand for alternative energy sources.

Given that the United States imports 68% of its oil, couldn't this disaster propel a call for more sustainable policies and practices? And if not, what are the next steps for people of faith whose religious beliefs motivate their environmental actions?

In an essay titled "Jesus and the Climate Bill," the Rev. Peter Sawtell, executive director of Eco-Justice Ministries, describes the Senate's failure to provide leadership around climate change as "genuinely sinful." In the face of his own frustration, Sawtell turns to Scripture.

In Luke 17:3, Jesus calls us to rebuke the offender (hold legislators accountable) and if there is repentance, forgive. In Mark 6:11, Jesus says that if any place refuses to hear you, "shake off the dust that is on your feet" and, essentially, go elsewhere.

And this is where [Julia Roberts](#) comes in. In the movie, she goes elsewhere. She leaves the frustrations of her personal life and a divisive marriage (read Congress) for an epic spiritual journey.

Congregations across the country are living these three verbs — eat, pray, love — without traveling to Italy, India, or Indonesia. They are creating bold acts of redemption to address global warming in ways their parishioners can understand: how climate change affects the people and places they love. Their examples provide signposts for how our collective acts in the trenches can generate a momentum that transcends the actions of individuals or inaction of legislative bodies.

Eat

Congregations literally feed people with bread and serve millions of meals to people in need each week. The metaphor of eating also calls us to ask what feeds and sustains us as believers. At All People's Church in inner-city Milwaukee, the back of the sanctuary becomes a free farmer's market each Sunday, with organic vegetables grown by youth of the church. Across the country, St. John's United Lutheran Church in Seattle has integrated care of creation into a church garden, energy-efficient buildings, sermons and the Sunday school curriculum. People of faith can practice sustainable eating in community and integrate place into a life of prayer.

Pray

Prayer provides stillness that can connect us with God's creation. The oil spill in the [Gulf of Mexico](#) precipitated a groundswell of prayer vigils from Pensacola, Fla., to Newark, N.J. In its climate justice tours, North Carolina Interfaith Power and Light integrates prayer into educational journeys for congregations to learn about the relationship between energy production and climate change. Congregations can use contemplation as a strategy that inspires reflection and action to reduce our carbon footprint.

Love

Loving our neighbor as ourselves stirs believers to care for creation. The organization GreenFaith focuses on environmental actions such as promoting energy-efficiency in low-income homes, green jobs and solar panels on sanctuaries. In Washington state, Earth Ministry is bringing interfaith religious leaders and legislators together in a campaign to transition the state from coal to clean energy by 2015. Communities of the faithful can model this belief in love and justice by protecting healthy environments for all.

These local, state and regional efforts could be one practical alternative to our reality of stalled federal leadership and international agreement on effective approaches to reduce global carbon emissions. Global warming has created common ground for Jews, Evangelicals, Muslims, Lutherans, Baptists and Roman Catholics. Our diverse religious traditions provide the structure of intentional community, a shared moral imperative, forgiveness and redemption, and most important, hope in things not seen.

In the trailer for the movie, Julia Roberts tells her boss she is leaving her job for a journey: "I want to go where I can marvel at something." The end to our own story can inspire awe, rather than disappointment. Follow the conversion of congregations across the country to address climate change. Eat. Pray. Love.

Mallory McDuff is the author of Natural Saints: How People of Faith are Working to Save God's Earth. She teaches at Warren Wilson College in Asheville, N.C.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/2010-08-10-mcduff10_ST_N.htm

August 10, 2010

Church bells ring to highlight toll of biodiversity

Church of England Press Release

Church bells across the country will ring in tune with the United Nations next month to mark crucial international talks on biodiversity.

As the bells toll at the UN headquarters in both New York and Nairobi, bell ringers from small parish churches to large cathedrals and minsters are being encouraged to ring on September 22. This year was declared the UN 2010 International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) and the Church of England is one of the official partners in the UK.

The UN General Assembly will discuss for the first time ever the crisis affecting the world's biodiversity on September 22, underlining the importance of how plants, animals and life are all linked and the loss of one species through human actions can affect many others.

With a Christian presence in every community, around 6,000 of the CofE's 16,000 churches have a peal of bells (not including those with a single bell). IYB in the UK is encouraging bell ringing by faith groups, schools and organisations from 12-2pm.

The UN declared 2010 as IYB in recognition of the fact that, despite the formation of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) following the Rio Earth Summit, targets set to stop the global loss of biodiversity by 2010 have not been met.

In October 2010, following the UN meeting, the 193 heads of state who are signatories to the Convention will meet in Nagoya in Japan to make binding agreements. The Secretariat of the Convention is encouraging the ringing of bells all over the world as an urgent 'memo' ahead of this meeting to rouse the world to take action to stop the loss of species.

David Shreeve, the Church of England's national environment adviser said: "As Christians we believe it is important to care for God's creation and our natural world is suffering because of our own actions. Many of our estimated 10,000 churchyards are full with often rare biodiversity and others in towns and cities support fewer, but equally important wildlife. The church is providing protected havens right on our own doorstep."

Dr Jill Hopkinson, the Church of England's National Rural Officer, said: "Ringing the church bells is a great way for the wider community to be reminded and to celebrate the beauty of creation. Rural churches are at the heart of village life and their churchyards are part of the collective history and memory of that community. Celebrating the biodiversity of countryside and churchyard will bring a community together and ringing the bells is a very prominent way of doing it."

Dr Bob Bloomfield, co-ordinator of IYB in the United Kingdom said: "It is excellent that the Church of England see the importance of people being responsible stewards of the environment. Their support of the International Year of Biodiversity will encourage people to ask why biodiversity is so important and what would be the consequences of its loss on the health and wellbeing of people and the environment. The bell ringing will draw attention to critical negotiations taking place in Nagoya that will effect all of us for decades to come."

Notes

The initiative to ring bells across the world is inspired by the UK based MEMO Project and supported by IYB-UK and the Church of England. MEMO is a collaboration of scientists, sculptors and stonemasons dedicated to communicating the reality of the current extinction crisis by creating a perpetual memorial. The aim is to erect a stone sculpture featuring the carved images of the species being made extinct, which also supports a huge bell. The bell and sculpture will be built on the cliffs of the Isle of Portland. This is part of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site whose 95 miles of fossil rich cliffs already record 185 million continuous years of the history of life. The great bell will be tolled whenever a species is declared extinct.

<http://www.memoproject.org/>

More information on the importance of biodiversity and about IYB in the UK:

<http://www.biodiversityislife.net/>

**How Wild is your Churchyard?* <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr0110.html>

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr6910.html>

August 11, 2010

Conservation, religious groups work to prevent development on available religious lands

By Jay Lindsay
Associated Press

WAREHAM, Mass. (AP) — The stretch of shoreline owned by a Massachusetts religious order is a place where even the sounds add to the stillness. Bells jangle on buoys as birds chatter and the tide slides in a soft rush past scattered clammers.

"It's a refuge of silence," said the Rev. Stan Kolasa, director of a retreat center on the Buzzards Bay property. "It's holy. This is holy ground."

It's also protected ground. Kolasa's Roman Catholic order, the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, sold development rights on 100 acres of its property for \$3.6 million. It's now a key piece of the Great Neck Wildlife Sanctuary, which opens to the public this fall.

Deals to buy religious land, or its development rights, are being made with the help of conservationists from Washington state to Colorado and New Jersey. In a tough economy, such land is a tempting asset for churches and religious orders to trade for solvency. But many are choosing to conserve it, sometimes for less money than private developers would offer.

"There's a rising consciousness among a lot of different religious groups that the environment is very important," said Kathy McGrath of the Religious Land Conservancy Project. Some, she said, "think about land conservation as a spiritual activity."

"We've recognized that we have more common ground than we ever knew we had," Kathy Sferra of Mass Audubon, which helped secure the Sacred Hearts' contract and will manage the sanctuary.

But even with two willing parties, religious land deals aren't easy.

It can take years to get consensus from a religious group, approval from various levels of government and funding from different private and public sources. And with public funds for conservation land getting more scarce, it's tough to seal any type of conservation purchase and the opportunities to buy don't last forever, said Joe Martens of the Open Space Institute, which has purchased religious properties along the Hudson River.

The properties can be expensive and complex, particularly if there's a building like an old monastery included in the sale, Martens said.

"I think that there's lots of them out there. I think the conservation community ... (is) really concerned about the futures of the properties," Martens said. "In my opinion, there's not enough money in the system right now."

Financial pressures from declining attendance or clergy are a key reason religious groups put land on the market in the first place.

It's no coincidence Catholic groups have been involved in many of the recent deals. Statistics from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University show that since 1965, the number of religious brothers has dropped 62 percent (12,271 to 4,690). Over the same period the number of religious sisters has plummeted 68 percent (179,954 to 57,444).

McGrath said an order's land, often left through bequest, can become a burden, and selling the land or development rights is an attractive way to ease that strain. Plus, it can provide money to take care of aging members and continue their mission.

"As time goes on and the orders age, (the pressure to sell) gets more and more acute," McGrath said.

Kolasa said the Sacred Hearts order decided to sell its development rights after its membership dropped from 100 to 40 in recent decades and it began to focus more on developing on the 67-year-old retreat center and less on its overseas missions.

The \$3.6 million it received for the development rights is seed money for a broad expansion aimed at helping the center and property reach more people, Kolasa said.

"We want to give (the land) in such a way that people's visions, people's spirits, people's hopes and dreams, they're changed," he said.

Sacred Hearts' land was worth \$15 to \$18 million to private developers, according to officials from groups involved in the deal, including Mass Audubon and the Wareham Land Trust. Such bargains from religious groups aren't uncommon, but plenty also command full price for their land.

John Keenan, director of land preservation at the New Jersey chapter of The Nature Conservancy, said the \$2 million they agreed to pay the Diocese of Camden for 493 acres in Cumberland County was market value. Last month, the conservancy closed on the first phase of the deal, which makes the land part of the Manumuskin River Preserve — a vast mix of forests, meadows, swamps and tidal marsh.

Jim Ennis, executive Director of the Catholic Rural Life Conference, said good stewardship for religious groups can sometimes mean getting top price for their property.

"They have to be prudent and make decisions on what's best for the order," he said.

Chris Kay of The Trust for Public Land said his group is selective about pursuing any property, weighing factors such as the parcel's impact on drinking water, whether it can be part of a larger conservation area and how frequently it can be used. Several religious sites have fit the bill.

In New Castle, Del., the trust is helping the city buy a 42-acre parcel that an Episcopal church has owned since 1719 to preserve open space in the town center. In Westminster, Colo., it's working with the Sisters of the New Covenant Catholic order to sell 25 acres for open space. In Washington State, Tall Timber Ranch is working with the trust to save the land and secure its future.

Tall Timber is a Presbyterian camp, built in 1957 at the convergence of the White and Napeequa rivers. It welcomes up to 6,000 guests a year, but it's also facing financial strain as attendance in mainline denominations drops, and churches struggle just to pay for their own operations, said co-director Becky Fishburn.

In a deal Fishburn expects will close next month, Tall Timber sold development rights on two 20-acre riverfront parcels for \$400,000. The money will establish an endowment to help the camp pay for its future operations, while helping preserving the pristine rivers as place the salmon can run God's voice can be heard, she said.

"I believe deeply that, as human beings, we are wired, in many ways, to respond to God's voice," Fishburn said. "We need places of peace and quiet and tranquility in order to connect with that."

Online:

Religious Land Conservancy Project: <http://www.crystalspring.org/html/reliiglands.html>

The Trust for Public Land: <http://www.tpl.org/>

The Nature Conservancy: <http://www.nature.org/>

Eds: Corrects name of conservation area in third paragraph, clarifies Mass Audubon's role in

managing it.

www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/sns-ap-us-rel-religion-today,0,2919716.story

August 14, 2010

In Weather Chaos, a Case for Global Warming

By Justin Gillis
New York Times

The [floods battered New England, then Nashville, then Arkansas, then Oklahoma](#) — and were followed by a deluge in Pakistan that has upended the lives of 20 million people.

The summer's heat waves baked the eastern United States, parts of Africa and eastern Asia, and above all Russia, which lost [millions of acres of wheat](#) and thousands of lives in a drought worse than any other in the historical record.

Seemingly disconnected, these far-flung disasters are reviving the question of whether [global warming](#) is causing more weather extremes.

The collective answer of the scientific community can be boiled down to a single word: probably.

“The climate is changing,” said Jay Lawrimore, chief of climate analysis at the [National Climatic Data Center](#) in Asheville, N.C. “Extreme events are occurring with greater frequency, and in many cases with greater intensity.”

He described excessive heat, in particular, as “consistent with our understanding of how the climate responds to increasing greenhouse gases.”

Theory suggests that a world warming up because of those gases will feature heavier rainstorms in summer, bigger snowstorms in winter, more intense droughts in at least some places and more record-breaking heat waves. Scientists and government reports say the statistical evidence shows that much of this is starting to happen.

But the averages do not necessarily make it easier to link specific weather events, like a given flood or hurricane or heat wave, to climate change. Most climate scientists are reluctant to go that far, noting that weather was characterized by remarkable variability long before humans began burning fossil fuels and releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

“If you ask me as a person, do I think the Russian heat wave has to do with climate change, the answer is yes,” said Gavin Schmidt, a climate researcher with [NASA](#) in New York. “If you ask me as a scientist whether I have proved it, the answer is no — at least not yet.”

In Russia, that kind of scientific caution might once have been embraced. Russia has long played a reluctant, and sometimes obstructionist, role in global negotiations over limiting climate change, perhaps in part because it expected economic benefits from the warming of its vast Siberian hinterland.

But the extreme heat wave, and accompanying drought and [wildfires](#), in normally cool central Russia seems to be prompting a shift in thinking.

“Everyone is talking about climate change now,” President Dmitri A. [Medvedev told the Russian Security Council](#) this month. “Unfortunately, what is happening now in our central regions is evidence of this global climate change, because we have never in our history faced such weather conditions in the past.”

Thermometer measurements show that the earth has warmed by about 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit since the Industrial Revolution, when humans began pumping enormous amounts of carbon dioxide, a heat-trapping greenhouse gas, into the atmosphere. For this January through July, average [temperatures were the warmest on record](#), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported Friday.

The warming has moved in fits and starts, and the cumulative increase may sound modest. But it is an average over the entire planet, representing an immense amount of added heat, and is only the beginning of a trend that most experts believe will worsen substantially.

If the earth were not warming, random variations in the weather should cause about the same number of record-breaking high temperatures and record-breaking low temperatures over a given period. But climatologists have long theorized that in a warming world, the added heat would cause more record highs and fewer record lows.

The statistics suggest that is exactly what is happening. In the United States these days, about [two record highs are being set for every record low](#), telltale evidence that amid all the random variation of weather, the trend is toward a warmer climate.

Climate-change skeptics dispute such statistical arguments, contending that climatologists do not know enough about long-range patterns to draw definitive links between global warming and weather extremes. They cite events like the heat and drought of the 1930s as evidence that extreme weather is nothing new. Those were indeed dire heat waves, contributing to the Dust

Bowl, which dislocated millions of Americans and changed the population structure of the United States.

But most researchers trained in climate analysis, while acknowledging that weather data in parts of the world are not as good as they would like, offer evidence to show that weather extremes are getting worse.

A United States [government report](#) published in 2008 noted that “in recent decades, most of North America has been experiencing more unusually hot days and nights, fewer unusually cold days and nights, and fewer frost days. Heavy downpours have become more frequent and intense.”

The statistics suggest that the Eastern United States may be getting wetter as the arid West dries out further. Places that depend on the runoff from spring snow melt appear particularly vulnerable to climate change, because higher temperatures are making the snow melt earlier, leaving the ground parched by midsummer. That can worsen any drought that develops.

“Global warming, ironically, can actually increase the amount of snow you get,” said Kevin Trenberth, head of climate analysis at the [National Center for Atmospheric Research](#) in Boulder, Colo. “But it also means the snow season is shorter.”

In general, the research suggests that global warming will worsen climate extremes across much of the planet. As in the United States, wet areas will get wetter, the scientists say, while dry areas get drier.

But the patterns are not uniform; changes in wind and ocean circulation could cause unexpected effects, with some areas even cooling down in a warmer world. And long-established weather patterns, like the periodic variations in the Pacific Ocean known as El Niño, will still contribute to unusual events, like heavy rains and cool temperatures in normally arid parts of California.

Scientists say they expect stronger storms, in winter and summer, largely because of the physical principle that warmer air can hold more water vapor.

Typically, a storm of the sort that inundated [parts of Tennessee in May](#), dumping as much as [19 inches of rain over two days](#), draws moisture from an area much larger than the storm itself. With temperatures rising and more water vapor in the air, such storms can pull in more moisture and thus rain or snow more heavily than storms of old.

It will be a year or two before climate scientists publish definitive analyses of the Russian heat wave and the Pakistani floods, which might shed light on the role of climate change, if any. Some scientists suspect that they were caused or worsened by an unusual kink in the jet stream, the high-altitude flow of air that helps determine weather patterns, though that itself might be

linked to climate change. Certain recent weather events were so extreme that a few scientists are shedding their traditional reluctance to ascribe specific disasters to global warming.

After a heat wave in Europe in 2003 that killed an estimated 50,000 people, the worst such catastrophe for that region in the historical record, scientists published detailed analyses suggesting that it would not have been as severe in a climate uninfluenced by greenhouse gases.

And Dr. Trenberth has published work suggesting that [Hurricane Katrina](#) dumped at least somewhat more rain on the Gulf Coast because the storm was intensified by global warming.

“It’s not the right question to ask if this storm or that storm is due to global warming, or is it natural variability,” Dr. Trenberth said. “Nowadays, there’s always an element of both.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/15/science/earth/15climate.html>

August 14, 2010

Dalai Lama sounds alarm over global warming amid floods

AFP

DHARAMSHALA, India – The [Dalai Lama](#) said global warming could be to blame for devastating flooding and mudslides across Asia as he offered prayers on Saturday for victims of the disasters.

The Buddhist spiritual leader said he was "deeply saddened" by the loss of lives and destruction of property in Pakistan, India and China, and added he was concerned that the disasters may have been caused by global warming.

He also expressed concern about [Russia](#), which is battling its worst-ever forest fires.

"According to experts these very unusual floods and the devastating fires in Russia are symptoms of a deeper malaise occurring due to unprecedented global warming and other environmental causes," the Dalai Lama said in a statement issued from Dharamshala, his home-in-exile in northern India.

"A [concerted international effort](#) is needed to think about measures to preserve our common and delicate ecology," said the Dalai Lama, who fled to India in 1959 after a failed uprising against Chinese rule in [Tibet](#).

Pakistan says 14 to 20 million people face direct or indirect harm as a result of unprecedented floods that have triggered the country's worst humanitarian disaster.

The United Nations believes 1,600 people have died, while Islamabad has confirmed over 1,300 deaths in the [Pakistan floods](#).

Meanwhile, China is battling huge floods and a massive mudslide that has claimed over 1,150 lives.

In India sudden rain storms more than a week ago triggered flash floods that killed 189 people in the adventure tourism region of Ladakh in the Himalayas while some 400 people are still missing.

http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20100814/wl_sthasia_afp/indiachinapakistanrussiawarmingweatherdisasterdalai

August 15, 2010

Hindus laud Norway's Oya Music Festival for environment friendliness

Baltic Review

Hindus have applauded Norway's Oya Festival (Oyafestivalen) for being a sustainable and green festival in an environmentally friendly zone, calling it "a step in the right direction".

Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement in Nevada (USA) today, said that in view of global ecological crisis, musicians and artists should not stay silent spectators to this threatening crisis faced by humanity, should fulfill their obligations by voicing the environmental issues, and should come forward to do their share of tackling global warming and persuading others to undertake this cause.

Zed, who is President of Universal Society of Hinduism, urged other music festivals, music groups and musicians of the world to embrace Oya's philosophy of looking at the environment from planning to closing and beyond and management in between.

Rajan Zed pointed out that ancient Hindu scriptures, especially Atharva-Veda, were highly respectful of mother nature.

"It is cool to be green", Zed added.

According to reports, Oya Festival, held from August 10 to 14 in Medieval Park in Gamlebyen, oldest part of Oslo (Norway), attracted about 16,000 visitors daily. Litter at the Festival was sorted into 14 different categories, food was organic and sourced locally, electric and hydrogen-powered cars were used by staff on the site, its four stages were powered by 100% renewable energy sourced from hydroelectric dam instead of polluting generators, it provided eco-friendly diaper change stand and eco-labeled sunblock. Stein Arne Blomseth was the Festival Manager.

<http://baltic-review.com/2010/08/15/hindus-laud-norway%E2%80%99s-oya-music-festival-for-environment-friendliness/>

August 16, 2010

Church bells to ring out in September for species protection

By Martin Revis
Ecumenical News International, London

Support for United Nations talks on biodiversity will be marked in Britain by the biggest nationwide peal of bells since celebrations to mark the eve of the third millennium, organizers say.

"Ringling the church bells is a great way for the wider community to be reminded and to celebrate the beauty of creation," said Jill Hopkinson, the [Church of England](#)'s national rural officer, in an August 10 statement.

The denomination is urging cathedrals and several thousand parish churches to ring their bells to mark the talks at the U.N. general assembly on Sept. 22 in New York that will address the international failure to meet targets on species conservation.

The United Nations has declared 2010 to be [International Biodiversity Year](#) to draw attention to the failure to meet targets to stop the global loss of biodiversity by 2010, despite the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity, which entered into force in 1993.

"As Christians we believe it is important to care for God's creation and our natural world is suffering because of our actions," David Shreeve, the church's national environmental adviser, said in a statement.

"Many of our estimated 10,000 churchyards are full with often rare biodiversity and others in towns and cities support fewer, but equally important wildlife. The church is providing protected havens right on our own doorstep," he said.

A similar initiative involving the worldwide ringing of church bells took place in December to mark U.N. climate change talks in Copenhagen.

In October, following the U.N. biodiversity meeting, the 193 heads of state who are signatories to the convention will meet in Nagoya in Japan. The secretariat of the convention is encouraging the ringing of bells all over the world as an urgent appeal ahead of this meeting to rouse the world to take action to stop the loss of species.

Bell ringers will be reminded through blogs and Twitter messages to peal their bells between 12 noon and 2 p.m. on Sept. 22.

The initiative is linked to the MEMO project, which the Church of England is also supporting, to erect a stone sculpture on the Isle of Portland in southern England featuring a bell and carved images of threatened species. The great bell will be tolled whenever a species is declared extinct.

http://www.episcopal-life.org/81808_124075_ENG_HTM.htm

August 16, 2010

Scharper: Social chaos reflected in sculpture

By Stephen Bede Scharper
Toronto Star

Last month, the Grey Roots Museum in Owen Sound unveiled an 11-foot wood carving depicting “Chaos on Turtle Island.”

Ensclosed in the centre of the Blessing the Good People Gallery, dedicated to the stories and spiritual worldviews of the Anishinabe people, the sculpture powerfully interweaves visages of aboriginal ancestral anguish in light of contemporary ecological destruction. The artist, Wilmer Nadjiwan, 89, a decorated World War II veteran and former chief at Cape Croker Native Reserve, is described on the plaque as “hunter, fisherman, trapper, renowned carver, and Protector of Native Culture” who is striving “to restore and maintain the beauty, magnificence, and spirit of North American culture.” (www.greyroots.com)

He started carving, however, as he shared with me recently, simply “to make a living.” “I was hungry,” he declared. It is in this intersection of the quest for both subsistence and the sublime that Nadjiwan’s remarkable life has been hewn, and through it winds not only an important strand of First Nations history, but also a disquieting reflection on our present, pernicious ecological path.

I had gotten to know Nadjiwan during summer visits to Tobermory at the tip of the Bruce Peninsula, which divides the crystal cool waters of Georgian Bay from Lake Huron. I would chat

with him at his shop, catching bits of his story that flecked out along with wood chips as he worked, a life journey he describes as “uphill both ways.”

After his mother was killed in a car accident, Nadjiwan was sent to a residential school, where tragically, like so many other First Nations youth, he was sexually abused, an experience that he says left him emotionally “crippled,” and has tintured subsequent family relationships. At 21, he joined his brothers in the army, fighting with the Perth Regiment through Italy and Holland until Nazi Germany’s final gasp in 1945.

Upon his return to Ontario, fresh from the war and still in uniform, Nadjiwan tried to buy a beer for himself and his father, but was told that the bar “did not serve Indians.” A sobering reminder that some things had not changed on the home front.

After witnessing the public burning of handwritten treaty records by the Indian agent in charge of Cape Croker, Nadjiwan publicly challenged a government official on the incident, and was thus encouraged by friends to run for chief in 1964, a position he held for 14 years.

After the dissolution of a successful furniture factory on the reserve by an Indian agent, Nadjiwan worked to end the Indian agent system, which was ultimately abolished not only at Cape Croker but also across the country. He made some serious enemies, however, when he opposed Pierre Trudeau’s decision to fund the tribal band councils, which he claimed would erode native autonomy.

For Nadjiwan, the suppression of aboriginal economic independence is concurrent with the subjugation of aboriginal worldviews, which often accent a holistic integration of all parts of creation. The current ecological and social chaos of our planet, seared by climate change, species extinction, pollution, poverty and cultural suppression, is what Nadjiwan explores in his sculpture and his life story, and his message — tempered by war, want, abuse, broken relationships, courage, creativity and concern for the earth — remains quietly compelling and meaningful.

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<http://www.thestar.com/news/ontario/article/847878--scharper-social-chaos-reflected-in-sculpture>

August 18, 2010

Deep Water calamity exposes our faith in the sea

By Kimberley C. Patton
Washington Post

"The sea can wash away all evils." The ancient Greek playwright Euripides gave these words to the exiled priestess Iphigenia, indentured to the goddess Artemis in a strange land. Can seawater ritually clean her refugee brother Orestes, even of the blood-stain of matricide? Her answer to King Thoas is unequivocal. There is nothing the sea cannot purify.

"Where is the oil?" The slick is almost gone. As the various levels of "kill" -- top, static, bottom - cauterize the oil-wound at the floor of the Gulf of Mexico, so the sea itself, the ultimate matrix, is doing the mighty work of dealing with what has already escaped from its deep-buried arteries: absorbing, dissolving, breaking down. An effective approach apparently must "kill" what has itself already done so much killing: marine life, economic livelihoods, the hope of a timely regional recovery from Katrina.

Failed deep-water drilling caused a puncture in the submarine floor that resembled nothing so much as hemorrhagic bleeding. This oil-blood, however, is a form of marine pollution that is incomparable to, for example, nuclear waste or chemicals. An organic substance trapped below the earth's surface, crude oil seeps continually into the sea floor in inconsequential amounts, and is consumed by microbes or dispersed by the deep. But like blood that is normally confined to subdermal vessels in the human body, oil is lethal when released in such quantities into upper strata, into ocean environments and coastlines where in nature it does not belong. It may be even more lethal when mixed with chemical dispersants. Millions of gallons of the 200 million barrels of oil released into the Gulf remain unaccounted for. How great are the sea's cathartic powers?

The anthropologist Clifford Geertz wrote in 1983, "Theory, scientific or otherwise, moves mainly by analogy, a 'seeing-as' comprehension of the less intelligible by the more [such as] the earth is a magnet, the heart is a pump, light is a wave, the brain is a computer. . . ." But the imagination does not usually see the sea in terms of other things. The sea is irreducible. Instead it is the metaphor for other kinds of vastness. One speaks of "a sea" of grain, blood, ink, or deep space (where astronomers in 2003 named a planetoid discovered at the edge of our solar system Sedna, an Inuit name for the sea's animate, mercurial persona).

The first human response to the ocean was almost certainly religious: primordial and uninhabitable, it swallowed bodies and did not give them back, except at the awful end of time, as in the New Testament book of Revelation or the medieval Hindu Shiva Purana. Composed of ancient purifiers, salt and water, the sea was divinized, in part, because it never ceased to transform what went into it. With its complex choreography of waves, tides, and currents, appearing to pour over the horizon even after the world was known to be round, the sea, unlike any bounded river, was a theater of dangerous journey and metamorphosis. Its names, deities, and daimones in world mythologies are a cast of protean, hidden characters: Poseidon, Amphitrite, Tethys; Tiamat; tehôm, Leviathan; Olokun; Iemanjá; Wata-tsu-mi; Tangaroa; Nuliajuk; Samudra, Vadava. To its deepest zone, the trenches, extending down to almost 36,000 feet, oceanographers gave a mythical name, the Hadal, after the Greek underworld: unseen, lightless, where none but the dead should dwell, viperfish, jellyfish, and tube worms thrive near thermal vents, long adapted to fantastic amounts of pressure that destroy other species.

Despite its rising, toxic alkalinity, its widening gyres of particulate plastic in both Atlantic and Pacific, and the unnatural black flood unleashed this spring into the sparkling Gulf, the sea is still awesome, still omnipotent as it encircles and washes over 71 percent of the globe. And despite our use and abuse of it as a "resource," we continue to respond to it on a spiritual level. It keeps its many names and denizens, its countless secrets. We know that it is far more powerful than we are, able to kill us as individuals in a heartbeat, even as we as a race are killing it by inches. Its actual vulnerability is hard to accept, and prevents us from doing more to protect it from poisoning.

It is true that British Petroleum had no plan B. But it is equally true that in an industrial society, the Deep Water calamity exposes our faith in an age-old idea about the supernatural sea, namely that it always has the power to neutralize whatever might contaminate it. No one knows whether this is true -- or if Iphigenia was right. Despite our cruel national initiation into a catastrophic oil spill, the response of the sea remains to some extent, as it always has, a mystery.

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http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2010/08/deep_water_calamity_exposes_our_faith_in_the_sea.html

August 19, 2010

Environment needs Muslim support

The Qur'an teaches respect for the environment. But Moroccan activist Mohamed Attaoui has found the authorities less keen

By Brendan Borrell
The Guardian

In early March, just days after the Kingdom of Morocco announced plans for a landmark environmental charter called "[the first commitment of its kind in Africa and the Arab world](#)", Mohamed Attaoui was sentenced to two years in prison in the Atlas mountains. His crime? Speaking out against illegal logging of shrinking cedar forests and corruption among the ranks of the forest service and local government officials.

Politicians and high-powered clerics in the Muslim world often seem to be more concerned with the preservation of social mores than the deserts, peaks and wetlands they lord over. Yet consider

the words the prophet Muhammad [is said to have taught](#): "The world is green and beautiful, and Allah has appointed you his guardian over it."

While other major religions, such as [evangelical Christianity](#), are beginning to find a place for an environmental ethic in their people-centric preachings, the political turbulence of the Muslim world threatens the longevity of their spectacular ecosystems, from Iraq's marshlands to the rainforests of [Sulawesi](#). That's why we need to support to a new generation of daring, eco-minded muckrakers like Attaoui, who are bringing some semblance of transparency to the most far-off corners of the world.

Attaoui lives in the town of Tounfite, tucked into a valley at the base of Morocco's highest mountains, where he runs a tiny NGO out of his garage called "L'Association Avenir pour le Cèdre et le Mouflon" – the association for the preservation of cedars and the bighorn sheep. It doesn't exactly roll off the tongue, but then again Attaoui is a homegrown activist who has supported the operation with his own money and contributions from other concerned locals. No one taught Attaoui how to be an environmentalist, and, well, it was hard to hold my tongue when I watched him bury a sardine tin in the woods or capture a hedgehog on the road and haul it 30 miles to his backyard. That's not to say his heart is not in the right place, particularly when it comes to cedar.

Morocco's forests are protected at a national level because they are key to capturing its limited water supply and reducing erosion from its arid valleys. Roy Hagen, a forestry expert who has worked for USAID in the region, says that government foresters have been involved in illegal logging for decades but no one has done anything about it. At least until 16 February when Attaoui started naming names. He published an exposé in the local paper, Al-Monataf, that tracked the movements of illegally felled logs by government officials, whom he named the "cedar mafia".

On 8 March, two plainclothes officers stopped Attaoui on his way home from work, handcuffed him and said he was being arrested for possession of hashish, a charge Attaoui denies. It would be days before his wife and children learned what happened and before Attaoui even learned of the formal charge against him: extortion. A whistleblower in the forestry service who Attaoui had interviewed had lodged the claim earlier that day, perhaps – Attaoui believes – to prevent the axe from falling on his own head.

The truth of the matter is Attaoui's case is not unique. Environmental activists in other countries have suffered a similar fate. In 2008, Uzbek journalist [Solidzhon Abdurakhmanov](#), who has been documenting the destruction of the Aral Sea, was sentenced to 10 years on apparently bogus drug trafficking charges. This July, the naked, handcuffed body of [Ardiansyah Matra](#), the reporter who uncovered illegal logging by the Indonesian military, washed up in the Gudang Arand river. "Conservation is still seen as a luxury by most people," says Cagan Sekercioglu, a Turkish conservationist who fought to establish Turkey's 13th [Ramsar wetland](#) last year (Mexico, by contrast, has 113.)

Despite an audio record of the conversation Attaoui had with the whistleblower at his own home, he was summarily declared guilty and was facing up to two years in prison when Reporters

Without Borders [stepped in](#) with legal help. His sentencing has been pushed back multiple times this summer, but it seems like the gavel may finally fall on 20 September. With it, the international community can finally judge whether Morocco means what it says when it comes to the environment.

For his part, Attaoui is hardly chastened. When I visited him with fellow journalist Daniel Grushkin, he had been out of his prison cell for a little more than a week. He led us up a steep stream where fresh stumps were still powdery with sawdust. A couple of logs had been felled by prohibited chainsaws, but not yet hauled away. "Encore un désastre!" he shouted.

He launched into a verse from the Qur'an about the conversations of the birds and the trees. "The trees eat, they breath, they even speak," he said in French. Hopefully, the faithful will start listening.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/libertycentral/2010/aug/19/environment-needs-muslim-support>

August 21, 2010

Oil spill may awaken Christians' ecological conscience

By Ray Column
The Tennessean

A low moment early in the agonized public reaction to the Gulf oil disaster was when Texas Governor Rick Perry suggested the deadly explosion and poisonous spill were acts of God.

He was referring to the contractual, legal definition — act of God as an extraordinary, unforeseen natural event beyond our control. But it trivialized the divine name to drag it into a human-made mess. As if to say: sooner blame God than an oil company.

The shame of the tragedy soon pushed us past cheap rhetoric to fresh self-evaluation. Southern Baptist educator Russell Moore recently identified the dubious bargain struck between American Christians and American business.

"For too long, we evangelical Christians have maintained an uneasy ecological conscience. I include myself in this indictment," Moore, dean of the school of theology at Louisville's Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote in a June blog.

"We've had an inadequate view of human sin. Because we believe in free markets, we've acted as though this means we should trust corporations to protect the natural resources and habitats. But a laissez-faire view of government regulation of corporations is akin to the youth minister who lets the teenage girl and boy sleep in the same sleeping bag at church camp because he 'believes in young people.' "

This remains a minority view. Now that BP is capping the poison spill, pressure will be great to return to normal consumption assumptions. For churches, this means resuming the role of weekly oasis of stability and tradition, not leading protests against empty materialism and corporate virtue.

The oil disaster briefly unveiled a nest of contradictions burdening modern life. Our unrepentant consumerism ignores religion's call to reverence, courage and sacrifice. Consumer culture hourly trumpets the illusion that there is no friction between overspending and gospel belief, no contradiction between ostentatious display and biblical values, no connection between our own personal energy demands and the Gulf well explosion that killed 11 people and desecrated the deep sea.

But change is possible. A recent online initiative gives churches ideas for an honest response to the Gulf squalor. It suggests worship-service prayers that mourn our "participation in an economy based on toxic energy that has made such death inevitable" and calls for restoration. It urges a weekly Friday fast from foods that are trucked long distances and rely on petroleum-based fertilizers and pesticides. It asks that Friday be a day to walk or carpool or take the bus to work rather than drive. (See <http://prayerforcreationcare.creationcare.org/>)

Even these small steps will be nervously denounced. But the alternative is to forget the Gulf misery happened, forget the contradictions we live by, forget that God and God's world will not be trivialized.

Columnist Ray Waddle is a former *Tennessean* religion editor who lived in Nashville 20 years. Now based in Connecticut, he can be reached at ray@raywaddle.com.

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100821/COLUMNIST0126/8210310/Oil-spill-may-awaken-Christians-ecological-conscience>

August 25, 2010

Indo-Americans laud India for disallowing mining of "sacred" mountain in Orissa

ANI

Indo-Americans have applauded India for reportedly rejecting bauxite mining by multinational company in remote tribal area of Orissa, which the environmentalists had described as devastating to the area environment and tribes considered sacred.

Noted Indo-American statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement in Nevada (USA) today, said that Government of India apparently took into consideration the concerns of the tribes living in the area and issues raised by environmentalists involved and it should be commended for that.

Rajan Zed, who is the Chairperson of Indo-American Leadership Confederation, pointed out that it seemed that issues like sacredness of the mountain, disturbance of lifestyle and tradition of the tribes, affect on ecosystems-water sources-wildlife-water pollution-displacement-deforestation-endangered species, etc., outweighed the financial interests of the miner Vedanta.

Niyamgiri Hill range, where the bauxite extraction was planned, is reportedly considered sacred by the Dongria Kondh tribe.

Vedanta had reportedly proposed a 2.7-billion-dollar investment in the area. Survival International led the campaign against mining and parallelized the plight of Dongria Kondh to the Na'vi tribe in blockbuster "Avatar" (James Cameron). Celebrities like actress Joanna Lumley (Absolutely Fabulous), activist Bianca Jagger, BAFTA winner actor-comedian Michael Palin (A Fish Called Wanda), etc., reportedly voiced against the proposed mining project. Church of England reportedly sold its shares in Vedanta in view of inconsistency with its investment policy. (ANI)

<http://sify.com/news/indo-americans-laud-india-for-disallowing-mining-of-sacred-mountain-in-orissa-news-national-kizsabidfff.html>

August 26, 2010

Zen and the art of protecting the planet

By Jo Confino
The Guardian

In a rare interview, zen buddhist master Thich Nhat Hahn warns of the threat to civilisation from climate change and the spiritual revival that is needed to avert catastrophe

It is not exactly a traditional Sunday stroll in the English countryside as 84-year-old Vietnamese zen master [Thich Nhat Hanh](#) leads nearly a thousand people through the rolling Nottinghamshire hills in walking meditation.

The silent procession takes on the shape of a snake as it wends its way extremely slowly through a forest glade and an apple orchard. The assembled throng are asked to deeply experience each step they take on the earth in order to be mindful in the present moment.

Thay, as he is known, steps off the path into a field of tall grass and sits quietly in meditation. He exudes a sense of serenity, born of his 68 years' practice as a monk.

Despite having hundreds of thousands of followers around the world and being viewed with the same reverence as the Dalai Lama, Thay is little known to the general public. He has chosen to shun the limelight and avoid the shimmer of celebrity endorsement in order to focus on building

communities around the world that can demonstrate his ethical approach to life. There are monasteries in France, America and Germany as well as groups of supporters that meet all over the world, including more than 20 "sanghas" across the UK.

He is seeking to create a spiritual revival that replaces our consumption-based lives with a return to a simpler, kinder world based on deep respect for each other and the environment.

He rarely gives interviews but recognises that the enormous challenges facing the world, combined with his own increasing age and frailty, means it is important to use what time and energy he has left to contribute what he can to re-energising society and protecting the planet.

For a man of his age, Thay keeps to a punishing schedule. After having lectured to thousands at London's Hammersmith Apollo, Thay has come to Nottingham for a five day retreat, then goes on to a three month tour of Asia, before returning for a winter retreat at his [Plum Village](#) community in France, where he has lived in exile for more than 40 years.

Thay, a prolific author with more than 85 titles under his belt, has taken a particular interest in climate change and recently published the best-selling book 'The World We Have – A Buddhist approach to peace and ecology.'

Tranquilising ourselves with over-consumption

In it, he writes: "The situation the Earth is in today has been created by unmindful production and unmindful consumption. We consume to forget our worries and our anxieties. Tranquilising ourselves with over-consumption is not the way."

In his only interview in the UK, Thay calls on journalists to play their part in preventing the destruction of our civilisation and [calls on corporations to move away from their focus on profits to the wellbeing of society](#).

He says that it is an ill-conceived idea that the solution to global warming lies in technological advances. While science is important, even more so is dealing with the root cause of our destructive behaviour: "The spiritual crisis of the West is the cause for the many sufferings we encounter. Because of our dualistic thinking that god and the kingdom of god is outside of us and in the future - we don't know that god's true nature is in every one of us. So we need to put god back into the right place, within ourselves. It is like when the wave knows that water is not outside of her.

"Everything we touch in our daily lives, including our body, is a miracle. By putting the kingdom of god in the right place, it shows us it is possible to live happily right here, right now. If we wake up to this, we do not have to run after the things we believe are crucial to our happiness like fame, power and sex. If we stop creating despair and anger, we make the atmosphere healthy again.

"Maybe we have enough technology to save the planet but it is not enough because the people are not ready. This is why we need to focus on the other side of the problem, the pollution of the

environment not in terms of carbon dioxide but the toxic atmosphere in which we live; so many people getting sick, many children facing violence and despair and committing suicide.

Spiritual pollution

"We should speak more of spiritual pollution. When we sit together and listen to the sound of the [meditation] bell at this retreat, we calm our body and mind. We produce a very powerful and peaceful energy that can penetrate in every one of us. So, conversely, the same thing is true with the collective energy of fear, anger and despair. We create an atmosphere and environment that is destructive to all of us. We don't think enough about that, we only think about the physical environment.

"Our way of life, our style of living, is the cause of it. We are looking for happiness and running after it in such a way that creates anger, fear and discrimination. So when you attend a retreat you have a chance to look at the deep roots of this pollution of the collective energy that is unwholesome.

"How can we change the atmosphere to get the energy of healing and transformation for us and our children? When the children come to the retreat, they can relax because the adults are relaxed. Here together we create a good environment and that is a collective energy."

Capitalism as a disease

Thay talks about capitalism as a disease that has now spread throughout the world, carried on the winds of globalisation: "We have constructed a system we cannot control. It imposes itself on us, and we become its slaves and victims."

He sees those countries that are home to Buddhism, such as India, China, Thailand and Vietnam, seeking to go even beyond the consumerism of the West: "There is an attractiveness around science and technology so they have abandoned their values that have been the foundation of their spiritual life in the past," he says. "Because they follow western countries, they have already begun to suffer the same kind of suffering. The whole world crisis increases and globalisation is the seed of everything. They too have lost their non-dualistic view. There are Buddhists who think that Buddha is outside of them and available to them only after they die.

"In the past there were people who were not rich but contented with their living style, laughing and happy all day. But when the new rich people appear, people look at them and ask why don't I have a life like that too, a beautiful house, car and garden and they abandon their values."

While Thay believes that change is possible, he has also come to accept the possibility that this civilisation may collapse. He refers to the spiritual principle that by truly letting go of the 'need' to save the planet from climate change, it can paradoxically help do just that.

The catastrophe to come

"Without collective awakening the catastrophe will come," he warns. "Civilisations have been destroyed many times and this civilisation is no different. It can be destroyed. We can think of time in terms of millions of years and life will resume little by little. The cosmos operates for us very urgently, but geological time is different.

"If you meditate on that, you will not go crazy. You accept that this civilisation could be abolished and life will begin later on after a few thousand years because that is something that has happened in the history of this planet. When you have peace in yourself and accept, then you are calm enough to do something, but if you are carried by despair there is no hope.

"It's like the person who is struck with cancer or Aids and they learn they have been given one year or six months to live. They suffer very much and fight. But if they come to accept that they will die and they prepare to live every day peacefully and they enjoy every moment, the situation may change and the illness may go away. That has happened to many people."

Thay says that the communities his Order of Interbeing is building around the world are intended to show that it is possible to "live simply and happily, having the time to love and help other people. That is why we believe that if there are communities of people like that in the world, we will demonstrate to the people and bring about an awakening so that people will abandon their course of comforts. If we can produce a collective awakening we can solve the problem of global warming. Together we have to provoke that type of awakening."

'One Buddha is not enough'

He stops for a moment and goes quiet: "One Buddha is not enough, we need to have many Buddhas."

Thay has lived an extraordinary life. During the Vietnam War he was nearly killed several times helping villagers suffering from the effects of bombing. When visiting America, he persuaded Martin Luther King to oppose the war publicly, and so helped to galvanize the peace movement. In fact King nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1968.

In the following decade Thay spent months on the South China Sea seeking to save Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees from overcrowded boats and, in more recent years, he led members of the US Congress through a two-day retreat and continues to hold reconciliation retreats for Israelis and Palestinians at Plum Village.

His whole philosophy is based on watching the breath and walking meditation to stay in the present moment rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.

He says that within every person are the seeds of love, compassion and understanding as well as the seeds of anger, hatred and discrimination. Our experience of life depends on which seeds we choose to water.

To help the creation of a new global ethic and sustain those positive seeds, Thay's Order of Interbeing has distilled the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path into five core principles.

[The Five Mindfulness Trainings](#), updated in the last year to make them relevant to our fast changing world, are not a set of rules but a direction to head in. Beyond calling for mindful consumption, they encourage an end to sexual misconduct as well as a determination "not to gamble, or to use alcohol, drugs or any other products which contain toxins, such as certain websites, electronic games, TV programmes, films, magazines, books and conversations."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/sustainability/environment-zen-buddhism-sustainability>

August 30, 2010

Earth's resources must be protected for future generations, says pope

Catholic News Service

CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy -- People today have a duty to leave the earth in a state in which future generations "can live in dignity and safeguard it further," said Pope Benedict XVI.

Expressing his support for the Sept. 1 Day for Safeguarding Creation, the pope told people gathered in the courtyard of his summer residence at Castel Gandolfo Aug. 29, "There can be no peace in the world without respecting the environment."

The Day for Safeguarding Creation is celebrated by the Catholic Church in Italy and the Greek Orthodox Church, which also makes the occasion "important on an ecumenical level," the pope said.

In a message marking the day, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople said all men and women must take part in "this titanic and just fight" to address the environmental crisis and prevent its impact on the earth from worsening.

The Orthodox patriarch's written message was published in the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, Aug. 28.

The patriarch called on people to adjust their lifestyles and behavior so as to minimize their personal and communal impact on the earth's resources.

The current economic crisis might provide an opportunity for communities to reassess the way they pursue development and inspire new economic and social models in which top priority is given to the environment and not "unbridled financial gain," he wrote.

Citizens and politicians must cooperate so that the current economic and ecological crises can be

reversed in a way that promotes "sustainable and long-lasting environmental development," wrote the patriarch.

<http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1003496.htm>

August 31, 2010

Raimon Panikkar, 'apostle of inter-faith dialogue,' dies

'Overcoming tribal Christology,' he said, is task of third Christian millennium.

By Joseph Prabhu

National Catholic Reporter

Professor Raimon Panikkar, one of the greatest scholars of the 20th century in the areas of comparative religion, theology, and inter-religious dialogue, died at his home in Tavertet, near Barcelona, Spain, Aug. 26. He was 91.

Panikkar taught and lived in the United States from 1966-1987 and was known to generations of students here and around the world through both his lectures and his many books. What they heard and read were the arresting reflections of a multi-dimensional person, who was simultaneously a philosopher, theologian, mystic, priest and poet.

Panikkar was born the son of an Indian Hindu father and a Spanish Catholic mother Nov. 3, 1918. He received a conventional Catholic education at a Jesuit high school in Barcelona before launching his university studies in the natural sciences, philosophy, and theology, first in Barcelona and then in Madrid. Shortly thereafter, the Spanish Civil War broke out, and Panikkar was able to take advantage of his status as the son of a father who was a British citizen to go to the University of Bonn in Germany to continue his studies. When World War II started in 1939, Panikkar returned to Spain and completed the first of his three doctorates, this one in philosophy, at the University of Madrid in 1946.

It was around 1940 that he met Escriva de Balaguer, the founder of Opus Dei, with whom he had a close relationship. It was at Escriva's urging that he trained for the Catholic priesthood and was ordained in 1946. Panikkar continued to be associated with Opus Dei for about twenty years, breaking effectively with the organization only in the early 1960s. He was tight-lipped about this period of his life, saying only that he did not regret it. It is clear, however, when one compares the Panikkar of the 1940s and the early 1950s with the later Panikkar better known to the world as a pioneer of inter-religious dialogue, that he had moved a long way from his early roots.

In late 1954 when he was already 36, Panikkar visited India, the land of his father, for the first time. It proved to be a watershed, a decisive reorientation of his interests and of his theology.

He had entered a dramatically new world, religious and cultural, from the Catholic Europe of his youth. The transformation was aided by his meetings and close friendship with three monks, who like him were attempting to live and to incarnate the Christian life in Indian, predominantly Hindu and Buddhist forms: Jules Monchanin (1895-1957), Henri Le Saux, also known as Swami Abhishiktananda (1910-1973), and Bede Griffiths, the English Benedictine monk (1906-1993). All four of them, in different ways, discovered and cherished the riches and the deep spiritual wisdom of the Indic traditions, and attempted to live out and express their core Christian convictions in Hindu and Buddhist forms. To some extent this multiple belonging was made possible by their embrace of *Advaita*, the Indic idea of non-dualism, which sees the deep, often hidden, connections between traditions without in any way minimizing the differences between them.

One of Panikkar's many striking sentences looking back on his life's journey asserts: "I left Europe [for India] as a Christian, I discovered I was a Hindu and returned as a Buddhist without ever having ceased to be a Christian." A wealth of meaning lies in that assertion. Christianity in its historical evolution began as a Jewish tradition and then spread to the Greco-Roman world, acquiring along the way Greek and Roman cultural expressions which have given it a certain form and character. Panikkar, having grown up and having been trained in a traditional Catholic and neo-Thomist environment, had a profound knowledge of, and respect for, that tradition. This knowledge prepared him for discussions with some of the great minds of 20th-century Catholicism: Jean Danielou, Yves Congar, Hans Urs von Balthazar, and others. He was also invited to take part in the Synod of Rome and the Second Vatican Council. But Panikkar did not confuse or conflate historical contingency with spiritual truth. In Hinduism and Buddhism Panikkar found other languages, in addition to Biblical Hebrew, Greek philosophy, and Latin Christianity, to express the core convictions (the *kerygma*) of the Christian tradition.

That was the main thesis of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, which Panikkar originally presented as a doctoral thesis to the Lateran University in Rome in 1961, based as it was on a close textual comparison between Thomas Aquinas and Sankara's interpretation of a canonical Hindu scripture, the Brahma-Sutras. Christ and his teaching are not, so Panikkar argues, the monopoly or exclusive property of Christianity seen as a historical religion. Rather, Christ is the universal symbol of divine-human unity, the human face of God. Christianity approaches Christ in a particular and unique way, informed by its own history and spiritual evolution. But Christ vastly transcends Christianity. Panikkar calls the name "Christ" the "Supername," in line with St. Paul's "name above every name" (Phil 2:9), because it is a name that can and must assume other names, like Rama or Krishna or Ishvara.

This theological insight was crucial for Panikkar because it provided the basis of the inter-religious dialogue that he and Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths were both advocating and practicing themselves. Far from diluting or in any way watering down core Christian beliefs and practices, such dialogue, in addition to fostering inter-religious understanding and harmony provided an indispensable medium for deepening the Christian faith. Such dialogue provides an insight and entry point into other, non-Christian names and manifestations of Christ. This was particularly important for Panikkar because together with other Asian theologians he saw how historical Christianity had attempted, especially during its colonial periods, to convert Christ into an imperial God, with a license to conquer and triumph over other Gods. This for Panikkar is **the**

challenge of the post-colonial period inaugurated in the mid-to-late twentieth century and continuing into our present and the future. In his words, "To the third Christian millennium is reserved the task of overcoming a tribal Christology by a Christophany which allows Christians to see the work of Christ everywhere, without assuming that they have a better grasp or a monopoly of that Mystery, which has been revealed to them in a unique way."

Needless-to-say, such striking ideas carefully and rigorously argued and dramatically expressed got the attention of religious thinkers and secular institutions around the world. Panikkar was invited to teach in Rome and then at Harvard (1966-1971) and the University of California, Santa Barbara (1971-1987). He was now, as Leonard Swidler, occupant of the Chair of Catholic Thought at Temple University, called him, "the apostle of inter-faith dialogue and inter-cultural understanding."

Conversant in a dozen or so languages and fluent in at least six, he traveled tirelessly around the world, lecturing, writing, preaching, and conducting retreats. His famous Easter service in his Santa Barbara days would attract visitors from all corners of the globe. Well before dawn they would climb up the mountain near his home in Montecito, meditate quietly in the darkness once they reached the top, and then salute the sun as it arose over the horizon. Panikkar would bless the elements — air, earth, water and fire — and all the surrounding forms of life — plant, animal, and human — and then celebrate Mass and the Eucharist. It was a profound "cosmotheandric" celebration with the human, cosmic, and divine dimensions of life being affirmed, revered, and brought into a deep harmony. The celebration after the formal service at Panikkar's home resembled in some respects the feast of Pentecost as described in the New Testament, where peoples of many tongues engaged in animated conversation.

At the center of these celebrations, retreats, and lectures stood Panikkar himself and his arresting personality. People who heard or encountered him could not help but be struck by this physically small man who packed a punch and who managed to combine the quiet dignity of a sage, the profundity of a scholar, the depth of a contemplative, and the warmth and charm of a friend in his sparkling personality.

Not surprisingly, universities around the world, Catholic and non-Catholic, invited him to give lectures. To mention just a few among hundreds delivered, he was invited to give the William Noble Lecture at Harvard in 1973, the Thomas Merton Lecture at Columbia in 1982, and the Cardinal Bellarmine Lecture at the University of St. Louis in 1991. The most prestigious invitation, however, came from the University of Edinburgh, where Panikkar delivered the Gifford Lectures in 1989. These have recently been published by Orbis Books as [The Rhythm of Being](#) [3]. Panikkar thus joined the select company of William James, Karl Barth, Albert Schweitzer, and Reinhold Niebuhr to mention just a few of the most famous Gifford lecturers. He was in fact the first Indian and the first Asian invited to give these lectures.

Some of Panikkar's other well-known books are *The Vedic Experience*; *The Intrareligious Dialogue*; *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics*; *The Silence of God*; *The Cosmotheandric Experience*; and *The Invisible Harmony*. Jaca Books in Italy is bringing out his collected works (*Omnia Opera*) in some 30 volumes, and Continuum Books in England and the United States is planning an English edition. There is also a helpful Web site www.raimonpanikkar.org [4].

Ours is a new era in world history, where thanks to globalization and the increasing communication between cultures and religions it is vital that there be a well-developed Catholic theology of religions. Panikkar was one of the pioneering and paradigmatic theologians of this new era. He has left us a rich and many-sided legacy from the liturgical and pastoral to the theological and sapiential. It behooves us who follow him to notice, absorb, and extend that legacy.

[Joseph Prabhu is a professor of philosophy and comparative religion at California State University, Los Angeles.]

<http://ncronline.org/news/spirituality/raimon-panikkar-apostle-inter-faith-dialogue-dies>

August 31, 2010

Hindus commend Pope on environmental stand

ANI

Hindus have applauded His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for taking a strong stand on environment.

Noted Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement in Nevada (USA) today, praised Pope's powerful statement linking world peace to respecting the environment at Castel Gandolfo near Rome (Italy) on August 29, as reported by Catholic News Service.

Zed, who is President of Universal Society of Hinduism, also praised Pope's frequent calls to save the planet and curb environmental degradation.

Pope was quoted as saying: People today have a duty to leave the earth in a state in which future generations "can live in dignity and safeguard it further". "There can be no peace in the world without respecting the environment."

Faiths coming out in support of the environment was a remarkable signal; Rajan Zed said and urged all world religious leaders, religions and denominations to openly bless the environmental causes. Ancient Hindu scriptures, especially Atharva-Veda, were highly respectful of mother nature, Zed added.

We may believe in different religions, yet we share the same home-our Earth. We must learn to happily progress or miserably perish together. For man can live individually but can only survive collectively, Zed says quoting scriptures. Pope Benedict heads the Roman Catholic Church, which is the largest of the Christian denominations. Hinduism, oldest and third largest religion of the world, has about one billion adherents and moksh (liberation) is its ultimate goal. (ANI)

<http://sify.com/news/hindus-commend-pope-on-environmental-stand-news-international-ki5rEidefac.html>

September 2, 2010

Daoist Religion and Ecotourism: A Visit to Maoshan

By James Miller
Sustainable China Blog

In May this year I had the opportunity to visit Maoshan (Mt. Mao) a Daoist mountain sacred to the Shangqing (Highest Clarity) tradition of Daoism that I studied in [my most recent book](#). Located in Jiangsu province, it is about an hour's bus ride south of Zhenjiang, a stop on the main high speed railway from Shanghai to Nanjing.

I was interested to visit Maoshan not only because of my historical research, but because it was the site of the [Maoshan declaration](#), which in 2008 committed China's Daoist Association to a ten year program of ecological protection.

The result of my visit is a mixed assessment of the possibilities and problems associated with the practical implementation of Daoism and ecology. I'll be presenting the full details of my conclusions at the forthcoming [SASASAAS conference at Furman University](#) on September 24-25, but I'd like to present some key findings now.

First of all, the encounter between Daoism and Ecology has to be understood from the perspective of China's engagement with modernity and especially science. "Ecology" in Chinese does not signify a Romantic attachment to nature undefiled by human habitation, but rather a modern, scientific and ultimately technological enterprise. To make Daoist sites more "ecological" means to install green technology such as solar panels, and to showcase Daoism not as a "traditional" culture but as modern and scientific.

Secondly, the encounter between Daoism and Ecology is an economic enterprise. A chief incentive for Daoist sites to engage in ecological protection is to respond to the demand for ecotourism. As such Daoist sites work with local governments to develop the whole areas surrounding Daoist temples as ecotourism sites. Engaging with ecology thus helps drive economic development. As a case in point, the Maoshan site was developed not only by the Daoist Association but by the People's Liberation Army which operates a memorial to soldiers of the 3rd Army who fought in the Anti-Japanese War of 1937-45. Nearby the museum is a garish 99 metre high statue of Laozi, the legendary author of the Daode jing. Maoshan is thus an ecotourism site, a patriotic memorial, and a Daoist temple site, all in one. As a result it obtained AAAA tourism designation, the second-highest national ranking, making it a prime location for "red", i.e., patriotic tourism activities.

The current implementation of “Daoism and Ecology” in China thus resists simplistic Western notions of Daoism as “the Way of Nature.” It is also a way of economic development, a way of science and modernity, a patriotic and even militaristic way. This should not be surprising to scholars of religion who are well-attuned to the complexities and contradictions that religious cultures historically inhabit. But it may be surprising to those who have sought to frame “Eastern religions” as somehow more authentically connected to nature than the monotheisms of Western religion. Yes, the Daoist conception of nature does have much to contribute to the discussion on religion and ecology, but the practical implementation of this concept in China is caught in a complex political, ideological and economic web.

<http://www.sustainablechina.info/2010/09/02/daoist-religion-and-ecotourism-a-visit-to-maoshan/>

September 4, 2010

Raimon Panikkar, Catholic Theologian, Is Dead at 91

By William Grimes
New York Times

Raimon Panikkar, a Roman Catholic theologian whose embrace of Hindu scriptures and Buddhism made him an influential voice for promoting dialogue among the world’s religions, died on Aug. 26 at his home in Tavertet, Spain. He was 91.

His death was announced on his Web site, raimon-panikkar.org.

Mr. Panikkar was a Roman Catholic priest and a professor of philosophy at the University of Madrid when he made his first trip to India in 1954. It was a turning point in his spiritual life and a homecoming of sorts: his father was a Hindu from the south of India who had married a Spanish Roman Catholic.

While studying Indian philosophy and religion at the University of Mysore and Banaras Hindu University, Mr. Panikkar befriended several Western monks seeking Eastern forms for the expression of their Christian beliefs. It was an eye-opening experience.

“I left Europe as a Christian, I discovered I was a Hindu and returned as a Buddhist without ever having ceased to be Christian,” he later wrote.

The rest of his life was dedicated to promoting, as a university teacher and in dozens of books, an expansion of the Judaic and Greco-Roman foundations of Christianity to embrace the insights of non-Western religions.

“He was one of the pioneers in opening up Christianity to other religions and learning from them,” [Joseph Prabhu](#), a professor of philosophy at [California State University](#), Los Angeles, and the editor of [“The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar”](#) (1996), said in a telephone interview on Wednesday. “We can see the new waves of Christianity moving toward the non-

European world in the 21st century, and he prepared the ground for an authentic dialogue between Christianity and other faiths, and beyond that for the cross-cultural conversation which marks our globalized world.”

Raimundo Panikkar Alemany was born on Nov. 3, 1918, in Barcelona, where his father, after living in Britain, had opened a chemical plant. After attending a Jesuit secondary school, he began studying philosophy in Barcelona.

When the Spanish Civil War broke out, he fled to Bonn to continue his university studies, but while he was on vacation at home, Germany invaded Poland. He remained in Spain, earning a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Madrid in 1946 and a doctorate in chemistry in 1958.

In 1940 he had become friends with [Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer](#), the canonized founder of Opus Dei, a conservative Catholic movement of clerics and laity; Father Escrivá urged him to train for the priesthood. He was ordained in 1946 and for the next 20 years worked closely with Opus Dei. He earned a third doctorate, in theology, at the Lateran University in Rome in 1961.

In his dissertation, Mr. Panikkar compared the work of St. Thomas Aquinas with the interpretation of the Brahma Sutras, one of Hinduism’s fundamental texts, by the eighth-century Hindu philosopher Adi Sankara. Mr. Panikkar argued that Christ, as a universal symbol of the divine and the human intertwined, belonged to the world, not just to Christianity, and could be found under other names in other religions. His dissertation was later published as [“The Unknown Christ of Hinduism”](#) (1981).

In his later work, he tried to recast Christianity as a nontriumphal faith and to combat what he called “tribal Christology.” Christianity, he argued, was not intended to be an invasion force bent on conquering other gods and, in the colonial period, other peoples.

Mr. Panikkar became a visiting professor at Harvard Divinity School in 1966 and a professor of religious studies at the [University of California, Santa Barbara](#), in 1972. For many years he taught in the spring and spent the rest of the year doing research in India.

In 1987 he moved to Tavertet, in the hills north of Barcelona, where he founded the Raimon Panikkar Vivarium Foundation, a center for intercultural studies.

A year later he was invited to deliver the Gifford Lectures, joining a list of philosophers and writers that has included William James, Alfred North Whitehead and [Iris Murdoch](#). His lectures, on the concept he called “the cosmotheandric experience,” or the interplay between the divine, the human and the cosmic, were published in revised form in 2009 as “The Rhythm of Being.”

His many books include “The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man” (1973), “The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness” (1993), “Christophany: The Fullness of Man” (2004) and “The Experience of God: Icons of the Mystery” (2006).

He is survived by a brother, the Spanish philosopher and journalist Salvador Pániker, and a sister, Mercedes, both of Barcelona.

“The whole history of Christianity is one of enrichment and renewal brought about by elements that came from outside itself,” Mr. Panikkar told [The Christian Century](#) in 2000, adding, “If the church wishes to live, it should not be afraid of assimilating elements that come from other religious traditions, whose existence it can today no longer ignore.”

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: September 9, 2010

An obituary on Monday about the Roman Catholic theologian Raimon Panikkar referred incorrectly to the dissertation that earned him a doctorate in theology from Lateran University in Rome. It compared the interpretation of the Brahma Sutras by the eighth-century Hindu philosopher Adi Sankara with the work of St. Thomas Aquinas, not with St. Thomas Aquinas’s interpretation of the Brahma Sutras.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/05/us/05panikkar.html>

September 5, 2010

Rajan Zed urges Hindus to help “save the world”

ANI

Nevada (US): Noted Hindu statesman Rajan Zed has urged Hindus world over to “save the world” by countering environmental crisis with minor changes in their lifestyles.

Zed, who is President of Universal Society of Hinduism, in a statement in Nevada (USA) today, said that environment was the paramount issue of our times and it should not be just left to the specialists. It was our job and every little effort counted. Be an inspiration for others.

Rajan Zed suggested Hindus to use and consume less, observe and respect nature, help the not so fortunate, plant trees to compensate for carbon emissions, ride a bicycle, support environmentally responsible companies, buy organic, save water, eat local and seasonal food, be vegetarian, become eco-chic, replace bottled water with tap water, etc.

Humanity was facing a threatening ecological crisis and religions should not stay out as silent spectators, Zed said and urged all world religious leaders, religions and denominations to openly bless the environmental causes. Faiths coming out in support of the environment would be a remarkable signal, he added.

Senseless uses of natural resources, extravagance, greed, etc., were some of the major causes of this ecological crisis. Current trend of one percent increase in emissions every year, if left unchecked, would be catastrophic for the environment and humanity, Rajan Zed warned.

Zed pointed out that ancient Hindu scriptures, especially Atharva-Veda, were highly respectful of mother nature. He also urged Hindu temples worldwide to become “green temples” in order to provide environmental leadership in the community; to give devotees a healthy, toxic-free sacred place; and to preserve God’s creation for present and future generations.

Hinduism, oldest and third largest religion of the world, has about one billion adherents and moksh (liberation) is its ultimate goal. (ANI)

http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/world-news/rajan-zed-urges-hindus-to-help-save-the-world_100423549.html

September 15, 2010

Millions unite for 'Clean up the World' campaign

United Nations Environment Programme

Sydney (Australia) - Millions of people across the globe will be cleaning up their local parks, waterways and forests in a bid to restore and protect nature this Clean Up the World Weekend, in support of the United Nations 2010 International Year of Biodiversity.

Volunteers taking part in this year's Clean Up the World Weekend, held globally on 17 - 19 September, will join an estimated 35 million volunteers from 120 countries. The campaign, held in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), is in its 18th year and works at the grassroots level to mobilise global communities to clean up, fix up and conserve their local environments.

This year, participants will be focussing their efforts on conserving nature. Clean Up the World Chairman and Founder, Ian Kiernan AO*, welcomes the profile biodiversity is receiving from global through to local levels.

"Protecting the environment is something we've been advocating since Clean Up the World began 18 years ago so we welcome the current, high profile attention biodiversity is receiving. From marine clean ups in West Asia to reforestation in Africa, each Clean Up the World activity protects, restores and/or promotes nature and we'll continue to campaign for this for many years to come," said Kiernan.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), said, "The current state of biodiversity and the implications of its continued loss threaten human well-being and economies North and South. By acting locally, we can work towards reducing the impacts of land-based pollution and unsustainable consumption patterns, two of the factors underlying environmental degradation and the loss of natural capital. Ecosystems, and the biodiversity that underpins them, generate services worth trillions of dollars and in doing so support lives and livelihoods across the planet. Biodiversity also has spiritual and cultural significance. It is our responsibility, as custodians of the planet today, to conserve and to promote sustainable use and to hand over a healthy, functioning and productive natural world to the next generation."

"Clean Up the World brings the focus squarely on people as agents of change, " he added.

Over the forthcoming Clean Up the World Weekend, the "change" will come from all corners of the globe. Activities will range from cleaning up small villages to national clean up events. Across many regions communities will also implement recycling programmes, restoration projects, tree planting and educational activities.

Members of the Brazilian Institute for the Protection of Nature will join with their communities to restore Parque Ecológico do Tietê in São Paulo, the largest linear park in the world. They will also conduct a clean up along the iconic Amazon River in the city of Manaus.

Scouts from the Boy Scouts of the Philippines Association will work to rehabilitate a protected mangrove site. Senior Scouts of Jose J. Leido Jr., based in the Philippine city of Calapan, will lead volunteers in an activity they hope will "bring back the earth to a condition conducive to everyone".

From the Baltic coast to the Kampinoski National Park in east-central Poland, Our Earth Foundation will lead thousands of volunteers in clean up activities across Poland over Clean Up the World Weekend. Our Earth Foundation is celebrating its 17th year as a Clean Up the World participant and is one of over 60 organisations who have been involved with the campaign for more than 5 years.

In a demonstration of the support the campaign receives from the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the staff of the Australian Embassy in Amman, Jordan will host an environmental education day for Pella locals. Joining in on the activities will be a local environmental organisation, Friends of the Earth Middle East, and school children from the Jordan Valley area.

The Scout Association of Zimbabwe, with a membership of 27,000 young Zimbabweans across the country, will embark on a campaign against veld fires. The campaign will engage recently

resettled farmers and aims to raise awareness of the detrimental impact of wild fires on the environment. Just one of the many National Scout Organizations who have joined Clean Up the World as a result of the Ally relationship with the World Organization of the Scout Movement.

"Across Europe, Asia Pacific, the Americas, West Asia and Africa, Clean Up the World Weekend is when we unite to clean up, fix up and conserve our precious and shared environment. It's a weekend where we'll rise above geographical and political boundaries to prevent any more nature loss," Kiernan said. "We welcome more groups to join us in our bid to protect and care for nature."

Interested groups are encouraged to register with Clean Up the World by visiting activities.cleanuptheworld.org. The website also highlights the many global activities happening over Clean Up the World Weekend.

Note to Editors:

Clean Up the World

Based in Sydney, Clean Up the World is an Australian initiative created in the wake of the success of Clean Up Australia Day, first held in 1990. It is a not-for-profit, non-government, apolitical organisation that unites communities with a common focus to clean up the world.

For more information, please contact: Lara Charles at media@cleanuptheworld.org or visit the Clean Up the World Weekend News and Media Resources at:

<http://www.cleanuptheworld.org/en/NewsandMedia/clean-up-the-world-weekend-2010.html>

Clean Up the World is a campaign held in conjunction with Primary Partner UNEP. Supporters include The Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Armor. Allies are the World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM). Ambassadors include Celine Cousteau and David De Rothschild.

* AO Order of Australia awarded for distinguished service of a high degree to Australia or to humanity at large

http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=647&ArticleID=6749&l=en&WT.rss_f=pr&WT.rss_a=647-6749

September 19, 2010

Drawing power from the Father and the sun

By Meir Rinde

Trenton Times

TRENTON -- From the roof of Shiloh Baptist Church, the Rev. Darrell Armstrong has a great view. He sees not only the surrounding Canal Banks neighborhood and the tops of the city's tallest buildings, but also some 180 brand-spanking-new solar panels, soaking up the sun and sending pollution-free power back down into his church.

The 37.8-kilowatt solar installation is a financially prudent choice for the church, and part of its ongoing effort to act on biblical instructions to take care of the environment, Armstrong said. The system was dedicated at a Sunday worship service two weeks ago.

"We are trying, with other organizations, to give a very clear and definitive message about what it means to create health in our environment, health in our bodies, health in our spirits, health in our souls," he said last week after a trip to the roof to show off the panels.

Armstrong said he believes the solar installation is the first on a house of worship in Trenton, though he was quick to recognize the pioneering efforts of Grace Cathedral Fellowship Ministries, which is located on the city border in Ewing. Grace installed solar panels last year.

Grace's Bishop Jerome Wilcox and the Rev. Dan Whitener of Abiding Presence Lutheran Church "freely shared their wisdom, knowledge, advice and counsel in this highly involved process, for which I am very thankful," he said. St. Mark Lutheran Church in Hamilton also offered advice.

Another helpful adviser was GreenFaith, a nonprofit organization that promotes environmental action among religious institutions of all faiths. The New Brunswick organization was formerly located in Trenton.

Its executive director, the Rev. Fletcher Harper, said he was particularly pleased by Shiloh's work to improve its urban environment.

"Shiloh has been an influential leader in the African-American community for generations," Harper said. "The fact they are making this commitment to renewable energy makes a very important statement in itself on a symbolic level."

Solar power is an important alternative energy source because it does not cause pollution, he said. The burning of coal to create electricity sends fine particulate matter into the air, causing respiratory problems, and contributes to climate change.

"That's particularly true in urban settings, where air pollution levels are much higher and climate change effects are more severe," Harper said. "You see an increase in heat-related stress and illness, which often has a greater impact than in suburban or rural communities."

Armstrong said the congregation began discussing the possibility of a solar installation five years ago. Eventually the church signed up with the Bureau of Public Utilities' CORE program, which provided nonprofit organizations with solar subsidies.

Shiloh is slated to receive a \$139,910 rebate on the project's cost of about \$230,000, according to Armstrong and the BPU. Fundraising is expected to provide another \$101,000.

In the coming months, the church will benefit from a sale of renewable energy credits, which utilities such as PSE&G buy to meet requirements that they generate alternative energy. Shiloh also expects to stop having to pay for electricity.

Lower utility bills and the sale of renewable energy credits should together quickly add another \$100,000 to Shiloh's bottom line, Armstrong said.

"It's a great investment for the church. We're anticipating a return on our investment within a year," he said.

The panels are also an investment in God's Earth and scriptural calls for environmental stewardship, Armstrong said.

He cited Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein," and Genesis 2:15, "Then the Lord God took man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it."

With the recent Gulf oil spill on his mind, Armstrong dedicated a series of sermons in recent weeks to environmental issues, he said. They concluded with the dedication of the solar panels Sept. 5.

"Man has not 'tended' to God's 'garden' very well," he wrote in a letter announcing the solar installation. "Humanity must be better caretakers of the natural environment."

Contact Meir Rinde at mrinde@njtimes.com or (609) 989-5717.

<http://www.nj.com/news/times/regional/index.ssf?/base/news-21/128487515490160.xml&coll=5>

September 20, 2010

Tearfund says governments must be held to account on MDGs

By Brian Hutt
Christian Today

Christian development agency Tearfund says world leaders must make "real progress" at the UN summit on the Millennium Development Goals this week.

The summit has been called by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon to accelerate progress on the MDGs as the five-year countdown to the target date for their fulfilment begins.

Tearfund's advocacy director Paul Cook said "encouraging progress" had been made in many areas but that the world was "still a long way off tackling poverty once and for all".

“We must see real progress this week, especially in developing an effective accountability mechanism which will hold governments to account for clear targets every year for the next five years,” he said.

Mr Cook welcomed Prime Minister David Cameron’s commitment to tackling global poverty and climate change but said that the UK Government also needed to speak out more on the link between the two.

He called for a new global fund to help developing countries adapt to the effects of climate change.

“Climate change has become the elephant in the room when discussing global poverty,” he said.

“It’s ridiculous to think that we can tackle global poverty without recognising the huge changes in climate change that are already happening around the world and which are affecting the world’s poorest countries – ironically the ones that have done the least to cause it.”

The Millennium Development Goals were agreed by world leaders in 2000 and include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, and reducing the child mortality rate by 2015.

Mr Cook said that the international community must recognise churches as “essential partners” in their plans to achieve the MDGs.

“We must embrace the opportunities that churches and faith communities bring in working with poor communities at grassroots levels to transform their own lives forever,” he said.

Tearfund is among the aid agencies convening in New York for the summit. They will call on world leaders to endorse the Sanitation and Water for All initiative aimed at boosting investment in low income countries, and urge governments to commit fresh funds to the Global Fund for addressing HIV, TB and malaria.

Mr Cook said: “All the plans discussed this week will come to very little if we don’t make sure that there is a clear roadmap for the next five years, with annual targets that can clearly be measures, and that we all hold our governments to account for meeting these targets.”

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/tearfund.says.governments.must.be.held.to.account.on.mdgs/26744.htm>

September 20, 2010

UNEP Report: Green Economy can reduce poverty and help meet Millennium Development Goals

United Nations Environment Programme

New York - Investing in clean energy, sustainable transport, forests and environmentally-friendly agriculture is essential, if internationally-agreed goals to reduce poverty are to be achieved.

This is among the central conclusions of *A Brief for Policymakers on the Green Economy and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*, launched today as heads of state and ministers meet at the UN Headquarters to review progress to date - five years before the MDG deadline of 2015.

Environmental degradation is making it more difficult for governments to achieve Millennium Development Goals such as improving maternal health, providing safe drinking water and combating hunger and disease.

Conversely some countries and communities are finding that environmental improvements, catalyzed by deliberate policy choices; smart investments and often private sector partnerships can be a big part of the solution, the new study claims.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), said: "There is rapidly growing evidence that accelerating a transition to a low carbon, resource efficient, employment-generating Green Economy may not only be the key to meeting sustainability challenges of the 21st century, but also provide a considerable contribution to meeting other MDGs.

The report - compiled by UNEP's Green Economy team - cites numerous cases where green strategies are paying multiple dividends in respect to the eight MDGs.

Policies and investments in Costa Rica have triggered an expansion of protected areas and national parks, now covering over 25 per cent of the country's total land area.

- Since this strategy was adopted there has been a boom in eco-tourism attracting over one million visitors a year and generating USD \$5 million annually in entrance fees alone. Studies indicate that communities living in or near national parks have higher wages, employment rates and lower rates of poverty.

The report, prepared for this week's UN Summit on MDGs in New York, also spotlights China's energy policy as set out in the country's 11th five year plan covering 2006-2010. The plan has fuelled a rapid rise in renewable energy manufacturing and installation.

- China is now the world's second biggest user of wind power and the biggest exporter of photovoltaics (devices that convert solar energy into electricity). 10 per cent of households

have solar water heaters and 1.5 million people are employed in China's renewables sector, with 300,000 of those jobs generated in 2009 alone.

Creative and forward-looking urban planning, allied to sustainable transport policies, have allowed the Brazilian city of Curitiba to grow more than six fold while simultaneously improving mobility and quality of life.

- The average area of green space per person has risen from one square metre to around 50 square metres; 45 per cent of journeys are made by public transport; excessive fuel use due to congestion is 13 times less per person than in Sao Paulo and the lower levels of air pollution result in health benefits for local citizens.

In Nepal, 14,000 Forest User Groups have reversed the deforestation rates of the 1990s through community-based policies which include setting harvesting rules, product prices and the sharing of profits.

- Between 2000 and 2005, the annual forested area of Nepal increased by 1.3 per cent, soil quality and water supplies are better managed and local employment has risen.

Uganda, a country where 85 per cent of the working population is employed in agriculture, has turned to organic production to boost exports and incomes. Farm-gate prices for organic vanilla, ginger and pineapples are higher than for conventional produce.

- Since 2004, the number of certified organic farmers has grown from 45,000 to over 200,000 and the area of land under organic cultivation from 185,000 hectares to close to 300,000 hectares.

Mr Steiner said: "The underlying task of the 21st century is to provide a secure and sustainable way of life for a world population that over the next four decades will increase in size by a third. It was this challenge that in September 2000 led world leaders to adopt the eight MDGs".

"On current trends it is likely that achieving all the MDGs by 2015 will be missed. In part because the responses so far have been embedded in a 20th century approach to a new century's challenges," he added.

"The Green Economy puts a fresh lens on the challenges and a spotlight on the multiple cost effective economic and social opportunities from investing and re-investing in modern clean-tech energy systems up to natural resource management of the planet's ecological infrastructure. In doing so, it addresses the economic, social and environmental objective of sustainable development and underscores the wealth of choices and options for sustained progress that meets the realities of our time," said Mr Steiner.

Some Key Points from the Report - Environmental Sustainability and the MDGs Inextricably Intertwined

The report, *A Brief for Policymakers on the Green Economy and the Millennium Development Goals*, underlines that the environmental goods and services that underpin the global economy - and in particular the GDP of the poor - are shrinking at a rapid rate.

It underscores how this loss of ecological infrastructure is undermining not only MDG7 on environmental sustainability but most if not all of the other MDGs and their associated targets.

Coral reefs in the Caribbean for example have declined by 80 per cent and globally 30 per cent of mangroves have been lost in the past two decades.

Both these ecosystems provide coastal defenses, tourism revenues and other services and income for local communities.

In addition they are nurseries for fish upon which a billion people rely directly for protein. The fate of coral reefs and mangroves are thus closely linked to the achievement of several MDGs, including MDG1 on hunger.

Forests are key sources of drinking water and nutrients for agriculture while providing essential goods such as wild foods and medicines.

Thus the fate of forests links to MDG1 on hunger, MDGs 4 and 5 on health and several targets of MDG7 such as halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water.

The rate of deforestation is slowing. In the past decade the annual loss of forest has averaged 13 million hectares, compared with 16 million hectares a year during the 1990s.

But this rate is still causing lasting environmental damage and currently close to 30 countries have lost 90 per cent of their original forest cover.

Investing and re-investing in forests would not only assist in meeting the aforementioned MDGs, but also in reducing greenhouse gas emissions linked with deforestation.

While there is no specific MDG for energy, the report points out that providing clean energy will underpin the success of many of the goals, both directly in terms of sustainable development and indirectly if climate change, linked to the burning of fossil fuels, is left unaddressed.

For example 14% of the population of developing countries and around a fifth of their urban dwellers live in low-lying coastal regions and are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, such as rising sea levels, coastal flooding and soil erosion.

Subsidies - A Possible Source of Additional MDG Funding

One way of financing the achievement of the MDGs is through re-directing subsidies.

Fossil fuels for example still attract over US\$500 billion a year in government subsidies - and there is abundant evidence that these subsidies rarely reach the poor, despite the best intentions of governments.

- In Indonesia in 2005, 60 per cent of fuel subsidies went to the richest 40 per cent of the population
- In 2003, Argentina's gas subsidies went to the far south of the country - home to just three per cent of Argentina's poor.
- In Mongolia, some 85 per cent of a recent 'life-line' heating tariff went to the 'non-poor'.

Investing all or part of these subsidies in renewable energy technologies, such as solar and wind, could trigger new kinds of employment, faster access to electricity and greater social equity - a better overall standard of living.

There would be benefits for the environment including improvements in air pollution alongside an estimated six per cent cut in annual greenhouse gas emissions.

There are other green economy approaches: In Bangladesh a subsidiary of the Grameen Bank - Grameen Shakti - has pioneered microfinance to assist local people in buying solar heating systems.

Some 20,000 'green' jobs, many of which have been for women, have been generated, with an aim of creating 100,000 new jobs by 2015. The project thus meets many of the MDGs including MDG3 relating to gender equality.

Similar arguments are made in respect to fisheries where subsidies total some US\$27 billion a year and are part of the reason why fish stocks in many parts of the world are in decline.

Re-directing around US\$8 billion of these subsidies into improved management measures such as marine protected areas, tradable quotas, the retiring of vessels and the retraining of fisher-folk, could boost catches and conserve stocks.

The report also points to the multiple benefits from other policies, for example those that promote the certification of biodiversity-friendly agricultural products.

With the right backing, the market for such products could be worth US\$210 billion by 2020 up from US\$40 billion in 2008, generating new income flows while conserving the planet's natural capital.

Notes to Editors:

Launched in 2008 at the height of the global financial and economic crisis, UNEP's Green Economy Initiative provides macroeconomic analysis on policy reforms and investments in key sectors that can contribute to economic growth, creation of jobs, social equity and poverty reduction, while addressing climate risks and other ecological challenges. The Initiative

undertakes a wide-range of research and provides advisory services to more than 20 countries interested in moving towards a green economy.

This report is one of in a suite of special briefs that draws on the preliminary findings of its flagship publication, the Green Economy Report, which is scheduled to be released in early 2011.

To download a copy of the report, visit: <http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy>

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=647&ArticleID=6754&l=en&t=long>

September 21, 2010

Empowering Local Energy Entrepreneurs and Catalyzing Low-Cost Loans Key to Cook Stove Initiative

UNEP Joins Major International Initiative to Boost Women's Health, Cut Deforestation and Provide Significant Climate Benefits

United Nations Environment Programme

NEW YORK — The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) joined international efforts to dramatically boost the efficiency of around three billion cook stoves across Africa, Asia and Latin America with the aim to protect women's health and provide significant environmental benefits.

The Global Alliance for Clean Cook Stoves, launched, Tuesday, during the 65th session of the UN General Assembly, is part of the Global Clinton Initiative and spearheaded by the UN Foundation. It aims to cut the estimated 1.6 million to 1.8 million premature deaths linked with indoor emissions from inefficient cook stoves.

The initiative will also make a contribution to reducing deforestation by curbing the large quantities of wood and other biomass used to make charcoal or by households switching to alternative fuels including cookers powered by solar energy.

Other fuels include liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and a new one called “gel” fuel consisting of ethanol and organic pulp—community-based biofuel projects could be developed to make the gel fuel, thus saving households money, generating employment and offering alternative livelihoods.

For full story, visit:

http://www.rona.unep.org/documents/news/20100921_Cook_stove_Press_Release.pdf

September 21, 2010

'Bells for Diversity' ring at University of North Texas Sept. 22

By UNT News Service

Dr. Pankaj Jain's South Asian Religion and Philosophy class at the University of North Texas will ring bells in tune with the United Nations on Sept. 22 (Wednesday) to mark crucial international talks on biodiversity.

September 22 is the day that the UN General Assembly will discuss for the first time the crisis affecting the world's biodiversity, underlining the importance of how plants, animals and life are all linked and the loss of one species through human actions can affect many others. The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is promoting the ringing of bells all over the world as an urgent 'memo' to rouse the world to take action to stop the loss of species.

“Changes in temperatures, global warming and changes in patterns of rainfall are having a powerful impact on biodiversity,” says Kusum Vyas, Founder of the Living Planet Foundation. “The ringing of bells will not only remind the world of the need to preserve our environment but it will also inspire the protection of the species that still survive.”

Dr. Pankaj Jain, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology and Department of Philosophy and Religion Studies, says “We are very happy to participate in this global event to raise awareness about saving the biodiversity.”

Bells for Biodiversity will ring on Wednesday, September 22, at noon in Wooten Hall room 210. Wooten Hall is located one block west of Welch and Highland streets on the UNT campus in Denton, Texas.

The event is facilitated by the Living Planet Foundation of Houston, who is encouraging bell ringing by local faith groups, schools and organizations.

For additional details, please e-mail, livingplanetfoundation@gmail.com

September 21, 2010

Cambodian Buddhist monk with an environmental crusade

Ven. Bun Saluth, a Cambodian Buddhist Monk with an environmental crusade

United Nations Development Programme

In what began as a Cambodian Buddhist monk's mission to thwart the destruction of the environment has resulted in the legal protection of 18,261 hectare of evergreen forest in northwestern Cambodia, now called the Monks Community Forest.

In honour of the Venerable Bun Saluth's work to preserve the forests of his country, UNDP's Equator Initiative has selected him as one of 25 people in the world to receive the Equator Prize 2010.

The Equator Initiative is a partnership that brings together the United Nations, governments, civil society, businesses and grassroots organizations to raise the profile of local efforts to reduce poverty through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

For Bun Saluth, the effort to save the forest surrounding Cambodia's Oddar Meanchey province from illegal logging and land encroachment was from the start an effort to teach people the importance of the natural resources their livelihoods depended on.

When he began his crusade in 2002, Bun Saluth encountered skeptical villagers who thought he wanted to establish personal ownership of the forest. Yet with time they came to understand that saving the forest was for the whole community.

"It would be very difficult for our lives had it not been for this forest," said Cheng Ri, a resident from the region. "Villagers, when they run out of rice, can go into the forest to pick mushrooms or wild ginger to sell without having to borrow money from others."

Ri said he earned an average US\$130 a month from trading mushroom and tree resin, a significant amount considering one third of Cambodia's 13.4 million people still live below the national poverty line of 60 cents a day.

Under Bun Saluth's leadership, six villages now work together to patrol the area and to ensure that farmers from the local communities benefit from the forest's resources. Villagers have a direct say in forest management and together monitor the forest to stop illegal logging and harvesting activities.

Monks Community Forest has also been chosen as one of 13 community forest sites for Cambodia's first carbon credit project under the United Nations led programme Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD).

Bun Saluth will be honoured along with the award's other recipients at the Equator Prize Award Ceremony on 20 September 2010 as part of Equator Initiative's participation in the 2010 United Nations General Assembly and Millennium Review Summit taking place in New York City (20-24 September) and the United Nations special session on Biodiversity (22 September).

<http://content.undp.org/go/newsroom/2010/september/cambodian-buddhist-monk-with-an-environmental-crusade.en>

September 22, 2010

Root Recall

By Shailaja Tripathi
The Hindu

A festival celebrating earth as a living system will be held in Delhi on Gandhi Jayanti

“Bhoomi The Earth Festival” was conceived by Navdanya long before Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh refused stage II forest clearance to Vedanta's bauxite mining in Niyamgiri Hills in Orissa. The development has indeed added to the happiness and fervour of Navdanya's first ever “Bhoomi – The Earth Festival”, a day-long event on October 2 at India International Centre.

After all, the organisation committed to the issues of bio-diversity, conservation and organic farming was part of the process that finally led to this momentous decision by the government. Mobilising public opinion, getting Dongria Kondh tribals of Niyamgiri Hills to express their views openly, holding conferences, filing PILs on land issues, the outfit played its part. This national awakening, slowly becoming visible on the horizon of the nation is what the festival seeks to celebrate.

For quite sometime, the organisation put together a festival that focused on organic farming but actively fighting illegal mining in the Lanjigarh area, it realised the need to shift the focus to earth. The Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth in the UN was another valid reason to have a festival revolving around the earth. “There is a gradual reawakening to the mother earth as a living system and now we want a national awakening. We plan to do this festival for next ten years and on a bigger scale,” says Vandana Shiva, noted environmentalist behind Navdanya.

The Bolivian government had initiated a process to introduce in the U.N. the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth and it even established a Ministry for the Rights of Mother Earth. The plenary session on the ‘Rights of the Earth’ will have Shiva along with the other environmentalists and country ambassadors of the Bolivian Alliance speak on the subject.

Sacred earth

“Atharva Veda, the indigenous tribal culture and poetry...there is no dearth of reminders that earth is sacred. Sri Aurobindo wrote about it, so did Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu and Mahatma Gandhi in their poems,” tells Shiva.

A book comprising poems that have earth at its core will be released during the festival. It will also have poems from the regions of Manipur and Punjab “to show that their reference point of mother earth is not pre-historic. It's live and contemporary,” she adds.

The festival will showcase three films — *Jhing Chik Jhing*, a recently made fiction film in Marathi about a boy who grows up amidst farmers' suicide and debt in Vidarbha by Nitin Nandan, the classic *Do Bigha Zamin* and *Niyamgiri: The Forest Speaks* by Surya Dash.

However, the day-long programme will kick off with an invocation to Mother Earth by rock group Ibadat. Be it the thumris of Vidya Rao, the folk music of a three-member team from Bihar or the paintings by Shakti Maira, everything, Vandana Shiva tells us, will be centred around the earth. An interesting part of the festival is the exhibition and interaction with the seed keepers.

Struggling against the crisis of agricultural biodiversity, Navdanya began saving seeds and established 54 seed banks in 16 states across the country. The visitors will get to see more than 1000 varieties of rice, pulses, millet, bajra, wheat to name a few. “There will be lot of forgotten food on display like ragi, jhangora, buckwheat, jowar, bajra and many of these ingredients will be used in the organic dinner that day,” informs Shiva.

Culling various known and unknown ingredients from the diverse Indian food basket, the organic dinner “Roots and Shoots” will have recipes like brahmi flavoured buttermilk, mixed tandoori platter of roots, and tubers, Nandigram “aloo” chaat, mili juli saag (cooked in clay handi),

navrangi daal, mixed herbs parantha, raw papaya salad flavoured with aami adrak (a mango flavoured garlic).

(For details and table reservation please contact 26968077/26532561)

<http://www.thehindu.com/life-and-style/metroplus/article777183.ece?css=print>

September 24, 2010

The costs of cheap meat

Critics of factory farms say we pay a high price for low-cost food

By Monica Eng
Chicago Tribune

If you adjust for inflation and income, Americans have never spent less on food than they have in recent years. And yet many feel we've also never paid such a high price.

U.S. Department of Agriculture figures show the average American spent just 9.5 percent of his or her disposable income on food last year, a lower percentage than in any country in the world.

And although meat consumption has risen slightly over the past 40 years, its impact on the pocketbook is less than half of what it was in 1970, falling from 4.1 percent to 1.6 percent in 2008.

The majority of this cheap protein is delivered by "factory farms" that house thousands of animals in confinement. These concentrated animal feeding operations, or CAFOs, produce mass quantities of food at low cost.

"We have found the most efficient way to meet consumer demand for a high-quality, relatively inexpensive product," said Dave Werner, spokesman for the National Pork Producers Council in Washington, D.C. "We're the lowest-cost producer in the world, which is why we're the No. 1 pork exporter in the world."

But the system also has created disasters like last month's recall of half a billion salmonella-tainted eggs. Critics say the consolidation of food production has led to environmental damage, the loss of millions of small independent farms, rising health care expenditures and billions in tax-funded subsidies to produce cheap animal feed.

The U.S. House of Representatives held hearings this week on just what went wrong with the factory-farmed eggs implicated in the salmonella outbreak and whether regulation could have helped. But many environmentalists, farmers and advocates of "sustainable" food say that even with better regulation, this kind of agriculture is not sustainable and only artificially cheap.

"Cheap is in the eyes of the accountant," said Daniel Imhoff, a researcher who edited the new book "CAFO: The Tragedy of Industrial Animal Factories." "Somehow we've forgotten how to add the total costs of cheap meat production to our health, environment, the loss of vibrant rural communities with lots of family farms."

The costs not calculated in the direct consumer price of meat and other animal products — called externalities — touch on a variety of issues. Among them:

Health

Meat producers put antibiotics in feed to make the animals grow faster and to prevent disease. But this summer, officials from several federal agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, testified in support of new guidelines that would curb CAFOs' nontherapeutic use of antibiotics, citing a rise in dangerous antibiotic-resistant infections.

The meat industry objects, saying no studies directly link drug resistance in humans to the use of antibiotics in animals.

A cheap meat supply also may affect health by encouraging people to eat more of it. Americans already eat more protein than the USDA dietary guidelines recommend — an average of 5.5 ounces of protein from meat, fish, beans and nuts combined daily. The USDA is expected to add eggs to that list of protein sources this year.

According to a recently published Harvard School of Public Health study that followed 84,000 women over 26 years, women who ate two servings per day of red meat had a 30 percent higher risk of developing coronary heart disease than those who had half a serving per day.

"So maybe it's time to step back and ask if it really needs to be that cheap," said David Kirby, author of "Animal Factory: The Looming Threat of Industrial Pig, Dairy and Poultry Farms to Humans and the Environment." "Maybe we don't need so much. Maybe we need better-quality animal products in moderation and less regularly."

Food safety

While some CAFO supporters say these operations benefit from having enough money to hire

consultants who help create safer and more efficient facilities, the multiple violations at the huge Wright County Egg operation at the center of the salmonella outbreak show that larger doesn't always mean safer.

Last year, the Consumers Union found that two-thirds of American supermarket chickens they tested were contaminated with salmonella or campylobacter, another bacterium that can sicken humans.

The relatively rapid consolidation of U.S. meat, poultry, egg and dairy production and processing greatly increases the potential for these "problems to spread fast and wide throughout the food system," Imhoff said.

"Ideally eggs shouldn't have salmonella in them in the first place, and chickens grown in a more sustainable manner are less likely to carry it," Kirby said. "But if this were isolated to one (small) egg farm somewhere, we wouldn't have this massive problem."

As long as the factory-farming system is in place, stringent safety rules and better enforcement are needed, Kirby said. "Right now we just don't have enough inspectors and boots on the ground," he said.

Taxpayer dollars

The meat industry doesn't receive direct subsidies from the government. However, it relies heavily on cheap corn and soy feed whose farming soaks up billions in subsidies each year. It also receives government grants for CAFO pollution management, and the government bought \$150 million of pork from an industry damaged last year by swine flu fears.

Environment

On small traditional farms, animal waste is used to fertilize crops. On CAFOs, there are not enough crops nearby to absorb the enormous amount of waste, which must be stored, pumped out and transported away.

Often, environmentalists say, the excrement creates toxic fumes (both while stored and when sprayed onto fields), leaks into waterways, runs off fields and spills from lagoons and transit vehicles.

In Iowa, home to hundreds of CAFOs, the Department of Natural Resources recorded that 99 waterways were contaminated enough in 2008 to cause fish kills and that 47 of the incidents that caused the contamination could be positively traced back to animal waste. Such contamination

has killed as many as 150,000 aquatic animals at a time.

Activists say such figures underestimate the problem because they account only for spills that are reported and investigated.

"The problem is there is very little monitoring of the pollution big ag has caused because the agencies don't regulate," said Scott Edwards, director of advocacy at Waterkeeper Alliance.

An analysis by the Chesapeake Bay Program found that agriculture — both livestock and crops — is the single biggest source of pollution in the bay, contributing 42 percent of the nitrogen, 46 percent of the phosphorus and 76 percent of the sediment in the troubled waterway.

This year the Environmental Protection Agency found that 21 percent of the groundwater sampled in Washington's agricultural Yakima Valley contained unsafe levels of nitrates, leaving it unfit for residents to use. A final report is due out in coming weeks, but nitrogen-rich animal waste is a suspected contributor.

Defenders of CAFOs say environmental compliance is improving within the industry. "We support environmental standards, and problems are rare," Werner said. "That's not to say that there isn't anyone out there who is not up to the standards, but that happens in every industry."

Farms

Representatives of the meat industry acknowledge that consolidation has contributed to the loss of nearly 5 million independent family farms since 1935.

Some, they note, now work as hired contractors who produce uniform animals under the rules and specifications of huge companies like Tyson or Smithfield. "As a contract grower for Smithfield, you have a guaranteed income," Werner said.

Critics — including the USDA — say these practices put the remaining independent farmers at a disadvantage, especially when independents are given a lower price for their meat than the ones operating under contract.

Animal welfare

Supporters of CAFOs say housing animals this way protects them from predators and harsh weather and makes it easier to feed and medicate them. Animal rights supporters and other opponents say the crowded indoor conditions lead to stress that affects the animals' health and increases the likelihood of mass infection. They also object to what they view as mistreatment of

the animals, such as the clipping of chicken beaks to prevent closely packed birds from wounding each other.

Pastured chickens, a niche industry, are often raised in moveable outdoor pens. But Richard Lobb, spokesman for the National Chicken Council, said switching to such a system would not be feasible or wise on a large scale.

"We raise 9 billion, with a B, birds a year, and if you were to try to (pasture all the birds) in the mainstream chicken industry you would need all of the farmland in the entire Deep South," he said.

Final words

Many in the meat industry say CAFO practices meet consumer demand for a uniform, inexpensive product. With a record number of Americans using food stamps, cheap food strikes Lobb as a strange thing to complain about.

"Our food bill is high enough as it is," he said. "I rejoice that there are people in this country who would be willing to pay a lot more for their food, but to me they are snobs."

Imhoff responds that investing in more sustainable food practices would save money elsewhere.

"What we will hear time and time again from the industry is that we can't afford to have increases in food production costs, but we haven't tried," he said. "And I don't think as a society, as a country, people wouldn't pay more if they understood what it took to make the food cheap."

Kirby added: "It's strange, in this country we are crazy about quality control for our kids' toys, bedding, car seats ... but then we will go out and buy the cheapest food we can find.

"This is what we put in our mouth, what we feed our children," he said. "Why aren't we regulating it better and why is cheap such an important factor?"

meng@tribune.com

http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-09-23/health/ct-met-cheap-protein--20100923_1_factory-farms-cafos-salmonella-outbreak

September 27, 2010

Save the planet – a message from another world

The first member of a remote Colombian tribe ever to set foot in Britain brings a stark ecological warning

By Patrick Barkham
The Guardian

Jacinto Zarabata sits in a suburban back garden in north London and unselfconsciously uses a stick to probe the inside of a gourd, which is shaped like a rather phallic mushroom with a bright yellow cap. The first member of the Kogi people of [Colombia](#) ever to visit Britain is wearing traditional rough cotton clothes and has a cloth bag slung over each shoulder as he chews toasted coca leaves.

It would be easy to view Jacinto as a noble savage; an exotic being from a pristine indigenous culture still living in impenetrable pockets of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the highest coastal mountain range in the world. But this small, self-assured spokesman for the Kogi soon subverts that stereotype. As he answers my first question in fluent Spanish, he delves into one bag, extracts a camera and takes a photograph of me.

Jacinto has made the journey to Britain because the Kogi have embarked on an unusual and ambitious mission. They are making a movie about their way of life – but not for themselves, as part of some kind of do-gooding community workshop; it is for us, and it carries an uncompromising message. One of very few indigenous American people to resist the ravages of Spanish conquistadors, Christian missionaries and, now, eco-tourists, militias, drug lords and heavy industry, the Kogi have observed frightening changes to their homeland in recent decades. The glaciers are melting, storms have increased in ferocity, there are landslides and floods, followed by droughts and deforestation. The Kogi, who live by a complex set of spiritual beliefs, are the “elder brother” and guardians of this, the heart of the earth, and they believe we in the west (“little brother”) are destroying the planet. They have come to warn us, before it is too late.

Jacinto, who is a spokesperson for the Mamos, the Kogi spiritual leaders who have a unique wisdom forged by an entire childhood spent living in the dark, arrived in London the previous night. He is staying with Alan Ereira, who made a BBC documentary, *The Heart of the World*, about their life 20 years ago. What are Jacinto’s first impressions of our society?

“The first thing that is noticeable to me is that this is still the world,” he says. “What’s visible is construction, what you have made. This is not something we, the Kogi, are used to seeing. You give precedence to the use of a thing rather than its source. That’s the intellectual error. Ultimately, it’s all nature.” From Jacinto’s viewpoint, when we glance at a car we might assess its cost and the status conferred on its driver. We don’t recognise it as a clever piece of engineering of resources that once lay inside the earth.

The Kogi are witnessing some of this extraction first hand. Coal mining in the Sierra Nevada has boomed in recent decades (fuelled in part by the demand for cheap foreign coal in post-miners’ strike Britain). Over centuries, they survived the wars waged on them by retreating further into the mountains, through dense rainforest and cloud forest dubbed “El Infierno” by settlers. There

are still no roads to the Kogi's traditional settlements (Jacinto's home does not exist on official maps), but global capitalism is slowly conquering the Kogi's isolation.

Not that Jacinto does not embrace victimhood. He highlights the positive developments for their culture. When Ereira's film was broadcast around the world in 1990, there were 12,000 Kogi. Now there are 18,000. After centuries witnessing their lands being plundered, they have been returned significant traditional areas and sacred sites by the Colombian government. Last month Juan Manuel Santos, the country's new president, visited the Kogi to be blessed by the Mamos before his official inauguration. "In a sense, the Kogi are trying to take over the Colombian government and build a sense of responsibility into the president himself," says Ereira. "The Kogi are saying, 'How are we going to sort the world out?' They must be the most proactive indigenous people on earth."

In Ereira's documentary, the Kogi's message was ahead of its time: they warned of [climate change](#), and that "little brother's" (the west's) hunger for energy and material possessions was "cutting out of the eyes and ears" of the great mother (the earth). But we didn't listen. And so, 18 months ago, Ereira received a phone call out of the blue from the Kogi (Spanish-speakers such as Jacinto use mobile phones when they visit westernised cities; there is little reception in the mountains), demanding his immediate presence. Ereira then returned to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, trekking on a mule through the rainforest. He was taken to sacred sites he had never been allowed to visit before and the Kogi, some of whom had received training with video cameras and broadcast a series of seven-minute documentaries on Colombian television, explained their new film-making mission.

When Ereira returned, he found the Kogi's heartland remarkably unchanged. "You don't see the transformation you see in Amazonian traditional societies, where you have an impoverished western urban culture in indigenous villages. You don't see the T-shirts and baseball caps. The Kogi's identification with their culture is phenomenally strong. The belief of the Mamos in their responsibility for taking care of the world is absolute, and it's the duty and function of the rest of their society to ensure they do that. That's not broken down."

But it has been changed by the growing relationship between the indigenous community and the government. Increasingly, a few salaried Kogi who speak Spanish and work as local officials have the power to get things done. Ereira wonders if this will undermine the traditional authority of the Mamos – and if the Kogi's unique way of thinking is at risk. "It's a perception of reality which is contained in their language and is utterly different from ours. My fear is that the moment you mess with it in any way, it's lost. You probably can't hold that experience if you speak Spanish because the conceptual world is totally different. You're at risk of losing this last trace, this philosophical reserve."

Jacinto, however, does not fear for the future of Kogi culture. "There has always been an attempt to bring other ideas and thoughts into our way of life," he says. Doesn't he worry that the Kogi will be drawn to the bright lights of westernised cities, such as nearby Santa Marta? "No," he says. "The Mamos have authority over people. People can experience other cultures but they have an obligation to return. If they don't, the authorities are obliged to go down [the mountain] and get them." Doesn't Jacinto crave cars, houses and restaurants? "At this particular moment

there isn't that need," he says, gravely. "But I can envisage a time when we may adopt certain things."

One thing they have adopted is filmmaking – the Kogi believe a movie is their best hope not only of telling little brother where he is going wrong, but *showing* him. This time, however, the Kogi's film is not being masterminded by Ereira: "They decided after the first film that this was the best way to connect with the world," he explains. "But they realised that to be in our hands was just not a good idea." So Ereira is assisting, and seeking funding for the project, which will be completed next summer. [Judging by the Kogi's trailer](#), the authentic voice of an indigenous people makes for compelling viewing but the BBC have not expressed an interest, so instead, Ereira and the Kogi are planning a movie release. Footage of the Kogi conducting rituals beneath a spectacular tree is straight out of Avatar. "Avatar has done great work for this," Ereira says. "Twenty years ago, the Kogi were pushing on a wheel that had just started to turn. Now that wheel is really rolling and they are part of the zeitgeist."

The Kogi may not feel under attack culturally, but in their mountain environment "a lot has changed" in the last two decades, according to Jacinto. "The Sierra is the heart of the world. It functions the same way as our own heart does – it sustains the organism," he says. "There has been snow melt, landslides and earthquakes. People are damaging the sacred places from where the damage can be restored."

Why is little brother so greedy? Jacinto chuckles and rubs his gourd, a sign he is thinking. (The mushroom shaped cap on the gourd, which men carry to symbolise their connection with the womb, is a sign of his accumulated thought.) "Habit," he says, finally. "That ambition to have more doesn't have a framework. It's just a drive to accumulate. The habit is a competitive one. 'What everyone else has I must have too, otherwise everyone else has power over me.' The consequences are evident, but it doesn't seem obvious to you," Jacinto says. "You can go and live in space, that's fine, but you don't seem to be able to go back to the understanding of how to live harmoniously with the earth. That's something you've forgotten."

Yet the Kogi hope we can still reconnect, by seeing the value they place on thinking and their spiritual world. "When you understand that, you begin to understand yourself a bit more," Jacinto says. "Originally, the great mama brought us into being so we would be guardians of nature. You, the little brother, was given this knowledge of how to treat the earth and the water and the air. At some point there was divergence and you, the little brother, went on a different path.

"We, by example, don't live like you do. You come to the Sierra, there are no factories, there is no industrial agriculture. Now we really want you to look at the images of how we live."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/sep/27/kogi-warn-the-west>

September 27, 2010

Mixed Reception for UN Anti-poverty Action Review

By Ecumenical News International

Leaders of global faith and humanitarian groups have given mixed reactions to a New York summit evaluating the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, set out a decade ago to reduce global poverty – *write Peter Kenny and Chris Herlinger.*

Political leaders at the summit acknowledged that progress towards achieving the eight MDGs by 2015 is not where it should be.

In a final “outcome document” for the 20 to 22 September 2010 UN summit, participants recommitted themselves to achieving the goals, which include the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.

Church leaders have applauded the progress made so far to reduce global poverty but say more must be done.

The General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, told UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in a letter that, “Without significant transformations in global economic frameworks, the attainment of the MDGs by 2015 is endangered”.

Referring to the New York-based UN high-level summit on the MDGs, Tveit's letter expressed concern that governments needed to do more to address the root causes of poverty. The WCC leader said that if this were not done, justice-oriented reforms would not be possible.

“In today's globalised world, efforts by nations to meet the MDGs are more and more contingent on an enabling international economic environment,” wrote Tveit.

The world leaders meeting in New York failed to decide on what some observers claim must be done to tackle the most pressing problems hindering the elimination of poverty.

“We need action on hunger, poverty, trade and human rights, and we need it now,” said John Nduna, General Secretary of the Geneva-based ACT Alliance, one of the world's largest humanitarian and development networks, after the New York meeting.

The ACT Alliance noted that what was agreed in New York is long on promises and short on detail, and contains few of the practical agreements needed to realise the MDGs by their target date.

The MDGs aim to halve the number of people experiencing hunger, and living on less than US\$1 a day by 2015. World Food Programme statistics released a week before the summit show that one in seven of the world's population goes hungry each day.

“This is not the forgotten few we are talking about, it is the forgotten billion,” said Nduna. He added that the ACT Alliance believes poverty and hunger can be eradicated if politicians are willing to embrace innovative thinking.

This, noted Nduna, includes investing in smallholder agriculture – the main source of livelihood for people in poverty – and changing current global food policy into one based on the right to food. He said there is also the need to eliminate all export subsidies in developed countries, because these allow Western agricultural producers to sell their goods cheaply to the developing world, and poor farmers get squeezed out in the process.

David Beckmann, a Lutheran church minister and president of the Washington-based advocacy group Bread for the World, told a 22 September forum at the Yale University-backed Church Centre for the United Nations that he viewed the future with some optimism.

“I am just profoundly hopeful because hundreds of millions of people have escaped from extreme poverty in the last 20 years,” Beckmann said. He called the progress made on poverty, “the great exodus of our time,” and noted, “This is God moving in our history. This is our loving God answering the prayers of hundreds of millions of people.”

Still, others at the Yale event were pessimistic, and claimed that not enough is being done to promote equality for the poor.

Melinda St Louis, deputy director of Jubilee USA, a faith-based group working for debt forgiveness for poorer nations, said advocates for the poor needed to focus less on, “specific goals and benchmarks, and actually start talking about economic justice”.

Thomas Pogge, who teaches philosophy and international affairs at Yale, noted that while there are, “millions of success stories” and much good work done on behalf of the poor, the U.N.’s Food and Agriculture Organisation reported that in 2009 the number of chronically undernourished persons had, for the first time, risen above one billion people. He said that the poor continue to face an, “enormous headwind”.

Peter Singer, who teaches bioethics at Princeton University in the US, told his audience of divinity-school professors, staff, graduates and students that he finds a, “huge amount of complacency in the United States” on the issue of poverty, even among Christians.

Singer believed that, “Perhaps the Christian churches in particular have really failed to convey a serious ethical message, which I would take to be, as I read the gospels, (that) if you are not doing something substantial for the poor, you are not living an ethical life.”

At another 22 September New York event, co-sponsored by a coalition of non-governmental organisations and faith groups, participants said substantial change in current economic systems is needed to end poverty.

David McNair, senior economic justice advisor for the UK-based development agency Christian Aid, cited a just-released study by his agency, which praises the MDGs for having, “driven significant and very welcome progress, and raised the profile globally of the international commitment to eradicate poverty”.

Still, the Christian Aid study also noted that the eradication of poverty would only come about, “when the systematic and structural causes of poverty are challenged. Those in poverty must be supported to take power over the constraints they face; those in power must be held accountable.”

ACT Alliance: www.actalliance.org/

Christian Aid report: www.christianaid.org.uk/

[With acknowledgements to ENI. [Ecumenical News International](http://www.ecumenicalnewsinternational.org/) is jointly sponsored by the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Conference of European Churches.]

<http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/13197>

September 27, 2010

The Vatican goes green

By Alison Stewart
PBS

The Holy See has embarked on a new mission: the fight against climate change. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI announced that Vatican City would strive to become the first carbon-neutral state. Although the Vatican’s plan to purchase carbon offset credits fell through, the sovereign city-state has harnessed the power of the sun with solar panels and a solar generator, and has also made progress with energy conservation efforts. Pope Benedict has added a religious element to the climate change debate by framing the issue as a moral imperative.

To discuss these unprecedented efforts, Need to Know’s Alison Stewart spoke with Mark Hopkins, an energy expert with the United Nations Foundation who has 30 years of experience in energy policy and program development. Hopkins toured the Vatican’s new energy efficient facilities last year.

To listen to this podcast, visit:

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/the-climate-desk/audio-the-vatican-goes-green/3882/>

October 1, 2010

On Gandhi's Birthday, GreenFaith Announces Hindu and Jain Scholar in Residence

Dr. Pankaj Jain Joins Leading Interfaith Environmental Coalition

GreenFaith

On the anniversary of Gandhi's birthday, GreenFaith is pleased to announce that Dr. Pankaj Jain has become GreenFaith's Hindu and Jain Scholar in Residence, and will work with GreenFaith to strengthen Hindu and Jain environmental leadership nationwide. GreenFaith is a leading US interfaith environmental coalition that works with diverse religious communities to educate and equip them to be environmental leaders.

"Gandhi is an icon of sustainable living and an inspiration to millions of people globally," said the Rev. Fletcher Harper, GreenFaith's Executive Director. "On his birthday, we are thrilled to announce our partnership with Dr. Jain to engage Hindu and Jain communities in the United States on environmental issues."

Dr. Jain is an Assistant Professor of Indian Religions and Ecology at the University of North Texas. He has taught Indian Films, Sanskrit, Hindi/Urdu languages and literatures at North Carolina State University, Rutgers, Kean University, Jersey City University, and at the University of Iowa. In his scholarship he connects the ancient Indic traditions of Hinduism and Jainism with contemporary issues – particularly the environment. He studied under Dr. Christopher Key Chapple, one of the world's leading scholars on Indian religions and ecology.

"It is indeed a pleasure to be able to partner with GreenFaith to engage the Hindu and Jain communities on the environment," said Dr. Jain. "Ancient Indic philosophy and religion can make important contributions to the development of a sustainable society. I look forward to helping educate and engage our communities on this vital issue."

Dr. Jain has written "Ten Key Hindu Teachings on the Environment," which is featured on GreenFaith's website at www.greenfaith.org. In this essay, he lists the most significant Hindu teachings on the environment, citing Gandhi as an example of Hindu ecological values in action.

Jain will work with GreenFaith to identify US Hindu and Jain leaders concerned about the environment, and to connect them with GreenFaith's innovative programs. The GreenFaith Fellowship Program is the world's only comprehensive religious-environmental training program. Through retreats, monthly webinars, and extensive reading, Fellows receive education and training in eco-theology, "greening" the operation of religious institutions, environmental advocacy, and environmental justice. The GreenFaith Certification Program is the world's first interfaith environmental certification program for houses of worship. During a 2-year process,

participants 'green' their worship services, religious education programs, facilities, advocacy, and their member's consumption habits. "GreenFaith's programs present an important opportunity to the Hindu and Jain community," said Dr. Jain. I look forward to connecting leaders of these communities with GreenFaith."

"The Hindu and Jain communities an important part of the wider US religious community," said Harper. "We all need their help in creating a world that treats the environment in a way that Gandhi would approve of."

Founded in 1992, GreenFaith inspires, educates and mobilizes people of diverse religious backgrounds for environmental leadership. Visit www.greenfaith.org for more information.

<http://greenfaith.org/media/press-releases/on-gandhi2019s-birthday-greenfaith-announces-hindu-and-jain-scholar-in-residence>

October 1, 2010

Hindus want world to take water insecurity risk more seriously

ANI

Nevada (US): Hindus want the worldwide risk of water insecurity to be taken seriously.

According to a recent study, water threats include scarcity and pollution and about 3.4 billion people worldwide fall under the most severe threat category. Areas of the world inhabited by about 80 percent of world population lack secure fresh water supply. Prospect of poorer nations seemed even more depressing.

Renowned Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement in Nevada (USA) today, said that world governments and international organizations should come up with better water management strategies. Growing human population and climate changes reportedly would further deteriorate the water supply situation.

Moreover, integrated water management should be the focus of governments where needs of all users should be considered, Rajan Zed, who is President of Universal Society of Hinduism, added. (ANI)

http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/world-news/hindus-want-world-to-take-water-insecurity-risk-more-seriously_100437597.html

October 5, 2010

"30 Ways in 30 Days" to inspire action on reducing emissions and transition to global Green Economy

United Nations Environment Programme

Mexico City/Nairobi - From creating mass markets for solar water heaters to planting trees and protecting forests, the United Nations Environment Programme will be releasing 30 case studies in the run up to the UN climate convention in Mexico to prove that solutions to combat Climate Change are available, accessible and replicable.

"Across the globe, community-based programmes and entrepreneurial endeavor are challenging the status-quo through innovation and creativity. Importantly, they are delivering multiple benefits from access to energy, public health improvements and reduced environmental impacts to driving a transition to low carbon, greener growth. The challenge now is to accelerate and scale-up these world-wide transitions," said Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director.

Current commitments and pledges under the Copenhagen Accord covering emissions up to 2020 provide a good platform for global action, but the level of current ambition is widely viewed as insufficient to meet the 2 degree warming limit.

The UNEP "30 Ways in 30 Days" initiative will be announced at a special Climate Neutral Network (CN Net) breakfast at the Business for the Environment Summit (B4E) in Mexico City, from 4-5 October. The B4E Summit - which is co-hosted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), The Global Compact, WWF, and Global Initiatives - is the world's premier international conference for dialogue and business-driven action for the environment.

Latest members of CN Net include Saitama Prefecture in Japan, which is part of the Greater Tokyo Area hosting a population of more than 7 million, and Corporation Solar Alliance in Ukraine, which is developing next-generation technologies for energy conservation and the saving of resources.

The first case study from the "30 Ways in 30 Days" initiative is "Solar Loans for Solar Homes." More than 60 per cent of Indian households have no access to reliable electricity supplies and depend on kerosene for light and on burning dung and wood for heat.

In an example of small-scale enterprise and entrepreneurship that expanded rapidly, UNEP's Indian Solar Loan Programme worked with two of India's largest banking groups in 2003 to provide low-interest loans for household photovoltaic systems. Photovoltaics are a method of generating electrical power by converting solar radiation into direct current electricity using semiconductors.

The programme provided technical support and training, as well as an interest rate buy-down that reimbursed banks for the difference between their normal lending rates and the reduced rate that borrowers paid.

While banks did not profit directly from these subsidies, they were keen to develop a new market for rural financing. Almost 20,000 solar home systems were financed between 2003 and 2007. Towards the end of the project, subsidies were gradually reduced to a free market rate, by which time other banks had begun lending on commercial terms.

The Solar Loan Programme accelerated market penetration of solar lights in the Indian countryside and inspired several similar initiatives in India and elsewhere. In 2008, the programme won the Globe Energy Award for sustainability and in 2009 it was one of only two field projects within the UN system to receive the Secretary General's UN21 Award awarded for innovation.

The Indian Solar Loan scheme has influenced national policy, with the Government of India sidelining its capital subsidy approach to supporting solar power in favour of interest subsidies. Costs of US\$1.5 million in programme support and US\$6.1 million in loans from the banking partners have been more than offset by household savings on kerosene and other traditional energy sources.

"Solar lights are a long cherished dream of rural folk who often have no power, or power supplies that are at best irregular. They are one product that can meet aspirations of people living below the poverty line. It is a good business opportunity for the Bank," said Mr. P G Ramesh, Chairman, Pragathi Grameen Bank, Bellary, Karnataka, India.

Many of the best opportunities for climate mitigation are household-scale technologies such as solar, biogas and high efficiency appliances. Consumer and micro-lending approaches can be replicated elsewhere and their scale adjusted according to need.

Daily climate case studies will be released online at www.unep.org/unite/30ways from 1 November to 8 December. Examples span a wide range of solutions across the globe from "green" tea to energy entrepreneurs, transport solutions, carbon finance innovation, eco-living and adaption strategies.

View a video of the Indian Solar Loan Programme here: http://www.unep.org/newscentre/videos/shortfilms/2008-09-15_TaleOfTwoLights.flv

Notes to Editors

The UN climate convention is COP16/CMP6 in Cancun, Mexico, and will be held from 29 November to 10 December.

Latest participants of UNEP's Climate Neutral Network - September 2010

Climate Action (company), UK

Climate Action is a multimedia platform consisting of a website, newsletter and annual publication, produced in partnership with UNEP. The platform aims to encourage businesses and large organizations to reduce their carbon footprint. Climate Action has joined the Climate Neutral Network, after four years of collaboration with UNEP. Climate Action and UNEP will launch the fourth Climate Action publication in Cancun on 3 December.

Saitama Prefecture (region), Japan

Saitama Prefecture is part of the Greater Tokyo Area, and most of Saitama's cities can be described as suburbs of Tokyo. Saitama has a population of over 7 million. In February 2009, Saitama established the 'Stop Global Warming: Saitama Navigation 2050' plan, which establishes policies and objectives to meet specific emissions reduction goals. The prefecture is also actively promoting the widespread use of renewable energy.

Corporation Solar Alliance (company), Ukraine

Corporation Solar Alliance is a business organization and a scientific enterprise, which is developing next generation technologies for energy conservation and saving of resources, while respecting the basic principles for the protection of the environment and ecology. The company's activities include converting organic and inorganic waste into alternative energy sources.

Coffea Circulor (company), Norway

Coffea Circulor imports high quality coffee to Scandinavia. Situated in Arendal, Norway, Coffea Circulor's mission is to carry out coffee trading on the principle of the triple bottom line - people, planet and profit. The company works directly with farmers in Kenya and Uganda to ensure sustainability, transparency, and the empowerment of local farmers and the community. The company seeks clients and partners who share the company's philosophy of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Procea (company), Italy

Procea supplies consultancy services to organizations and privately held companies. The company has established the private initiative 'KlimaNet', which is designed to assist enterprises to implement and document environmental efforts. KlimaNet is a pragmatic yet ambitious environmental management system, which provides a unique opportunity for organizations and companies to implement environmentally sustainable practices in their cooperation with suppliers.

Please see the Climate Neutral Network homepage: www.unep.org/climateneutral

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=649&ArticleID=6770&l=en&t=long>

October 6, 2010

Incredible array of new species found in remote Papua New Guinea

New frogs, spiders, rodents & other critters among 200 new species discovered

Conservation International Press Release

Arlington, VA – An orange spider, a jabbing spiny-legged katydid, a white-tailed mouse and a minute long-nosed frog are among an amazing 200 new species of plants and animals discovered during just two months of deep rainforest exploration in a small portion of Papua New Guinea's remote forest-cloaked mountains last year.

Coordinated by Conservation International's (CI) Rapid Assessment Program (RAP) in partnership with Papua New Guinea's Institute for Biological Research (IBR) and A Rocha International, two scientific teams made these extraordinary discoveries in the country's rugged and poorly-known Nakanai and Muller Ranges in 2009.

The searches were conducted as part of CI's global efforts to document the biodiversity of poorly known but species-rich environments, and raise their profile to assist local communities establish conservation priorities for future development.

The findings include twenty-four new species of frogs, two new mammals, nine new species of plants, nearly 100 new insects including damselflies, katydids and ants, and approximately 100 new spiders. Remarkably, several of the katydids and at least one ant and one mammal are so different from any known species that they represent entirely new genera.

In depth: [See a list of all the species found.](#)

In the Nakanai Mountains on the large western Pacific island of New Britain, CI scientists worked with local communities to assess new, endemic, and previously undescribed species at three different sites ranging from lowlands to high elevations in the rugged rainforest-covered mountains.

The Nakanai Mountains host some of the world's largest underground rivers and most spectacular cave systems, which have prompted their nomination for World Heritage status by Papua New Guinea's Department of Environment and Conservation.

Among the highlights of the Nakanai surveys, were the discoveries of a new and beautiful yellow-spotted frog (*Platymantis* sp. nov.), found only high up on the mountains in the wet rainforests, as well as a bizarre little ceratobatrachid frog, (*Batrachylodes* sp. nov.) which is just two centimeters long .

Unlike most of his relatives that call for females at night, the new ceratobatrachid advertises with his call late in the afternoon after drenching tropical storms. CI herpetologist and RAP team leader Stephen Richards described it as the most exciting and surprising herpetological discovery of the survey because it belongs to a group of frogs previously only known from the Solomon Islands further to the east.

Also discovered in the Nakanai range was a distinctive mouse with white tipped-tail that was captured at the high elevation site (1590m above sea level). Although it resembles the prehensile-tailed tree mice of New Guinea, scientists report that this remarkable new species has no known close relatives and represents an entirely new genus.

Richards said, "With both the Nakanai Mountains and the Muller Range on UNESCO's World Heritage Tentative List, we hope that news of these amazing new species will bolster the nomination of these spectacular environments for World Heritage status".

During the Muller survey in September 2009, researchers including CI entomologist and RAP Director Leeanne Alonso, spent a week at each of three camps at 500, 1,600 and 2,875 meters height, to document the range of habitats and biodiversity of these different altitudes, where they uncovered what Alonso described as a "spectacular variety" of new ants, spiders, frogs and katydids.

Documented during the Muller expeditions was an exquisitely patterned emerald-green katydid (*Mossula* sp. nov. 1), a brilliantly pink-eyed katydid that lives in the forest canopy (*Caedicia*), and a sharp-legged katydid (*Mossula* sp. nov.) with an especially interesting defense mechanism that, when threatened, prompts it to hold its unusually large and spiny legs vertically above its head to jab at predators, a behavior which RAP scientist Piotr Naskrecki described from firsthand experience as "very painful".

Also found during these surveys was an extremely abundant new species of Rhododendron plant with spectacular large white flowers. Rhododendrons are among the most avidly sought-after plants in the Southeast Asian and Melanesian regions because of their ornamental value, and New Guinea is a well-known center of diversity for these plants.

The only way to access these remote sites was through a combination of small plane, by dinghy, on foot, or by a helicopter generously provided by the nearby Porgera Mine. But Papua New Guinea's rugged terrain and difficult access may also be conservation's most powerful ally in many parts of the country, where much remains to be discovered. At the same time some forests of New Guinea are facing increasing threats, not only from subsistence agriculture but more recently from loggers and Oil Palm producers.

In the Nakanai Mountains CI-Papua New Guinea has been working with the East New Britain Provincial Government and local communities to protect a large tract of rainforest, where the communities did not want logging to take place on their customary lands. Following the RAP surveys though, local community members from both Nakanai and Muller reported that they would be willing to participate in any potential project that did not involve destruction of their forest, and that proper management and protection of their traditional forest resources remains an extremely high priority.

Later this month, leaders from CI and A Rocha will join world leaders from governments, the private sector, and civil society in Nagoya Japan at the 10th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to discuss the current extinction crisis and set new targets for preserving Earth's biodiversity. CI will support ambitious, but achievable, new goals to protect at least 25 percent of Earth's land and inland waters and 15 percent of marine ecosystems by 2020.

"There's no question that the discoveries we made in both surveys are incredibly significant both for the large numbers of new species recorded, and the new genera identified," said Leeanne Alonso, whose Rapid Assessment Program at CI has been documenting new species around the globe since 1990. "While very encouraging, these discoveries do not mean that our global biodiversity is out of the woods. On the contrary, they should serve as a cautionary message about how much we still don't know about Earth's still hidden secrets and important natural resources, which we can only preserve with coordinated, long-term management."

The two surveys were a collaboration between Conservation International and A Rocha International, with funding provided by a generous grant from the Hans Wilsdorf Foundation. Professor Sir Ghilleen Prance, Chair of the A Rocha International Board, explained his organization's interest in searching for new species.

"As Christians, we believe we are called to care for creation and ensure that life on Earth is protected and respected, no matter how seemingly insignificant a particular species might appear to be," Prance said. "We also believe that we have a responsibility to help the poorest members of society, whose needs very often go hand in hand with natural resources, as it is usually the poorest people who live most closely to nature and depend on it for their daily needs. This work is therefore highly important to us, and we are pleased to have partnered with CI to announce the new species discovered."

A Rocha International is now involved in follow-up work in Papua New Guinea, in order to achieve the long-term protection of forests shown to have been of high conservation importance.

<http://www.arocha.org/int-en/news/media/9444-DSY.html>

October 7, 2010

A Hindu Sect Devoted to the Environment

By Akash Kapur
New York Times

DHUNDLI, India — About three kilometers from this village, across dirt tracks and open scrubland, there is a settlement of seven mud huts bordered by millet and lentil fields. No electricity or telephone poles run to these huts. There's not a satellite dish to be seen.

In the dry, open land that surrounds the settlement — part of the great Thar Desert that dominates the western part of the state of Rajasthan — black buck deer roam freely, foraging for leaves. They are noticeably bold; they seem unafraid of strangers.

The deer have good cause to feel safe. The settlement — like scores of others that dot this harsh landscape — is populated by members of the Bishnoi, a community that traditionally reveres and protects nature.

Although they are often referred to as a tribe, the Bishnoi are, more properly, a sect within Hinduism. They were founded in the 15th century when a saint laid down 29 precepts for his followers (hence their name: bis means 20 in the local dialect, and noi means nine). Today, there are around 600,000 Bishnoi, spread across northern and central India.

Several Bishnoi precepts are directed at encouraging harmony between man and nature. They include injunctions against eating meat and felling trees, and an exhortation to “be compassionate toward all living beings.”

The Bishnoi are devoted ecologists. Although they are friendly people, full of toothy smiles and warm hospitality, they can also be fierce when defending nature. The Bishnoi of this area have been known to chase down poachers and attack them.

The Bishnois' ecological ethic represents a remarkable ideology in modern India, where the environment so often seems to take a back seat to the quest for economic growth. Across the country, forests and glaciers are dwindling, air and land are being polluted, and coastlines are disappearing.

A recent [World Bank](#) report suggests that environmental sustainability is likely to be “the next greatest challenge” to India's development in coming years.

I wanted to visit the Bishnoi settlement outside Dhundli because I wondered if their way of life offered a path to sustainability. Historically, India's environmental consciousness (such as it is, anyway) has often been driven by grass-roots, traditional movements.

Many people attribute the birth of modern Indian environmentalism, for example, to the Chipko movement, a spontaneous protest that erupted in the 1970s when peasants in the Himalayas rose up to stop the destruction of their forests.

More recently, the environmental costs of development have been highlighted by the discontent of tribal populations that have protested large mining and industrial projects in several states.

Could the Bishnoi, in the same way, have something to teach the rest of the country about living in harmony with nature?

I was introduced to the Bishnoi way of life by Sajjan Bishnoi, the 75-year old patriarch of the settlement I visited, and his son, Khiyaram Bishnoi. Sitting under a leafy neem tree, they told me about their community's efforts to live with nature.

Nobody in their settlement ate meat, they said. Nobody used electricity. They only used motor vehicles when they absolutely had to.

Khiyaram Bishnoi pointed to a thatchlike material on the roofs of their houses. He said they only used plants they knew animals didn't eat.

He told me, also, that the Bishnoi tried to limit their use of plastic — a choice that was evident in the clean surroundings, noticeably absent of garbage, and in particular of the plastic waste that plagues so many villages and towns in India.

Plastic, he said, was bad for the environment. It lined the bellies of animals, and sometimes choked them.

This evidence of ecological living was impressive. But it was clear, also, that for all their adherence to an ancient way of life, the Bishnoi were struggling against the onslaughts of modernity.

Sajjan Bishnoi talked about another son. He worked in a distant town, as a miner. When asked whether he was aware of what mines did to the environment, how they split open the earth and choked trees with their dust and explosives, he grimaced and said, "It's necessary for the money."

He also told a familiar tale of agricultural decline — how yields had gone down, how the water had turned bad. Once, the Bishnoi had been able to live off the land. Now many were forced to move to the cities and take up modern jobs.

The overall impression, sitting in that quiet, bucolic and in many ways quite inspiring settlement, was of an island. I was impressed by the Bishnoi way of life, but I wondered how long they would be able to maintain it. I felt the world was closing in, washing up against the island, eating away at its shoreline.

Father and son both spoke of a new generation that was living in the cities. Sometimes, they conceded, this generation lost themselves. They would drink, maybe even eat meat.

"India is getting more and more developed," Khiyaram Bishnoi said. "People like us are less educated and have more expenses. Our children will move to cities." He said he worried that the 29 precepts would decline.

He gave me a tour of the settlement. He showed me the small huts in which they lived, the mud vessels in which they cooked. It all had a simplicity that was almost heartbreaking.

As we walked around, he said that he, too, worked sometimes in the city. It was difficult out there; he hated the filth and the crowds. But he had no choice. He had a family. He had to feed them.

I folded my hands and thanked him for the tour. "Good luck," I said. "I think you have a hard time ahead of you."

"Yes, hard time," he said, and he smiled. "Hard time, but a good life."

Join an online conversation at www.akashkapur.com.

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/08/world/asia/08iht-letter.html?_r=2

October 11, 2010

Congregations use religion to emphasize environmental awareness

Area houses of worship hope to help the Chesapeake, use alternative energy

By Raven L. Hill
The Baltimore Sun

For St. James Episcopal Church, environmental activism is a religion.

The church, nestled in Parkton's lush farmland and rolling hills, has received a Maryland Energy Administration grant to install a wind speed indicator, the first step in what church leaders hope will eventually lead to a wind turbine on its premises.

Members are preparing to host an environmental sustainability open house on Oct. 16, and the church is hoping to create a program with the University of Maryland that uses its buildings as working models for green design.

The Rev. Elizabeth Orens, who has led the almost-100-year-old church for four years, said looking outside her office window at the tree-lined sky reminds her to spread the gospel of environmental awareness.

"This is something that comes from Genesis, the whole idea of being good stewards of the earth," Orens said.

Other local churches are also heeding the call, seeking to tie activism to spirituality and faith.

Faith-based environmentalism isn't new, but it is becoming more relevant, local leaders said.

A handful of regional Jewish, Muslim and Christian leaders formed the Chesapeake Covenant Community, an interfaith environmental action group, last year.

This summer, nine leaders participated in a covenant signing in which they pledged to support environmental efforts in the Chesapeake Bay watershed area and the larger global community. The organization plans to launch a home energy reduction project in Baltimore with 20 congregations to expand its work with the Baltimore Watershed Alliance.

Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin, the group's program chair, called such efforts "an essential and integral piece of who we are as human beings and partners with God."

In 2006, she formed the Baltimore Jewish Environmental Network, a coalition of 11 congregations that aim to be "green synagogues." The group educates agencies, schools, and family and youth groups about reducing energy consumption, buying locally-grown fruits and vegetables, and even celebrating bar and bat mitzvahs in an environmentally friendly fashion.

"This is the ark that is protecting us," Cardin said, referring to the earth. "If we damage our ark, we will perish."

St. James' work aligns with broader goals established by the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland. The diocese hosted its first Greentober Fest this weekend, which focused on ways to evaluate sustainability efforts, explore the aftermath of the Gulf oil spill, and review the progress of initiatives at various churches.

The Right Rev. Eugene Taylor Sutton, known around the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland as the "Green Bishop," said he became more aware of the need to be eco-friendly through his global travels. His motivation is rooted in a social justice philosophy that seeks to eliminate disparities between poor and more affluent communities.

"An increasing number of people most affected by environmental degradation are the poor and people of color. We need to address that," said Sutton, who sits on the board of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and belongs to the Chesapeake Covenant Community. "We're all connected."

Sutton formed an environmental steering committee to work with parishes. He said that he would like for several parishes to launch model programs for the diocese to follow in building design and maintenance.

Approximately 150 people from the diocese's 115 churches are expected at the Greentober Fest.

"We're looking at ways to help bring environmental education to people in the pews as well as eventually a major project that the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland can get behind," Sutton said. "The project at St. James is the most ambitious, but more are coming."

Doug Harbit, who is in charge of the St. James environmental initiatives committee, said he's not surprised to see other congregations making environmental strides.

"It is found in the roots of every single faith — a belief in caring for creation," he said. "It is definitely an aspect of faith that has become increasingly urgent as we grapple with climate

change and global warming."

www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-county/bs-md-co-ecofaith-20101010.0.5556761.story

October 12, 2010

Bill Johnston, a pioneer in interreligious dialogue, passes

Irish Jesuit News

Bill Johnston SJ, the Irish Jesuit internationally renowned for his work on mysticism and inter-faith dialogue, died peacefully this morning, Tuesday 12 October in Tokyo, Japan. Born in Belfast on 30 July 1925, he entered the Jesuits on 20 September 1943. He was ordained a priest on March 24 1957 and spent many years of his life in Japan where he became actively involved in inter-religious dialogue, especially with the Buddhists. Writing in an article for *The Tablet* in the aftermath of 9/11 he claimed, "We used to say that dialogue between the religions is necessary for world peace. Now we can say that dialogue between the religions is necessary for world survival." He was well known also for his best-selling books on mysticism, including *Silent Music*, *The Still Point*, and *The Inner Eye of Love*.

<http://www.amdg.ie/2010/10/12/william-johnston-sj-rip/>

October 13, 2010

Our Commons Future Is Already Here

A stirring call to unite the environmental and global justice movement from Maude Barlow

By Maude Barlow
CommonDreams.org

Maude Barlow gave this stirring plenary speech, full of hope even in the face of ecological disasters, to the Environmental Grantmakers Association annual retreat in Pacific Grove, California. Barlow, a former UN Senior Water Advisor, is National Chairperson of the [Council of Canadians](#) and founder of the Blue Planet Project.

"Every now and then in history, the human race takes a collective step forward in its evolution. Such a time is upon us now."

We all know that the earth and all upon it face a growing crisis. Global climate change is rapidly advancing, melting glaciers, eroding soil, causing freak and increasingly wild storms, and displacing untold millions from rural communities to live in desperate poverty in peri-urban slums. Almost every human victim lives in the global South, in communities not responsible for greenhouse gas emissions. The atmosphere has already warmed up almost a full degree in the last several decades and a new Canadian study reports that we may be on course to add another 6 degrees Celsius (10.8 degrees Fahrenheit) by 2100.

Half the tropical forests in the world – the lungs of our ecosystems – are gone; by 2030, at the current rate of harvest, only 10% will be left standing. Ninety percent of the big fish in the sea are gone, victim to wanton predatory fishing practices. Says a prominent scientist studying their demise “there is no blue frontier left.” Half the world’s wetlands – the kidneys of our ecosystems – were destroyed in the 20th century. Species extinction is taking place at a rate one thousand times greater than before humans existed. According to a Smithsonian scientist, we are headed toward a “biodiversity deficit” in which species and ecosystems will be destroyed at a rate faster than Nature can create new ones.

We are polluting our lakes, rivers and streams to death. Every day, 2 million tons of sewage and industrial and agricultural waste are discharged into the world’s water, the equivalent of the weight of the entire human population of 6.8 billion people. The amount of wastewater produced annually is about six times more water than exists in all the rivers of the world. A comprehensive new global study recently reported that 80% of the world’s rivers are now in peril, affecting 5 billion people on the planet. We are also mining our groundwater far faster than nature can replenish it, sucking it up to grow water-guzzling chemical-fed crops in deserts or to water thirsty cities that dump an astounding 200 trillion gallons of land-based water as waste in the oceans every year. The global mining industry sucks up another 200 trillion gallons, which it leaves behind as poison. Fully one third of global water withdrawals are now used to produce biofuels, enough water to feed the world. A recent global survey of groundwater found that the rate of depletion more than doubled in the last half century. If water was drained as rapidly from the Great Lakes, they would be bone dry in 80 years.

The global water crisis is the greatest ecological and human threat humanity has ever faced. As vast areas of the planet are becoming desert as we suck the remaining waters out of living ecosystems and drain remaining aquifers in India, China, Australia, most of Africa, all of the Middle East, Mexico, Southern Europe, US Southwest and other places. Dirty water is the biggest killer of children; every day more children die of water borne disease than HIV/AIDS, malaria and war together. In the global South, dirty water kills a child every three and a half seconds. And it is getting worse, fast. By 2030, global demand for water will exceed supply by 40%— an astounding figure foretelling of terrible suffering.

Knowing there will not be enough food and water for all in the near future, wealthy countries and global investment, pension and hedge funds are buying up land and water, fields and forests in the global South, creating a new wave of invasive colonialism that will have huge geo-political ramifications. Rich investors have already bought up an amount of land double the size of the United Kingdom in Africa alone.

We Simply Cannot Continue on the Present Path

I do not think it possible to exaggerate the threat to our earth and every living thing upon it. Quite simply we cannot continue on the path that brought us here. Einstein said that problems cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them. While mouthing platitudes about caring for the earth, most of our governments are deepening the crisis with new plans for expanded resource exploitation, unregulated free trade deals, more invasive investment, the privatization of absolutely everything and unlimited growth. This model of development is literally killing the planet.

Unlimited growth assumes unlimited resources, and this is the genesis of the crisis. Quite simply, to feed the increasing demands of our consumer based system, humans have seen nature as a great resource for our personal convenience and profit, not as a living ecosystem from which all life springs. So we have built our economic and development policies based on a human-centric model and assumed either that nature would never fail to provide or that, where it does fail, technology will save the day.

Two Problems that Hinder the Environmental Movement

From the perspective of the environmental movement, I see two problems that hinder us in our work to stop this carnage. The first is that, with notable exceptions, most environmental groups either have bought into the dominant model of development or feel incapable of changing it. The main form of environmental protection in industrialized countries is based on the regulatory system, legalizing the discharge of large amounts of toxics into the environment.

Environmentalists work to minimize the damage from these systems, essentially fighting for inadequate laws based on curbing the worst practices, but leaving intact the system of economic globalization at the heart of the problem. Trapped inside this paradigm, many environmentalists essentially prop up a deeply flawed system, not imagining they are capable of creating another.

Hence, the support of false solutions such as carbon markets, which, in effect, privatize the atmosphere by creating a new form of property rights over natural resources. Carbon markets are predicated less on reducing emissions than on the desire to make carbon cuts as cheap as possible for large corporations.

Another false solution is the move to turn water into private property, which can then be hoarded, bought and sold on the open market. The latest proposals are for a water pollution market, similar to carbon markets, where companies and countries will buy and sell the right to pollute water. With this kind of privatization comes a loss of public oversight to manage and protect watersheds. Commodifying water renders an earth-centred vision for watersheds and ecosystems unattainable.

Then there is PES, or Payment for Ecological Services, which puts a price tag on ecological goods – clean air, water, soil etc, – and the services such as water purification, crop pollination and carbon sequestration that sustain them. A market model of PES is an agreement between the “holder” and the “consumer” of an ecosystem service, turning that service into an environmental property right. Clearly this system privatizes nature, be it a wetland, lake, forest plot or

mountain, and sets the stage for private accumulation of nature by those wealthy enough to be able to buy, hoard sell and trade it. Already, northern hemisphere governments and private corporations are studying public/private/partnerships to set up lucrative PES projects in the global South. Says Friends of the Earth International, “Governments need to acknowledge that market-based mechanisms and the commodification of biodiversity have failed both biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation.”

The second problem with our movement is one of silos. For too long environmentalists have toiled in isolation from those communities and groups working for human and social justice and for fundamental change to the system. On one hand are the scientists, scholars, and environmentalists warning of a looming ecological crisis and monitoring the decline of the world’s freshwater stocks, energy sources and biodiversity. On the other are the development experts, anti-poverty advocates, and NGOs working to address the inequitable access to food, water and health care and campaigning for these services, particularly in the global South. The assumption is that these are two different sets of problems, one needing a scientific and ecological solution, the other needing a financial solution based on pulling money from wealthy countries, institutions and organizations to find new resources for the poor.

The clearest example I have is in the area I know best, the freshwater crisis. It is finally becoming clear to even the most intransigent silo separatists that the ecological and human water crises are intricately linked, and that to deal effectively with either means dealing with both. The notion that inequitable access can be dealt with by finding more money to pump more groundwater is based on a misunderstanding that assumes unlimited supply, when in fact humans everywhere are overpumping groundwater supplies. Similarly, the hope that communities will cooperate in the restoration of their water systems when they are desperately poor and have no way of conserving or cleaning the limited sources they use is a cruel fantasy. The ecological health of the planet is intricately tied to the need for a just system of water distribution.

The global water justice movement (of which I have the honour of being deeply involved) is, I believe, successfully incorporating concerns about the growing ecological water crisis with the promotion of just economic, food and trade policies to ensure water for all. We strongly believe that fighting for equitable water in a world running out means taking better care of the water we have, not just finding supposedly endless new sources. Through countless gatherings where we took the time to really hear one another – especially grassroots groups and tribal peoples closest to the struggle – we developed a set of guiding principles and a vision for an alternative future that are universally accepted in our movement and have served us well in times of stress. We are also deeply critical of the trade and development policies of the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the World Water Council (whom I call the “Lords of water”), and we openly challenge their model and authority.

Similarly, a fresh and exciting new movement exploded onto the scene in Copenhagen and set all the traditional players on their heads. The climate justice movement whose motto is Change the System, Not the Climate, arrived to challenge not only the stalemate of the government negotiators but the stale state of too cosy alliances between major environmental groups, international institutions and big business – the traditional “players” on the climate scene. Those climate justice warriors went on to gather at another meeting in Cochabamba, Bolivia, producing

a powerful alternative declaration to the weak statement that came out of Copenhagen. The new document forged in Bolivia put the world on notice that business as usual is not on the climate agenda.

How the Commons Fits In

I deeply believe it is time for us to extend these powerful new movements, which fuse the analysis and hard work of the environmental community with the vision and commitment of the justice community, into a whole new form of governance that not only challenges the current model of unlimited growth and economic globalization but promotes an alternative that will allow us and the Earth to survive. Quite simply, human-centred governance systems are not working and we need new economic, development, and environmental policies as well as new laws that articulate an entirely different point of view from that which underpins most governance systems today. At the centre of this new paradigm is the need to protect natural ecosystems and to ensure the equitable and just sharing of their bounty. It also means the recovery of an old concept called the Commons.

The Commons is based on the notion that just by being members of the human family, we all have rights to certain common heritages, be they the atmosphere and oceans, freshwater and genetic diversity, or culture, language and wisdom. In most traditional societies, it was assumed that what belonged to one belonged to all. Many indigenous societies to this day cannot conceive of denying a person or a family basic access to food, air, land, water and livelihood. Many modern societies extended the same concept of universal access to the notion of a social Commons, creating education, health care and social security for all members of the community. Since adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, governments are obliged to protect the human rights, cultural diversity and food security of their citizens.

A central characteristic of the Commons is the need for careful collaborative management of shared resources by those who use them and allocation of access based on a set of priorities. A Commons is not a free-for-all. We are not talking about a return to the notion that nature's capacity to sustain our ways is unlimited and anyone can use whatever they want, however they want, whenever they want. It is rooted rather in a sober and realistic assessment of the true damage that has already been unleashed on the world's biological heritage as well as the knowledge that our ecosystems must be managed and shared in a way that protects them now and for all time.

Also to be recovered and expanded is the notion of the Public Trust Doctrine, a longstanding legal principle which holds that certain natural resources, particularly air, water and the oceans, are central to our very existence and therefore must be protected for the common good and not allowed to be appropriated for private gain. Under the Public Trust Doctrine, governments exercise their fiduciary responsibilities to sustain the essence of these resources for the long-term use and enjoyment of the entire populace, not just the privileged who can buy inequitable access.

The Public Trust Doctrine was first codified in 529 A.D. by Emperor Justinian who declared: "By the laws of nature, these things are common to all mankind: the air, running water, the sea and consequently the shores of the sea." U.S. courts have referred to the Public Trust Doctrine as

a “high, solemn and perpetual duty” and held that the states hold title to the lands under navigable waters “in trust for the people of the State.” Recently, Vermont used the Public Trust Doctrine to protect its groundwater from rampant exploitation, declaring that no one owns this resource but rather, it belongs to the people of Vermont and future generations. The new law also places a priority for this water in times of shortages: water for daily human use, sustainable food production and ecosystem protection takes precedence over water for industrial and commercial use.

An exciting new network of Canadian, American and First Nations communities around the Great Lakes is determined to have these lakes named a Commons, a public trust and a protected bioregion.

Equitable access to natural resources is another key character of the Commons. These resources are not there for the taking by private interests who can then deny them to anyone without means. The human right to land, food, water, health care and biodiversity are being codified as we speak from nation-state constitutions to the United Nations. Ellen Dorsey and colleagues have recently called for a human rights approach to development, where the most vulnerable and marginalized communities take priority in law and practice. They suggest renaming the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goals the Millennium Development Rights and putting the voices of the poor at the centre.

This would require the meaningful involvement of those affected communities, especially Indigenous groups, in designing and implementing development strategies. Community-based governance is another basic tenet of the Commons.

Inspiring Successes Around the Globe

Another crucial tenet of the new paradigm is the need to put the natural world back into the centre of our existence. If we listen, nature will teach us how to live. Again, using the issue I know best, we know exactly what to do to create a secure water future: protection and restoration of watersheds; conservation; source protection; rainwater and storm water harvesting; local, sustainable food production; and meaningful laws to halt pollution. Martin Luther King Jr. said legislation may not change the heart but it will restrain the heartless.

Life and livelihoods have been returned to communities in Rajasthan, India, through a system of rainwater harvesting that has made desertified land bloom and rivers run again thanks to the collective action of villagers. The city of Salisbury South Australia, has become an international wonder for greening desertified land in the wake of historic low flows of the Murray River. It captures every drop of rain that falls from the sky and collects storm and wastewater and funnels it all through a series of wetlands, which clean it, to underground natural aquifers, which store it, until it is needed.

In a “debt for nature” swap, Canada, the U.S. and The Netherlands cancelled the debt owed to them by Colombia in exchange for the money being used for watershed restoration. The most exciting project is the restoration of 16 large wetland areas of the Bogotá River, which is badly contaminated, to pristine condition. Eventually the plan is to clean up the entire river. True to

principles of the Commons, the indigenous peoples living on the sites were not removed, but rather, have become caretakers of these protected and sacred places.

The natural world also needs its own legal framework, what South African environmental lawyer Cormac Cullinen calls “wild law.” The quest is a body of law that recognizes the inherent rights of the environment, other species and water itself outside of their usefulness to humans. A wild law is a law to regulate human behaviour in order to protect the integrity of the earth and all species on it. It requires a change in the human relationship with the natural world from one of exploitation to one of democracy with other beings. If we are members of the earth’s community, then our rights must be balanced against those of plants, animals, rivers and ecosystems. In a world governed by wild law, the destructive, human-centred exploitation of the natural world would be unlawful. Humans would be prohibited from deliberately destroying functioning ecosystems or driving other species to extinction.

This kind of legal framework is already being established. The Indian Supreme Court has ruled that protection of natural lakes and ponds is akin to honouring the right to life – the most fundamental right of all according to the Court. Wild law was the inspiration behind an ordinance in Tamaqua Borough, Pennsylvania that recognized natural ecosystems and natural communities within the borough as “legal persons” for the purposes of stopping the dumping of sewage sludge on wild land. It has been used throughout New England in a series of local ordinances to prevent bottled water companies from setting up shop in the area. Residents of Mount Shasta California have put a wild law ordinance on the November 2010 ballot to prevent cloud seeding and bulk water extraction within city limits.

In 2008, Ecuador’s citizens voted two thirds in support of a new constitution, which says, “Natural communities and ecosystems possess the unalienable right to exist, flourish and evolve within Ecuador. Those rights shall be self-executing, and it shall be the duty and right of all Ecuadorian governments, communities, and individuals to enforce those rights.” Bolivia has recently amended its constitution to enshrine the philosophy of “living well” as a means of expressing concern with the current model of development and signifying affinity with nature and the need for humans to recognize inherent rights of the earth and other living beings. The government of Argentina recently moved to protect its glaciers by banning mining and oil drilling in ice zones. The law sets standards for protecting glaciers and surrounding ecosystems and creates penalties just for harming the country’s fresh water heritage.

The most far-reaching proposal for the protection of nature itself is the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth that was drafted at the April 2010 World People’s Conference on Climate Change in Cochabamba, Bolivia and endorsed by the 35,000 participants there. We are writing a book setting out our case for this Declaration to the United Nations and the world. The intent is for it to become a companion document to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Every now and then in history, the human race takes a collective step forward in its evolution. Such a time is upon us now as we begin to understand the urgent need to protect the earth and its ecosystems from which all life comes. The Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth must become a history-altering covenant toward a just and sustainable future for all.

What Can We Do Right Now?

What might this mean for funders and other who share these values? Well, let me be clear: the hard work of those fighting environmental destruction and injustice must continue. I am not suggesting for one moment that his work is not important or that the funding for this work is not needed. I do think however, that there are ways to move the agenda I have outlined here forward if we put our minds to it.

Anything that helps bridge the solitudes and silos is pure gold. Bringing together environmentalists and justice activists to understand one another's work and perspective is crucial. Both sides have to dream into being – together – the world they know is possible and not settle for small improvements to the one we have. This means working for a whole different economic, trade and development model even while fighting the abuses existing in the current one. Given a choice between funding an environmental organization that basically supports the status quo with minor changes and one that promotes a justice agenda as well, I would argue for the latter.

Support that increases capacity at the base is also very important, as is funding that connects domestic to international struggle, always related even when not apparent. Funding for those projects and groups fighting to abolish or fundamentally change global trade and banking institutions that maintain corporate dominance and promote unlimited and unregulated growth is still essential.

How Clean Water Became a Human Right

We all, as well, have to find ways to thank and protect those groups and governments going out on a limb to promote an agenda for true change. A very good example is President Evo Morales of Bolivia, who brought the climate justice movement together in Cochabamba last April and is leading the campaign at the UN to promote the Rights of Mother Earth.

It was this small, poor, largely indigenous landlocked country, and its former coca-farmer president, that introduced a resolution to recognize the human right to water and sanitation this past June to the UN General Assembly, taking the whole UN community by surprise. The Bolivian UN Ambassador, Pablo Solon, decided he was fed up with the “commissions” and “further studies” and “expert consultations” that have managed to put off the question of the right to water for at least a decade at the UN and that it was time to put an “up or down” question to every country: do you or do you not support the human right to drinking water and sanitation?

A mad scramble ensued as a group of Anglo-Western countries, all promoting to some extent the notion of water as a private commodity, tried to derail the process and put off the vote. The U.S., Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand even cooked up a “consensus” resolution that was so bland everyone would likely have handily voted for it at an earlier date. But sitting beside the real thing, it looked like what it was – an attempt, yet again, to put off any meaningful commitment at the UN to the billions suffering from lack of clean water. When that didn't work, they toiled behind the scenes to weaken the wording of the Bolivian resolution but to no avail. On July 28, 2010, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly voted to adopt a resolution

recognizing the human right to water and sanitation. One hundred and twenty two countries voted for the resolution; 41 abstained; not one had the courage to vote against.

I share this story with you not only because my team and I were deeply involved in the lead up to this historic vote and there for it the day it was presented, but because it was the culmination of work done by a movement operating on the principles I have outlined above.

We took the time to establish the common principles that water is a Commons that belongs to the earth, all species, and the future, and is a fundamental human right not to be appropriated for profit. We advocate for the Public Trust Doctrine in law at every level of government. We set out to build a movement that listens first and most to the poorest among us, especially indigenous and tribal voices. We work with communities and groups in other movements, especially those working on climate justice and trade justice. We understand the need for careful collaborative cooperation to restore the functioning of watersheds and we have come to revere the water that gives life to all things upon the Earth. While we clearly have much left to do, these water warriors inspire me and give me hope. They get me out of bed every morning to fight another day.

I believe I am in a room full of stewards and want, then to leave you with these words from *Lord of the Rings*. This is Gandalf speaking the night before he faces a terrible force that threatens all living beings. His words are for you.

—“The rule of no realm is mine, but all worthy things that are in peril, as the world now stand, those are my care. And for my part, I shall not wholly fail in my task if anything passes through this night that can still grow fair, or bear fruit, and flower again in the days to come.

For I too am a steward, did you not know?” —J.R.R. Tolkien

<http://www.commondreams.org/view/2010/10/13-6>

October 16, 2010

Traditional Circle Elder Jake Swamp (Tekaronianeken) Passes to Spirit World

North Country Now

Jake Swamp-Tekaronianeken, 68, the Wolf Clan Mohawk diplomat, author, teacher, chief, husband, father, grandparent and great-grandparent passed into the spirit world on October 15, 2010 in Massena.

Swamp was one of the most respected and honoured Mohawk Iroquois leaders of the past century. He was a member of the Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs for over three decades, a position in which he served as a counselor, spiritual leader, legislator and ambassador. He was an exceptional orator with a powerful command of the Mohawk language. He possessed great

knowledge as to the cultural heritage of the Haudenosaunee and shared that wisdom not only with his people but at forums, conferences and classes across the planet. He was known not only for his knowledge but for his teaching skills which were defined by his unique sense of humour.

When Skennenrahawi (the Peacemaker) established the Haudenosaunee Confederacy nearly 1000 years ago he set standards for leadership which were embodied in Tekaronianeken. He was patient, compassionate, humble, generous, intelligent and kind. Whenever he was called upon to serve the needs of the Haudenosaunee he did so without hesitation. He established the Tree of Peace Society in 1984 to promote the teachings of the Skennenrahawi while advocating greater ecological awareness and sensitivity. Swamp planted hundreds of Peace Trees in many nations, an activity begun with the founding of the Confederacy. Through his example millions of trees have taken root around the world from Israel to Australia, Venezuela to Spain and in all regions of North America.

Jake Swamp was a founder of the Akwesasne Freedom School in 1979 and helped develop a curriculum which was based on the traditional values of the Haudenosaunee. He managed Radio CKON at Akwesasne and not only oversaw its Native based programming but helped secure its status as the only Native licensed broadcast facility in the Americas.

Swamp served as a Mohawk Nation diplomat in many instances. He addressed the Fourth Russell Tribunal in the Netherlands, was a delegate to the United Nations, met with leaders of foreign nations and advised representatives from the US Congress and Canadian Parliament. He worked closely with scholars to have the US Senate pass a resolution acknowledging the influence of the Haudenosaunee on the US Constitution and thereby initiated a revolution in the understanding of American history. He was a delegate to two sessions of the World Parliament of Religions where he was affectionately called "el jeffe".

As a member of the Mohawk Nation, Tekaronianeken took an active role in preserving the ceremonial activities of the longhouse people. At each one of the rituals he rose from his seat as a Wolf Clan leader to address the people, with the beauty of his words calling their attention to those rituals which express the nation's collective gratitude to the natural world for the blessings of life. He presented infants to the people, gave advice to newlyweds and spoke words of condolence to those who suffered the loss of their loved ones.

There is another requirement for leadership set by Skennenrahawi, perhaps the most important of all. Before one can become a leader that person has to have the love and support of their family and must in turn love them; peace in the home brought about clarity in council. Tekaronianeken was a devoted family man, married to Judy Point Swamp for 49 years. Theirs was a solid and stable union defined by mutual respect, admiration and a quiet yet powerful affection. Jake was a highly skilled ironworker, he was one of the legendary Mohawk "skywalkers", travelling great

distances to provide for his wife and children. This determination to insure his family's health and security was a legacy of his parents, the late Leo and Charlotte Papineau Swamp. Jake was the second child of fourteen, in a family raised to be self reliant, hardworking and creative.

He is leaving behind seven children, twenty three grandchildren, and thirteen great grandchildren, many of whom are now assuming their own leadership roles within the Nation. He was a devoted lacrosse fan and an avid gardener and was rightly proud of the athletic skills of his family.

It is taught by the Haudenosaunee that whatever one does in life it is essential to leave things better than when they were found, to take into consideration the effect of one's actions on the seventh generation into the future. Throughout his wonderful life Tekaronianeken abided by this principle. Through his books, his words and his actions he brought great honour to his family, his community, the Mohawk Nation and the Haudenosaunee.

He is survived by his wife, Judy; 7 children, Andrew Swamp; Angela (Alec) Elijah, Glenn (Shannon) Swamp, Philip (Terri) Swamp, Leona (Ryan) Phillips, Kahontineh Swamp (Gibson), Skahendowaneh (Cheyanne) Swamp, all of Akwesasne; 23 grandchildren, 13 great grandchildren; 12 siblings, Leonard Swamp, Raymond Swamp, Lawrence (Dyan) Swamp, Herman (Diane), Cecilia (Paul) King, Janice Sharrow (Vince Phillips), Shirley Oakes, Elizabeth (Kevin) Nanticoke, Ronald (Joanne) Swamp, Roy (Peggy) Swamp, Josephine Swamp, and Theresa (Sky) Fox; a sister-in-law, Sylvia Swamp, all of Akwesasne, and many nieces and nephews.

He was predeceased by his parents; a brother, Joseph; a grandson, Rathahi:ne; and a granddaughter, Kanentakwas.

Friends may call at the Akwesasne Homemakers, River Road, Akwesasne, Quebec, beginning Saturday 7:00 PM until 10:00 AM Monday. Funeral services will be held Monday 11:00 AM at the Mohawk Nation Longhouse. Burial will follow in Solomon Road Cemetery in Frogtown, Akwesasne. Arrangements are with the Donaldson Funeral Home, Massena.

Flowers and other support may be sent to the Swamp family: 326 Cook Road, Akwesasne, NY 13655.

Condolences may be made online at www.donaldsonfh.com.

<http://northcountrynow.com/obituaries/jacob-tekaronhianeken-swamp-68-akwesasne>

October 18, 2010

Saving North America's sacred sites

More than two dozen sites sacred to Native Americans are at risk of being destroyed by 'development at any cost'

By John Schertow
The Guardian

Whether it's an ancient burial ground, a simple cave that witnessed the birth of a language not heard in centuries or the mountain home of a spirit that brings abundance to an entire ecosystem, every culture has its sacred sites. They provide an irreplaceable sense of continuity, identity, purpose, sustenance and fulfilment.

However, one culture's sacred site may be nothing more than empty space to another. This is frequently the case in countries such as Canada and the US, where more than [two dozen sacred sites](#) are in danger of being desecrated and destroyed.

One such site currently making a lot of headlines is the [Glen Cove burial site](#) and shell mound in Vallejo, California. Over the course of 3,500 years, the 15-acre site, known to the Ohlone peoples as Sogorea Te, was a traditional meeting place for more than 100 [indigenous nations](#). Over the centuries, it became the final resting place for thousands of people.

However, as far as the Greater Vallejo Recreation District (GVRD) and the city of Vallejo are concerned, the site is simply undeveloped land which, they say, they have a "responsibility" to put to good use. That's why they're about to convert the entire site into a public park with its own trails, picnic tables, toilets and parking lot. Native Americans say the plan [couldn't be more insulting](#) or sacrilegious. But the GVRD and their partners are beyond reproach. A court ruling may not even stop them from getting their way.

Another site making headlines is [Fish Lake](#), also known as [Teztan Biny](#), in south-central British Columbia. Canadian company Taseko Mines wants to [empty the pristine lake](#) so it can use it as a permanent storage site for its toxic mine waste rock.

The proposal is beyond unacceptable to the [Xeni Gwet'in](#), who are part of the [Tsilhqot'in](#) nation, because the lake and surrounding area is so important to them: it's the site of pit houses and burial grounds, a place of worship and ceremony, a school for children to learn their culture and a place to gather foods and medicines. The lake itself is home to an endemic species of rainbow trout that Taseko wants to transport to a brand new, smaller, man-made lake that can't accommodate the current trout population. In essence, Taseko's plan, which could be approved any day, will rob the indigenous people of their cultural, religious and economic wealth. Whether we're talking about Glen Cove, Teztan Biny or any other endangered sacred site, there is a cultural conflict at play that casually disregards religious beliefs, human rights and people's basic needs.

It is "development at any cost", which is a cultural belief like any other, but one that is decimating what Wade Davis has termed the "ethnosphere". A National Geographic explorer-in-residence, Davis [defines](#) the ethnosphere as "the sum total of all thoughts and dreams, myths, intuitions and inspirations brought into being by the human imagination since the dawn of consciousness ... humanity's great legacy." Sacred sites are part of it. And without them a culture may lose its foundation, making it as vulnerable as a human body no immune system.

Indigenous peoples are doing what they can to protect such a [wealth](#), but it's an uphill battle. In many cases they're going at it alone: against corporations, their lobby groups and every level of government. If they fail, we are all diminished.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/oct/18/sacred-sites-native-american>

October 20, 2010

India set to be first country to publish 'natural wealth' accounts

Accounts of the nation's 'natural capital' meets key demand of the UN study of The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB)

By Juliette Jowit
The Guardian

[India](#) is today expected to become the first country in the world to commit to publishing a new set of accounts which track the nation's plants, [animals](#), [water](#) and other "natural wealth" as well as financial measurements such as GDP.

The announcement is due to be made at [a meeting of world governments in Japan to try to halt global destruction of biodiversity](#), and it is hoped that such a move by a major developing economy will prompt other countries to join the initiative.

Work on agreeing common measures, such as the value of ecosystems and their "services" for humans – from relaxation to clean air and fertile soils – will be co-ordinated by the World Bank, which hopes it can sign up 10-12 nations and publish the results by 2015 at the latest.

The move fulfils one of the key demands of a major report also being published today at the Japan meeting, a UN study of [The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity \(TEEB\)](#) .

The report was commissioned by the G8+5 major nations in 2007 in the hope of repeating the success of Lord Stern's report on [climate change](#) in persuading governments of the strong economic case to take action on saving the natural world.

The environment secretary, Caroline Spelman, welcomed the report: "TEEB can have the same impact for [biodiversity](#) as Stern had for climate change and will be a useful tool to help reduce the loss of species and habitats ... economically, we have to take action to reduce the loss of our natural environment before the cost becomes too high."

Pavan Sukhdev, economist and the TEEB study leader said: "Natural capital is a massive asset class, and developing nations' biggest asset." For it to be missing from the balance sheet of the nation, or for failures not to be counted, does not make sense."

After India and the other countries that join it in the first ecosystem accounts, Sukhdev said he hoped another 20-30 would adopt the system over the following three to five years.

"The rest: if they are not with it, people will get left behind," he added. "We'll never have all 192 countries, but does that matter? The idea is to establish the direction in which national accounting must go."

After the publication over the past two years of an interim report and specific documents about the economics and recommended actions by governments, businesses and [citizens](#), Teeb will today publish its final "synthesis" report.

This will not contain a specific headline value for all the world's biodiversity, although earlier versions have quoted huge values for individual ecosystems such as forests, and Sukhdev today talks of ["the multi-trillion dollar importance" of the natural world](#).

However it argues that there is plenty of evidence for national and local governments, businesses and individuals to radically review how they make decisions to take into account the damage or preservation of biodiversity.

"Teeb's approach can reset the economic compass," says Sukhdev. "Do nothing, and not only do we lose trillions of dollars' worth of current and future benefits to society, we also further impoverish the poor and put future generations at risk. The time for ignoring biodiversity and persisting with conventional thinking regarding wealth creation and development is over. We must get on to the path towards a green economy."

Among the report's recommendations are that countries and companies should publish accounts of their natural capital, and how much it has increased or decreased over the previous year, in parallel with traditional financial accounts. This should help address current accounting rules which, for example, measure the clean up of a pollution spill as an increase in economic activity (by the clean up companies), but take no account of the long-term damage done.

Such all-encompassing measures would be more likely to encourage other suggested changes, such as paying people to protect or restore ecosystems, refunding people who do not cut down forests or farmers who reduce chemical fertilisers and pesticides; and better certification schemes so that those who produce products and services, such as food and drink, in more environmentally friendly ways, can get recognition and charge higher prices to cover extra costs.

The report also calls for reform of subsidies for damaging industries, such as mining and intensive farming, and tougher fines for polluters to discourage the problem and pay for proper restoration.

In a written statement for the TEEB launch and his own country's announcement, India's minister for environment and forests, Jairam Ramesh, said: "Teeb aims to provide strong incentives for countries to ensure decisions are not solely based on short-term gains, but build foundations for sustainable and inclusive development."

Among the figures collected by the report team were an estimate that at present rates deforestation would cost the global economy US\$2-4.5tr (£1.27-2.86tr) a year by the middle of this century; while the estimated market for certified agricultural products, such as organic, would be \$210bn (£133bn) by 2020. Another quoted by TEEB, by Trucost in London, found the [total environmental damage by the world's 3,000 biggest listed companies in 2008 added up to at least US\\$2.2tr \(£1.40tr\)](#).

"TEEB has brought to the attention of the globe that nature's goods and services are equally if not far more central to the wealth of nations including the poor – a fact that will be increasingly the case on a planet of finite resources with a population set to rise to 9 billion people by 2050," said Achim Steiner, UN under-secretary general and executive director of the [UN Environment Programme](#) .

TEEB in numbers

US\$50bn - The annual loss of opportunity due to the current over-exploitation of global fisheries. Competition between highly subsidised industrial fishing fleets coupled with poor regulation and weak enforcement of existing rules has led to over-exploitation of most commercially valuable fish stocks, reducing the income from global marine fisheries by US\$50bn annually, compared with a more sustainable fishing scenario (World Bank and FAO 2009).

€153bn - Insect pollinators are nature's multibillion-dollar providers. For 2005 the total economic value of insect pollination was estimated at €153bn. This represents 9.5% of world agricultural output for human food in 2005 (Gallai et al 2009)

US\$30bn - 172bn The annual value of human welfare benefits provided by coral reefs. Although just covering 1.2% of the world's continent shelves, coral reefs are home to an estimated 1-3 million species including more than a quarter of all marine fish species (Allsopp et al 2009). Thirty million people in coastal and island communities are totally reliant on reef-based resources as their primary means of food production, income and livelihood (Gomez et al 1994, Wilkinson 2004). Estimates of the value of human welfare benefits provided by coral reefs range from US\$30bn (Cesar et al 2003) to US\$172bn annually (Martinez et al 2007)

US\$ 20-67m (over four years)The benefits of tree planting in the city of Canberra. Local authorities in Canberra, Australia, have planted 400,000 trees to regulate microclimate, reduce pollution and thereby improve urban air quality, reduce energy costs for air conditioning as well as store and sequester carbon. These benefits are expected to amount to US\$20-67m over the period 2008-2012, in terms of the value generated or savings realised for the City (Brack 2002).

US\$6.5bn – The amount saved by New York, by investing in payments to maintain natural water purification services in the Catskills watershed (US\$1-1.5bn) rather than opt for the man-made solution of a filtration plant (US\$6-8bn plus US\$ 300-500m a year operating costs). (Perrot-Maitre and Davis 2001).

50 - The number of (rupees) millionaires in Hiware Bazaar, India as the result of regenerating 70 hectares of degraded forests. This led to the number of active wells in the surrounding area doubling, grass production increasing and income from agriculture increasing due to the enhancement of local ecosystem services (Teeb case mainly based on Neha Sakhuja).

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/oct/20/india-natural-wealth-accounts>

October 20, 2010

Nagoya 2010: Report puts economic value of nature on the global political radar

United Nations Environment Programme

Nagoya, Japan - The economic importance of the world's natural assets is now firmly on the political radar as a result of an international assessment showcasing the enormous economic value of forests, freshwater, soils and coral reefs, as well as the social and economic costs of their loss, was the conclusion of The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) report launched today by TEEB study leader, Pavan Sukhdev.

"TEEB has documented not only the multi-trillion dollar importance to the global economy of the natural world, but the kinds of policy-shifts and smart market mechanisms that can embed fresh thinking in a world beset by a rising raft of multiple challenges. The good news is that many communities and countries are already seeing the potential of incorporating the value of nature into decision-making," said Mr. Sukhdev, a banker who heads up the Green Economy Initiative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

He was speaking at the launch of the two-year study, which has involved hundreds of experts from around the world, at the Convention on Biological Diversity's 10th Conference of Parties meeting (CBD COP10) in Nagoya.

The TEEB study calls for wider recognition of nature's contribution to human livelihoods, health, security, and culture by decision-makers at all levels (local to national and business to citizens). It promotes the demonstration, and where appropriate, the capture of the economic values of nature's services through an array of policy instruments and mechanisms.

Countries such as India have already announced plans for implementing the economic valuation of their natural capital as well as the value of nature's services in decision-making.

"TEEB's approach can reset the economic compass and herald a new era in which the value of nature's services is made visible and becomes an explicit part of policy and business decision-

making. Do nothing, and not only do we lose trillions worth of current and future benefits to society, we also further impoverish the poor and put future generations at risk," said Mr. Sukhdev.

"The time for ignoring biodiversity and persisting with conventional thinking regarding wealth creation and development is over. We must get on to the path towards a green economy," he added.

Nature is crucial to prosperity and development

In TEEB's final report, "Mainstreaming the Economics of Nature", there are three scenarios: a natural ecosystem (forests), a human settlement (city), and a business sector (mining), to illustrate how the economic concepts and tools described in TEEB can help equip society with the means to incorporate the values of nature into decision-making at all levels.

With more than half of the human population now living in urban areas, cities have a crucial role to play in acknowledging the natural capital required to maintain and improve the well-being of their residents. Innovative economic instruments and policies are emerging that reward good practice. For example, the Japanese city of Nagoya (host to the COP-10 meeting), has implemented a new system of tradeable development rights whereby developers wishing to exceed existing limits on high-rise buildings can offset their impacts by buying and conserving areas of Japan's traditional agricultural landscape. Discounts on bank loans for buildings that receive a higher 'star rating' based on a green certification system designed by city authorities also create incentives for more green space within city projects.

An important finding of many studies reviewed by TEEB is the contribution of forests and other ecosystems to the livelihoods of poor rural households, and therefore the significant potential for conservation efforts to contribute to poverty reduction. It has been estimated that ecosystem services and other non-marketed natural goods account for 47 to 89 per cent of the so-called 'GDP of the Poor' (i.e. the effective GDP or total sources of livelihoods of rural and forest-dwelling poor households) in some large developing countries.

"In the past only traditional sectors such as manufacturing, mining, retailing, construction and energy generation were uppermost in the minds of economic planners and ministers of finance, development and trade. TEEB has brought to the world's attention that nature's goods and services are equal, if not far more central, to the wealth of nations including the poor—a fact that will be increasingly the case on a planet of finite resources with a population set to rise to nine billion people by 2050," said Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director.

Failure to account for the value of natural capital poses significant business and social risks

The report also drives home the message that failure of business to account for the value of natural capital, particularly in sectors such as mining, can pose significant business and social risks. The UK-based consultancy, TruCost, estimated that the negative impacts, or

'environmental externalities', of the world's top 3,000 listed companies totals around US\$ 2.2 trillion annually.

Approaches such as Net Positive Impact, wetland mitigation and bio-banking can help ensure that developers take responsibility for their environmental footprint. As consumers and governments opt for greener purchasing choices the business sector also stands to make considerable gains: by 2020 the annual market size for certified agricultural products is expected to be US\$210 billion; payments for water related ecosystem services US\$6 billion; and voluntary biodiversity offsets in the region of US\$100 million a year.

Countries give nature the green light

Countries are already taking steps to adopt the TEEB approach. India's Minister for Environment and Forests, Mr. Jairam Ramesh, said today that the TEEB study provides practical guidance for new economic approaches that India will start to implement.

"TEEB aims to provide strong incentives for countries to ensure decisions are not solely based on short-term gains, but build foundations for sustainable and inclusive development. India is planning a TEEB for India study to assess its natural capital. We are committed to developing a framework for green national accounts that we can implement by 2015, and we are confident that the TEEB for India Study will be the key facilitator for the same," said Mr. Ramesh.

The European Commission and Germany saw the benefits of the TEEB study at the Potsdam G8+5 Environment Ministers meeting in 2007 and applauded its conclusions.

"The European Commission has supported the project from the start and will continue to work on these issues after COP 10, taking into account the decisions that will be adopted in Nagoya. We intend to launch a study to examine more in detail the evidence available in an EU context and areas for implementation of the analyses developed by TEEB in our policies. The Commission is also willing to support initiatives by other countries, in particular developing countries, to demonstrate the benefits and costs of investing in the management of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Notably, we plan to work in partnership with UNDP for supporting assessments in interested developing countries and making the links with economic sectors and development plans," said Janez Potočnik, European Commissioner for the Environment.

Japan, the host country of the 10th Conference of Parties meeting on the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD COP10), also welcomed the study.

"The Japanese Government has contributed to the TEEB study, and has conducted research on economic evaluation and policy responses on Japan's biodiversity in close cooperation with TEEB. Japan welcomes the launching of TEEB at Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, in the International Year for Biodiversity. We expect the TEEB study will deliver significant impacts on global biodiversity policy. To support this new approach, Japan, as COP10 presidency, would like to proactively contribute to national, regional and global initiatives to implement aspects of the TEEB study," said Mr. Hideki Minamikawa, Vice-Minister for Global Environmental Affairs in the Ministry of the Environment Japan.

Braulio Dias, Secretary for Biodiversity and Forests of Brazil's Ministry for Environment, welcomed the TEEB study saying it offers sound guidance and a powerful message to reset the economic compass. "As one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, Brazil's government and business sectors are taking the TEEB recommendations very seriously and can see that the era of the invisibility of the value of nature must end. At a national level we are in discussions to implement a TEEB study of our natural capital, and the Brazilian business sector is also planning to move towards this practical and sustainable approach to decision-making," he said.

The TEEB study concludes with the following recommendations:

1. Public disclosure of -and accountability for -impacts on nature should be essential outcomes of the biodiversity assessment.
2. The present system of national accounts should be rapidly upgraded to include the value of changes in natural capital stocks and ecosystem service flows.
3. An urgent priority is to draw up consistent physical accounts for forest stocks and ecosystem services, both of which are required, for example, for the development of new forest carbon mechanisms and incentives.
4. The annual reports and accounts of business and other organizations should disclose all major externalities, including environmental damage affecting society and changes in natural assets not currently disclosed in the statutory accounts.
5. The principles of 'No Net Loss' or 'Net Positive Impact' should be considered as normal business practice, using robust biodiversity performance benchmarks and assurance processes to avoid and mitigate damage, together with pro-biodiversity investment to compensate for adverse impacts that cannot be avoided.
6. The principles of 'polluter pays' and 'full-cost-recovery' are powerful guidelines for the realignment of incentive structures and fiscal reform. In some contexts, the principle of 'beneficiary pays' can be invoked to support new positive incentives such as payments for ecosystem services, tax breaks and other fiscal transfers that aim to encourage private and public sector actors to provide ecosystem services.
7. Governments should aim for full disclosure of subsidies, measuring and reporting them annually in order that their perverse components may be recognized, tracked and eventually phased out.
8. The establishment of comprehensive, representative, effective and equitably managed systems of national and regional protected areas should be pursued (especially in the high-seas) in order to conserve biodiversity and maintain a wide range of ecosystem services. Ecosystem valuation can help to justify protected areas policy, identify funding and investment opportunities, and inform conservation priorities.

9. Ecosystem conservation and restoration should be regarded as a viable investment option in support of climate change mitigation and adaptation. Within the UNFCCC process, REDD-Plus should be prioritized for accelerated implementation, beginning with pilot projects and efforts to strengthen capacity in developing countries to help them establish credible systems of monitoring and verification that will allow for the full deployment of the instrument.

10. Human dependence on ecosystem services and particularly their role as a lifeline for many poor households needs to be more fully integrated into policy. This applies both to targeting development interventions as well as to evaluating the social impacts of policies that affect the environment.

It is envisaged that the TEEB study will continue with ongoing work on outreach and capacity building. **The TEEB reports are available at www.teebweb.org.**

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Notes to Editors:

In addition to the launch of the final synthesis Mainstreaming the Economics of Nature, TEEB Ecological and Economic Foundations is published today by Earthscan. The volume synthesizes state-of-the-art knowledge on a range of issues that are central to applying economic valuation to ecosystem services and biodiversity. A further three volumes based on the TEEB reports will be published by Earthscan over the next 15 months.

TEEB is an independent study, led by Pavan Sukhdev, hosted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), with financial support from the European Commission, Germany, UK, the Netherlands, Norway, Belgium, Sweden and Japan.

Mainstreaming the Economics of Nature is the last in a series of interconnected reports: TEEB Ecological and Economic Foundations, coordinated by Pushpam Kumar of the University of Liverpool; TEEB for Policy Makers coordinated by Patrick ten Brink of the Institute of European Environmental Policy (IEEP); TEEB for Local and Regional Policy Makers coordinated by Heidi Wittmer of the UFZ Helmholtz Research Centre and Haripriya Gundimeda of the Indian Institute of Technology; and TEEB for Business coordinated by Josh Bishop of IUCN. A TEEB for citizens website can be found at www.teeb4me.com.

US\$ 50 billion

The annual loss of opportunity due to the current over-exploitation of global fisheries. Competition between highly subsidized industrial fishing fleets coupled with poor regulation and

weak enforcement of existing rules has led to over-exploitation of most commercially valuable fish stocks, reducing the income from global marine fisheries by US\$50 billion annually, compared to a more sustainable fishing scenario (World Bank and FAO 2009).

Euros 153 billion

Insect pollinators are nature's multi-billion dollar providers. For 2005 the total economic value of insect pollination was estimated at Euros 153 billion. This represents 9.5% of world agricultural output for human food in 2005. (Gallai et al. 2009)

US\$30 billion US\$172 billion

The annual value of human welfare benefits provided by coral reefs. Although just covering 1.2% of the world's continent shelves, coral reefs are home to an estimated 1-3 million species including more than a quarter of all marine fish species. (Allsopp et al. 2009). Some 30 million people in coastal and island communities are totally reliant on reef-based resources as their primary means of food production, income and livelihood. (Gomez et al. 1994, Wilkinson 2004) Estimates of the value of human welfare benefits provided by coral reefs range from US\$30 billion (Cesar et al. 2003) to US\$172 billion annually (Martinez et al. 2007)

US\$20 -US\$67 million (over four years)

The benefits of tree planting in the city of Canberra. Local authorities in Canberra, Australia, have planted 400,000 trees to regulate microclimate, reduce pollution and thereby improve urban air quality, reduce energy costs for air conditioning as well as store and sequester carbon. These benefits are expected to amount to some US\$20-US\$67 million over the period 2008-2012, in terms of the value generated or savings realized for the city. (Brack 2002)

US\$6.5 billion

The amount saved by New York, by investing in payments to maintain natural water purification services in the Catskills watershed. (US\$1-US\$1.5 billion) rather than opt for the man-made solution of a filtration plant (US\$ 6-8 billion plus US\$300-500 million/year operating costs). (Perrot-Maitre and Davis 2001).

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The number of (rupees) millionaires in Hiware Bazaar, India, as the result of regenerating 70 hectares of degraded forests. This led to the number of active wells in the surrounding area doubling, grass production increasing and income from agriculture increasing due to the enhancement of local ecosystem services (a TEEB case mainly based on Neha Sakhuja).

Further examples available at www.teebweb.org

<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=649&ArticleID=6791&l=en&t=long>

October 22, 2010

Why did the U.N. proclaim World Interfaith Harmony Week?

By Tom Heneghan
Reuters

The United Nations General Assembly passes a stack of resolutions every year and many of them go all but unnoticed. One such document just approved in New York established a new World Interfaith Harmony Week. High-minded resolutions put most news junkies to sleep, so it's probably no surprise this one got such scant media coverage (see [here](#) and [here](#)). But there's more to this one than meets the glazed-over eye.

The [resolution, accepted by consensus on Wednesday](#), urged all member states to designate the first week of February every year as the World Interfaith Harmony Week. It asked them to *“support, on a voluntary basis, the spread of the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world’s churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other places of worship during that week based on Love of God and Love of the Neighbour, or based on Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbour, each according to their own religious traditions or convictions.”*

Amid the standard legal wording of U.N. resolutions, that phrase *“Love of God and Love of the Neighbour”* stands out both as a rare example of religious belief in an official document like this and an unmistakable hint at the authorship of this text. Readers of this blog will recognise it as a trademark phrase of the [Common Word group](#), the Muslim scholars who have been pursuing better interfaith understanding through dialogue with Christian churches. They've held a number of conferences with different churches and two of the manifesto's signatories last week became [the first Muslims to address a Vatican synod](#) of bishops. Now the group is pursuing its mission on the diplomatic stage with an appeal to governments to help foster interfaith contacts.

Jordan's [King Abdullah proposed the idea](#) to the General Assembly on Sept. 23: *“It is ... essential to resist forces of division that spread misunderstanding and mistrust, especially among peoples of different religions. The fact is, humanity everywhere is bound together, not only by mutual interests, but by shared commandments to love God and neighbour, to love the good and neighbour ... What we are proposing is a special week during which the world’s people, in their own places of worship, could express the teachings of their own faith about tolerance, respect for the other and peace.”*

Before the vote on Wednesday, Jordan's Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal presented the resolution to the General Assembly. In his speech ([full text here](#)), Ghazi, who is coordinator of the Common Word group, provided details on the thinking behind this initiative. *“Our world is rife with religious tension and, sadly, mistrust, dislike and hatred,”* he said. *“The misuse or abuse of religions can thus be a cause of world strife, whereas religions should be a great foundation for facilitating world peace.”*

“Much good work has already been done towards this,” said the prince, who is the king’s personal envoy and special advisor. “Yet the forces inciting interreligious tensions (notable among them being religious fundamentalisms of various kinds) are better organised, more experienced, better coordinated, more motivated and more ruthless. They have more stratagems, more institutes, more money, more power and garner more publicity such that they by far outweigh all the positive work done by the various interfaith initiatives. The sad proof of this is that religious tensions are on the rise, not on the decline.”

The idea behind the resolution is to give religious leaders and thousands of interfaith groups around the world a common date to organise around. Ghazi described it as *“harnessing and utilising the collective might of the world’s second-largest infrastructure (that of places of worship — the largest being that of education) specifically for peace and harmony in the world ...”*

Then came an interesting part. The prince said the aim of the week was *“permanently and regularly encouraging the silent majority of preachers to declare themselves for peace and harmony and providing a ready-made vehicle for them to do so ... if preachers and teachers commit themselves on the record once a year to peace and harmony, this means that when the next interreligious crisis or provocation occurs, they cannot then relapse into parochial fear and mistrust, and will be more likely to resist the winds of popular demagoguery ...”*

This is the same idea behind the Common Word manifesto, which aims to give a voice to a silent majority of Muslims who oppose religious extremism but don’t have a ready network to make their declarations heard. Around the world, there are countless groups and projects promoting dialogue and understanding among all sorts of religions, but their message isn’t always heard. Some of these dialogues are well organised, while many are simply local meetings that pass unnoticed outside the group of participants. At the same time, the opponents of interfaith harmony are, as Ghazi put it, *“better organised, more experienced, better coordinated, more motivated and more ruthless.”*

By launching World Interfaith Harmony Week, this little-noticed resolution aims to give those working for understanding and dialogue a stronger voice as well. It’s a modest first step and we won’t know until next February (and the following February, and the Februarys after that) how much of an effect it will have. But at a time when the forces of religious intolerance are on the rise, as many headlines in our news service show, we can’t forget the many voices preaching the opposite message.

What do you think of this initiative?

<http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2010/10/22/why-did-the-u-n-proclaim-world-interfaith-harmony-week/>

October 27, 2010

CT Faith Leaders Honored for Energy Stewardship

Credible

MIDDLETOWN -- [Connecticut Interfaith Power and Light](#) announces the first annual Ripple Awards at [First Church of Christ](#), 190 Court St. in [Middletown](#) Nov. 21 from 2 to 4 p.m.

The Ripple Awards is the first annual celebration of the houses of worship and faith around [Connecticut](#) who have learned and implemented energy saving strategies at their property. Teams from nearly 200 Connecticut congregations are invited to tell the story – in word, poster or photo – of the efforts they have undertaken. Many teams are graduates of CTIPL's This Old House of Worship. Some have also worked with the utility companies and private vendors to study and implement their upgrades. Two of the regional groups which took This Old House of Worship also initiated municipal level action on climate change in their towns. These two groups, Willimantic Area Interfaith Ministries and [Wethersfield Interfaith Green Committee](#), will be honored for their climate change leadership.

This year's Ripple Award honoree is Canon Jack Spaeth of the [Connecticut Episcopal Diocese](#). Spaeth was on the committee which originally created This Old House of Worship. He has been at the cutting edge of responsible land and energy use for the Episcopal Diocese for many years. He has initiated every useful upgrade at his home facility and has encouraged and empowered others to do so as well. The Ripple Award – named for the IPL in the middle AND the idea of creating RIPPLES go to Jack Spaeth.

Department of Environmental Protection commissioner, [Amey Marrella](#) will present the awards. In addition, Wadi Muhammad of the [Environmental Protection Agency for the New England](#) region will tell us how to participate in a federal recognition program, [Energy Start for Congregations](#).

The Ripple Award celebration is open to all and free of charge. Please RSVP so we can accommodate and offer refreshments: info@irejn.org

<http://credible.com/creed/lnews/8-latest-news/665-ct-faith-leaders-honored-for-energy-stewardship>

October 28, 2010

Conservation, religion join to save Ganges dolphin

By Henry Foy
Reuters

NARORA, India, Oct 28 (Reuters Life!) - As the sun sets over a serene stretch of the mighty Ganges, a pair of smooth, grey dolphins arch gracefully out of the water, bringing hope that wildlife can again call India's great river home.

Millions of Indians along the banks of the 2,500 km (1,550 mile)-long Ganges depend on the river, but unchecked levels of agricultural, industrial and domestic waste have poured in over the past decades, threatening the wildlife.

Five kilometres upstream from Narora, a five-hour drive west of New Delhi, the 350 megawatt nuclear power station that put this sleepy town on the map looms as a reminder of India's unrelenting drive for industrialisation.

In Karnabas, a small village just upstream from Narora, a local drama troupe performs for more than 150 villagers.

"Humans are polluting our river!" an actor playing a Hindu god declared, a WWF banner celebrating World Dolphin Day hanging over the makeshift stage.

"The life of our Mother Ganga is endangered! Please do something!"

Distinguishable from its ocean-going cousin by a long, pointed snout, the Ganges dolphin is one of only four freshwater species in the world. The total population across India, Nepal and Bangladesh is estimated at 2,000, down from 4,500 in 1982.

But along a northern stretch of the holy river, a Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) project is leveraging the religious importance of the Ganges for Hindus to teach villagers the virtues of conservation and protection of its sacred water. The upper stretch of the Ganges, from Rishikesh in the foothills of the Himalayas to Ram Ghat in the central state of Madhya Pradesh, holds great religious significance for Hindus.

Locations along the river figure heavily in the Hindu holy text, the Ramayana. A bathe in the river is a rite of passage.

"The religious sensibilities of the people are interlinked with the conservation of the river," said WWF-India project leader Sandeep Behera as he stood on the river bank in the shadow of a Hindu temple, while young boys chanted hymns on a nearby pier.

"If I ask a local farmer to give up just one afternoon to learn about conservation, he will ask 'What will I eat in the evening?'," Behera said.

"Therefore, we found that religious leaders were the way to get the message across."

PROTECTING THE HOLY RIVER

Vivek Kumar Mishra, a Hindu priest at the riverside Vedic school just outside Karnabas, stresses the importance of protecting the holy river in his lessons.

Local fishermen no longer hunt the dolphins for fear of reprisal from village leaders who have signed up to the WWF project, while a WWF campaign promoting natural fertilisers has dramatically reduced chemical pollution into the river.

"What they (WWF) are doing is working. It's become very clear that we need to clean the river," said Ritesh Sharma, a 26 year-old shopkeeper in Karnabas.

Dolphin numbers in the 165 km stretch upstream from Narora have almost trebled over the past 15 years, to an estimated 56 today, according to WWF-India.

There are other encouraging signs.

India's government recently recognised the Ganges River Dolphin as the country's national aquatic animal. And last week, the Ministry of Environment and Forests promised to rid the river of untreated sewage and industrial pollution by 2020.

Behera, who began conservation work in Narora as part of his PhD, understands that changing peoples' attitudes takes time.

"This is not one or two years' work," he said. "What you see happening is the result of 15 years of engagement."

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SGE69Q07Q.htm>

October 29, 2010

How religion is helping save the dolphin in UP

By Annant Zanane
NDTV

Karnavas, UP: In Karnavas in UP, street plays make frequent and reverent references to the dolphins in the Ganga.

"What's known as the dolphin in English is important to our ecosystem, our culture, but we are harming it," says one of the performers.

Religion and mythology are playing a huge role in helping to save the Gangetic dolphin along a 165 km stretch In UP. Since the conservation effort began in 1990, the dolphin population has doubled. Religion sells.

At another performance on a street corner, students chant excerpts from Valimiki's Ramayan. "With tremendous force, Ganga emerged from Lord Shiva's locks and along with it came several species of fish, animals and the Shishumaar ... the dolphin ... "

Locals are also told that the Baburnama too mentions the Gangetic Dolphin Minor - who is from the same family as the Gangetic Dolphin.

There are about 56-60 Gangetic dolphins now, as compared to about 20 in 1990, " says Dr Sandeep Behera, Senior Coordinator of the Fresh Water Programme for the World Wildlife Fund

in India.

The government in UP is now mining ancient texts to collate references to the Ganga in the hope that community support can be drummed up once again through religion and culture.

<http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/how-religion-is-helping-save-the-dolphin-in-up-63207?trendingnow>

October 29, 2010

Historic New Treaty Lays Out Ground Rules for Sharing Benefits of World's Wealth of Genetic Resources

Governments Also Agree Strategic 10 Year-Plan with Targets and Timetables to Combat Loss of Planet's Nature-Based Resources

United Nations Environment Programme

Nagoya - After close to 20 years of discussion and debate, governments from across the globe today agreed to a new treaty to manage the world's economically-central genetic resources in a far fairer and more systematic way.

The approval, to establish an International Regime on Access and Benefit Sharing of Genetic Resources (ABS), came on the last day of the convention on biological diversity meeting taking place in Nagoya, Japan.

The treaty, a Protocol to the main convention, lays down basic ground rules on how nations cooperate in obtaining genetic resources from animals to plants and fungi.

It also outlines how the benefits, arising for example when a plant's genetics are turned into a commercial product such as a pharmaceutical, are shared with the countries and communities who have conserved and managed that resource often for millennia.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) which administers the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), said: "This is a day to celebrate in terms of a new and innovative response to the alarming loss of biodiversity and ecosystems. And a day to celebrate in terms of opportunities for lives and livelihoods in terms of overcoming poverty and delivering sustainable development".

"It is also an important moment for the United Nations and the ability of countries to put aside the narrow differences that all too often divide in favour of the broader, shared issues that can unite peoples and nations. I would like to congratulate all governments concerned for bringing a fresh vision to the more intelligent management of life on Earth," he added.

The new Nagoya Protocol on ABS lays out rules on how derivatives—substances and compounds derived from genetic resources- will be dealt with under an ABS regime.

It also addresses the issue of traditional knowledge and pathogens—for example how developed countries may in emergency situations obtain a flu virus in order to develop a vaccine to counter a possible epidemic.

The Protocol also says governments should begin considering ways of recompensing developing countries for genetic material that may have been collected years, decades even centuries ago- if in future they become used to produce say a new pharmaceutical or crop variety.

One option may be to put a proportion of any profits arising into a special fund to be used by developing countries in order, for example, to build conservation or scientific capacity.

Strategic Plan

Governments also adopted a new strategic plan including targets for addressing biodiversity loss to be met by 2020.

For example, governments agreed to increase the extent of land-based protected areas and national parks to 17 per cent of the Earth's surface up from around 12.5 per cent now, and to extend marine protected areas to 10 per cent, up from under one per cent currently.

Other elements of the extensive plan include, by 2020, lifting the extinction risk from known threatened species.

The meeting agreed to study resource mobilization for assisting developing countries to meet the new targets in the plan based on a methodology that relates support to needs and gaps.

Other decisions included taking a 'precautionary approach' in terms of emerging areas such as geo-engineering in order to combat climate change and the development of synthetic biofuels.

Mr. Steiner said the two-week meeting, building on 10 months of the UN's International Year of Biodiversity, had also delivered a sea change in the global understanding of the multi-trillion dollar importance of biodiversity and forests, freshwaters and other ecosystems to the global economy and to national economies, and in particular for the "GDP of the poor".

The case has been built via The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), an initiative hosted by UNEP, requested by G8 environment ministers as well as developing country ones and supported by governments including Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom.

In Nagoya the final, global TEEB report was launched as countries including Brazil and India announced they would be launching their own national TEEB studies.

A parallel and supporting partnership was also announced by the World Bank in collaboration with organizations including UNEP to 'green' national accounts in order to mainstream 'natural capital' within national economic and development plans.

The project is initially set to be implemented in between six and 10 countries including Colombia and Mexico.

"Conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity need catalytic, strategic, serious and targeted investments from the public sector that reflects also the links between biodiversity and for example climate change. But ultimately the billions—if not hundreds of billions- required will only come when public policies and incentives are aligned with nature in a way that unleashes private sector investments".

"This perhaps is the ultimate litmus test with natural capital given equal standing with human and financial capital. Indeed history may show that this may be the real success and legacy of 2010 and of the Nagoya meeting," he added.

"Nagoya has certainly set new benchmarks upon which the nations of the world will be judged by their citizens. This time round these targets need to be an inspirational and drivers of fundamental change towards a sustainable, Green Economy for the many and not just the few," said Mr. Steiner.

"I would like to thank and congratulate Ryu Matsumoto, the Minister of Environment of Japan and his team, for their hospitality but above all their determination, leadership and skill in navigating nations to this positive and potentially transformational conclusion," he added.

For More Information Please Contact Nick Nuttall, UNEP Spokesperson/Head of Media, on Tel: +81 80 3660 1001 until 30 October, E-mail: nick.nuttall@unep.org or unepnewsdesk@unep.org

<http://unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?ArticleID=6811&DocumentID=649&l=en>

November 1, 2010

UNEP launches '30 Ways in 30 Days' to inspire action on climate change

United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi, Kenya - What do solar loans, sustainable tourism, tea plantations, forests in Panama and African financiers have in common?

The answer is quite simple: all are part of the global solution to climate change, and part of the United Nations Environment Programme's "30 ways in 30 Days" initiative, launched today.

From today, a month out from the start of the UN Climate Convention meeting in Cancun, Mexico, UNEP will release online case studies to show that solutions to climate change are

available and can be copied and scaled up around the world. The examples are just the tip of the iceberg and highlights in terms of existing successful climate initiatives and programmes.

UNEP's aim is to show that across the world, in myriad ways, from community-based programmes to entrepreneurial endeavours, solutions are available to help confront the challenges of climate change and to help countries, communities and businesses move towards low-emission climate-resilient growth.

More could be done if governments, corporations and communities scaled up this work. Every country and many institutions have their own 30 success stories to demonstrate that action is being taken across the globe, initiatives that with funding and technology support can be scaled up dramatically.

One of the case studies featured is "Solar Loans for Solar Homes" in India where more than 60 per cent of Indian households have no access to reliable electricity supplies and depend on kerosene for light and on burning dung and wood for heat.

UNEP's Solar Loan Programme, a partnership involving the UN Foundation, Shell Foundation and two of India's largest banking groups, helped turn on lights in homes that had previously not had them, accelerated market penetration of solar lights in the Indian countryside, and inspired several similar initiatives in India and elsewhere.

Other stories coming up are the "Green Passports" for sustainable tourism projects showing how you can be a "green traveler", the "greening" of tea plantations in East Africa, carbon financing in Africa and its massive potential for sustainable development and successful reforestation in Panama giving new evidence of the many opportunities and benefits from sustainable forests.

To find out more about these innovative programmes, go to www.unep.org/unite/30ways today. Come back to the site once a day until into December to discover all 30 ways in which UNEP is working with governments and communities around the world on projects, big and small, that put together could save our climate.

Editors Notes

The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP16/CMP6) will be held from 29 November to 10 December in Cancun, Mexico.

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November 3, 2010

From bamboo bikes to biomass briquettes: UNEP unveils SEED Award Winners

United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi - A novel solar device that turns waste heat into electricity in rural China, a Ugandan business that manufactures stationery from agricultural waste, a bamboo bicycle project in Ghana and a female-run business in South Africa making a hand-held laundry device that saves water are among the 30 winners of the 2010 SEED Awards, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) announced today.

The SEED Awards recognise inspiring social and environmental entrepreneurs whose businesses can help meet sustainable development challenges. By helping entrepreneurs to scale-up their activities, the SEED Initiative, which is hosted by UNEP, aims to boost local economies and tackle poverty, while promoting the sustainable use of resources and ecosystems.

This year, in addition to seeking innovative start-ups throughout the developing world, the SEED Awards had a special focus on Africa, placing particular emphasis on initiatives from South Africa, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Egypt, Ghana, Rwanda and Senegal. This focus was part of a larger project linked with UNEP's Green Economy Initiative and was funded largely by the European Union.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, said: "The SEED Award winners exemplify the strong spirit of entrepreneurship in the developing world and its significance in creating a Green Economy. While the Awards recognize individual outstanding projects, governments must also show leadership in supporting grassroots efforts through diverse and dynamic standards, forward-looking policies and incentives to further catalyze corporate and community-led change."

All the SEED winners will be honoured at award ceremonies in their home countries. The prize they will receive from SEED is a package of individually-tailored support for their business. This includes access to relevant expertise and technical assistance, meeting new partners and building networks, developing business plans and identifying sources of finance. SEED will furthermore contribute towards meeting each winner's most immediate needs by contributing to a jointly developed support plan.

The 2010 call for proposals saw applications from just under 60 countries, representing the collaborative efforts of non-governmental organizations, women's and youth groups, labour organisations, public authorities, international agencies and academia. While most of the applications were in the agriculture and rural development sector, many entries addressed issues

around climate change and energy, the conservation of biodiversity, and waste management. The selection of the winners was by an independent International Jury of experts.

The 2010 SEED Award winners (by country):

Burkina Faso:

"Manufacture and Popularization of Biomass Briquettes". Aiming to replace wood and charcoal with biomass briquettes from fallen leaves and other sources of unused biomass, this progressive enterprise of local and international NGOs and a research institution helps to combat desertification, create jobs in rural communities and raise awareness for alternative energy sources.

"Initiative for Promoting and Distributing Bio-Pesticides". The initiative's ambitious goal is to promote and distribute ecological pest control for organic crops, especially cotton, vegetable and oil-producing crops. In this way, the partnership of local and community-based organisations and research agencies hopes to increase yields and preserve the production environment.

China:

"SolSource" is a satellite dish-shaped solar device with removable modules that turns its own waste heat into electricity or stores it in thermal fabrics for later use. This novel device, which has been developed by an international social enterprise, research and government institutions, and local organizations, harnesses the sun's energy to provide a portable heat source for cooking and electricity for low-income families at an affordable price.

Colombia:

"BOSQUE HUMEDO BIODIVERSO" is a business initiative headed by a local NGO that uses fruit and pulp as ingredients for the local cosmetics and food industries. The use of non-timber products will reduce deforestation of tropical forests and local families will benefit from collecting value-added goods. This helps develop alternative income sources and promotes the sustainable management of local biodiversity.

Ghana:

"The Shea Economic Empowerment Program (SEEP)". This fruitful partnership centred on a community-based cooperative and international NGOs seeks to improve the livelihoods of women Shea nut producers by offering training, greater ownership within the supply chain and access to improved technology.

"G-lish: Income Generation, Re-Generation, Next Generation". The aim of this remarkable initiative of local NGOs is to provide value-added income for rural communities by crafting baskets from recycled materials. In doing so, they preserve the age-old basket-weaving tradition and carry out extensive tree-planting operations.

"High-value Syrup from 'Prekese' Fruits for Community Livelihood Empowerment". Relying on local raw materials, the partners of this promising initiative strive to establish the sustainable cultivation and harvesting of Prekese fruits in rural communities, allowing income to be generated over the whole life cycle of the tree.

"Ghana Bamboo Bikes Initiative" is a youth-led, non-profit enterprise committed to the economic empowerment of youth by taking advantage of the abundant bamboo raw materials in Ghana to manufacture and assemble high-quality bamboo bikes - suitable for the road conditions and terrain in Ghana and affordable to the poor.

"DeCo! - Decentralized Composting for Sustainable Farming and Development". The composting firm DeCO! benefits local farmers by producing organic fertiliser in decentralised composting plants following a low-tech approach. By working with local NGOs, government and research institutes, DeCO! aims to inform and educate farmers about the advantages of sustainable soil management.

"Biofuel Production in Promoting Sustainable Land Management". A local NGO in partnership with national research institutions has established a model for rehabilitating degraded community lands, producing food crop and utilising renewable energy through the cultivation and processing of sunflower plants into oil and biodiesel. Their sustainable land management approach also includes bee-keeping.

Kenya:

"Backpack Farm Agriculture Program". This initiative enables food autonomy for rural communities by providing small landholders with a dynamic set of agricultural tools, comprehensive training and monitoring - delivered and distributed in a canvas backpack.

"Papyrus Reeds, Our Future Hope" is a sustainable enterprise that harvests and processes papyrus reeds and crafts them into high-quality baskets, purses, carpets, chairs, sleeping mats and blankets, using the waste as natural manure. Community-based youth organisations and a local research institution implement the initiative.

"Solarlamps: Replacing 1 Million Kerosene Lamps with 1 Million Solar Lamps". The partners of this innovative initiative are a private company, a local NGO and a microfinance institution that provide economic, environmental and health benefits to both rural and urban households by sourcing and distributing solar lamps and training youth micro-entrepreneurs.

"Community-Based Medicinal Plant Enterprise for Biodiversity Conservation". This pioneering enterprise initiated by a community-based organisation and national and international government and research institutions generates alternative means of income and awareness for the value of biodiversity within rural communities based on the commercial cultivation and processing of indigenous medicinal plants.

"Village Cereal Aggregation Centres (VCAC)". A local commercial entity has joined forces with the national government, the financial sector and cereal buyers to establish mobile post-harvest

management centres in villages - enabling farmers to deliver high-quality grain to the market value chain and encouraging more participation of youth in cereal production.

"EcoPost - Fencing Posts from Recycled Post-Consumer Waste Plastic". International and national NGOs have launched this unique initiative to recycle waste plastic into aesthetic, durable and environmentally-friendly fencing posts and consequently reduce plastic litter on streets and open fields. By providing an alternative fencing material to traditional wood, EcoPost contributes towards the conservation of forests.

"Commercialization of Prosopis Juliflora Products from Affected Areas". A local community-based NGO, the FAO and a Kenyan company and research institute have mobilized efforts to control the undesirable spread of the Prosopis tree by promoting its commercial use as charcoal, timber and pods for livestock feed. The development of a sustainable national market will maximize returns to local communities.

Rwanda:

"Production and Distribution of Pressurized Biogas in Gas Cylinders". This initiative has been developed by a private company, an international NGO and government organizations to produce and store pressurised biogas for cooking made from urban, domestic and industrial wastes. Environmental benefits are achieved by offering an alternative firing material to firewood and charcoal.

"Efficient Charcoal Production and Smoke Recycling". This partnership of international NGOs, government institutions and a reforestation initiative is promoting new technologies to increase the energy output of charcoal. As a result, this significantly reduces the amount of forestland used for the production of charcoal and lessens air pollution by recycling tar and other smoke components.

Senegal:

"Micro Power Economy for Rural Electrification". The goal of this enterprise involving local partners from the private and microfinance sector is to set up a profitable rural power provider based on off-grid power system operation and the utilisation of renewable energy sources, such as wind-solar-diesel hybrid power systems.

FLOWER OF H.O.P.E This pioneering franchising initiative set up by a community-based organisation, international NGOs and research and finance institutions aims to improve agricultural development by training resource-poor community groups to become successful agricultural entrepreneurs, thereby generating more income for local communities.

Kayor Rural Energy, Rural Electrification by Photovoltaic Solar Energy". An outstanding pilot enterprise launched by a community-based organisation that aims to provide solar energy solutions for rural communities. The partnership with microfinance institutions permits KAYER clients to finance their equipment with microcredit adapted to their means.

South Africa:

Resentse Sinqobile Trust Trading as Zondi BuyBack Initiative". A local NGO and government institutions have teamed up to establish this comprehensive buyback centre to recycle, reshape and sell household waste such as cans and plastic. Natural resource protection, the reduction of litter, increased employment opportunities and an educational program are among the impressive results of this initiative.

IziWasha Two social enterprises and a private company have developed this innovative hand-held laundry device to facilitate washing in low-income communities. As the appliance does not rely on electricity or a home water supply, IziWasha significantly cuts water and energy use. A network of female micro-franchisees who distribute the eco-friendly product will directly benefit from the revenues.

Reclaiming Livelihoods - Mooi River Waste Reclaiming". This initiative led by a community-based organization, an international NGO and a government department has a high impact on local waste pickers who earn an income from recycling waste. By formalising the workforce and providing shelter, protective clothes and technical equipment, attractive job opportunities are created.

Amatola Wild Trout Fishery" is the first recreational fly-fishery in South Africa owned and managed by a local community. Set up by a partnership between a NGO and a research institution, the fishery brings a high-end market tourism activity into a rural area, while focusing on skills training and job creation for local people and environmental improvement by sustaining water quality and wild trout populations.

Food & Trees for Africa is a social enterprise addressing the greening of urban areas, climate change and food insecurity by planting trees. Launched by a local and international NGO, government institutions and private businesses, FTFA offers skills training in natural resource management and develops organic permaculture gardens for impoverished communities. The project has also designed a carbon calculator.

"Claire Reid Reel Gardening" provides consumers with a pre-fertilised seed strip that encases seeds at the correct depth and distance apart and offers planting instructions in seven languages. Implemented by a youth organization with assistance from government and social development programmes, the initiative aims to create sustainable subsistence gardens throughout South Africa.

Sri Lanka:

The "Rural Enterprise Network (REN)" aims at linking small-scale farmers to input-output markets through improved product quality, access to market information and the establishment of a common brand. By organizing producers in a network of organic agro- and food processing enterprises, the farmers will benefit from joint marketing services.

Uganda:

"ORIBAGS INNOVATIONS (U) LTD" is a private enterprise initiated by a research institution and local NGO to manufacture hand-made paper bags, printing paper and jewellery from agricultural wastes including wheat straw, elephant grass and other natural fibres. Oribags offers an eco-friendly alternative to polythene bags and empowers women entrepreneurs.

All of SEED's winners can be found on the SEED website at www.seedinit.org

Notes to Editors:

2010 SEED International Jury

The 2010 SEED Award winners were selected by the independent International Jury which very kindly dedicated considerable time to choosing the most promising of the applications. The members of the jury are:

Helmy Abouleish: Managing Director, SEKEM Group, Egypt

Leila Akahloun: Integrator for Africa Programs, Ashoka

Walter Baets: Dean, University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business

Nancy Chege: National Coordinator Kenya, GEF Small Grants Programme

Elisea Bebet Gillera Gozun: former Minister of Environment in the Philippines

Paul Laird: Corporate Partnerships Manager, Earthwatch, UK

Richard Lewis: Partner, Hogan Lovells

Alejandro Litovsky: Director, Volans Ventures Ltd

Brian Milder: Director of Strategy and Innovation, Root Capital

Kofi Nketsia-Tabiri: Regional Manager, E + Co Africa

Kirsten Spainhower: Innovation Practice, World Bank Institute

Sarah Timpson: Senior Adviser on Community-based Initiatives, UNDP

SEED Initiative

The SEED Initiative is a global network founded in 2002 by UNEP, UNDP and IUCN to contribute towards the Millennium Development Goals and the commitments made at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. SEED works through a global network of partners, supporters and associates.

SEED identifies, profiles and supports promising, locally-driven start-up enterprises working in partnership in developing countries to improve livelihoods, tackle poverty and marginalisation and manage natural resources sustainably. The Initiative also develops learning resources for the broad community of social and environmental entrepreneurs, informs policy- and decision-makers and aims to inspire innovative, entrepreneurial approaches to sustainable development.

For more information please visit www.seedinit.org

Or contact: Constance Hybsier, Programme Manager, constance.hybsier@seedinit.org

<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=651&ArticleID=6814&l=en>

November 4, 2010

Time to End War against the Earth

By Vandana Shiva

The Age

When we think of wars in our times, our minds turn to Iraq and Afghanistan. But the bigger war is the war against the planet. This war has its roots in an economy that fails to respect ecological and ethical limits - limits to inequality, limits to injustice, limits to greed and economic concentration.

A handful of corporations and of powerful countries seeks to control the earth's resources and transform the planet into a supermarket in which everything is for sale. They want to sell our water, genes, cells, organs, knowledge, cultures and future.

The continuing wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and onwards are not only about "blood for oil". As they unfold, we will see that they are about blood for food, blood for genes and biodiversity and blood for water.

The war mentality underlying military-industrial agriculture is evident from the names of Monsanto's herbicides - "Round-Up", "Machete", "Lasso". American Home Products, which has merged with Monsanto, gives its herbicides similarly aggressive names, including "Pentagon" and "Squadron". This is the language of war. Sustainability is based on peace with the earth.

The war against the earth begins in the mind. Violent thoughts shape violent actions. Violent categories construct violent tools. And nowhere is this more vivid than in the metaphors and methods on which industrial, agricultural and food production is based. Factories that produced poisons and explosives to kill people during wars were transformed into factories producing agricultural chemicals after the wars.

The year 1984 woke me up to the fact that something was terribly wrong with the way food was produced. With the violence in Punjab and the disaster in Bhopal, agriculture looked like war. That is when I wrote *The Violence of the Green Revolution* and why I started Navdanya as a movement for an agriculture free of poisons and toxics.

Pesticides, which started as war chemicals, have failed to control pests. Genetic engineering was supposed to provide an alternative to toxic chemicals. Instead, it has led to increased use of pesticides and herbicides and unleashed a war against farmers.

The high-cost feeds and high-cost chemicals are trapping farmers in debt - and the debt trap is pushing farmers to suicide. According to official data, more than 200,000 Indian farmers have committed suicide in India since 1997.

Making peace with the earth was always an ethical and ecological imperative. It has now become a survival imperative for our species.

Violence to the soil, to biodiversity, to water, to atmosphere, to farms and farmers produces a warlike food system that is unable to feed people. One billion people are hungry. Two billion suffer food-related diseases - obesity, diabetes, hypertension and cancers.

There are three levels of violence involved in non-sustainable development. The first is the violence against the earth, which is expressed as the ecological crisis. The second is the violence against people, which is expressed as poverty, destitution and displacement. The third is the violence of war and conflict, as the powerful reach for the resources that lie in other communities and countries for their limitless appetites.

When every aspect of life is commercialised, living becomes more costly, and people are poor, even if they earn more than a dollar a day. On the other hand, people can be affluent in material terms, even without the money economy, if they have access to land, their soils are fertile, their rivers flow clean, their cultures are rich and carry traditions of producing beautiful homes and clothing and delicious food, and there is social cohesion, solidarity and spirit of community.

The elevation of the domain of the market, and money as man-made capital, to the position of the highest organising principle for societies and the only measure of our well-being has led to the undermining of the processes that maintain and sustain life in nature and society.

The richer we get, the poorer we become ecologically and culturally. The growth of affluence, measured in money, is leading to a growth in poverty at the material, cultural, ecological and spiritual levels.

The real currency of life is life itself and this view raises questions: how do we look at ourselves in this world? What are humans for? And are we merely a money-making and resource-guzzling machine? Or do we have a higher purpose, a higher end?

I believe that "earth democracy" enables us to envision and create living democracies based on the intrinsic worth of all species, all peoples, all cultures - a just and equal sharing of this earth's vital resources, and sharing the decisions about the use of the earth's resources.

Earth democracy protects the ecological processes that maintain life and the fundamental human rights that are the basis of the right to life, including the right to water, food, health, education, jobs and livelihoods.

We have to make a choice. Will we obey the market laws of corporate greed or Gaia's laws for maintenance of the earth's ecosystems and the diversity of its beings?

People's need for food and water can be met only if nature's capacity to provide food and water is protected. Dead soils and dead rivers cannot give food and water.

Defending the rights of Mother Earth is therefore the most important human rights and social justice struggle. It is the broadest peace movement of our times.

Dr Vandana Shiva is an Indian physicist, environmentalist and recipient of the 2010 Sydney Peace Prize. This is an edited version of her speech at the Sydney Opera House last night.

<http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/time-to-end-war-against-the-earth-20101103-17dxt.html>

November 5, 2010

Program seeks to get religions involved in sustainable farming, food systems

By James Bruggers
Louisville Courier-Journal

An international program announced Friday seeks to marshal the hearts, minds and buying power of the world's religious faiths to change farming and food systems seen by many as bad for the planet and people's health.

The goal is to "shift a billion people into eating, growing, purchasing, investing and praying (toward) a proper relationship with their food and land," said the Martin Palmer, the secretary general of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, which is spearheading the Faith in Food program.

Palmer, a regular BBC commentator, archeologist and adviser to the United Nations on climate change, began day three of the seven-day Festival of Faiths, now its 15th year in Louisville, in a panel discussion with fellow Briton Patrick Holden, a pioneering organic farmer in Wales. This year's theme is Sacred Soil, Foundation of Life.

He said the world's religions are major economic and environmental players as property owners, investors and consumers. As much as 8 percent of the world's land surface is controlled by religions, from farms to shopping centers to office buildings. Religious institutions are the world's third largest investing group.

Many have long withheld investment in businesses that didn't match their moral interests, he said. Now many are beginning to specifically invest in businesses that do things they like, he added.

People of faith also have the power to influence food and farming practices that don't deplete the soil and are more sustainable, he said.

Palmer cited one opportunity as an example: The Sikhs in India feed 30 million people a day through a free kitchen program.

Holden, a former director of the United Kingdom's Soil Association, which certifies organic food and runs other environmental programs, said there's increasing evidence that industrial-scale farming and the food it produces have depleted soil while contributing to such human ailments as diabetes, obesity, cancers, and immune system diseases.

The new program will seek the participation from the world's religions with the goal of holding an international conference in 2012, when each will present their programs, said Susie Weldon, a communications consultant with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation. She said the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), based in Louisville, has already signaled its participation.

In a wide-ranging talk, Palmer also argued against a "utilitarian approach" to saving the planet from environmental destruction. For example, he said it was "blasphemous" to save the Amazon rainforest simply because its rich growth functions as a reservoir, or sink, of carbon dioxide.

"That's as if the whole of evolution produced the Amazon so we can drive our cars and not worry much," he said.

On the contrary, he said, the Amazon exists "because God loves it, however you understand God to be."

Reporter James Bruggers can be reached at (502) 582-4645.

<http://www.courier-journal.com/article/20101105/GREEN/310250121/Program%20seeks%20to%20get%20religions%20involved%20in%20sustainable%20farming%20%20food%20systems>

November 5, 2010

The Rise of the Tao

By Ian Johnson
New York Times

YIN XINHUI reached the peak of Mount Yi and surveyed the chaos. The 47-year-old Taoist abbess was on a sacred mission: to consecrate a newly rebuilt temple to one of her religion's most important deities, the Jade Emperor. But there were as yet no stairs, just a muddy path up to the pavilion, which sat on a rock outcropping 3,400 feet above a valley. A team of workers was busy laying stone steps, while others planted sod, trees and flowers. Inside the temple, a breeze blew through windows that were still without glass, while red paint flecked the stone floor.

"Tomorrow," she said slowly, calculating the logistics. "They don't have much ready. . . ." Fortunately, a dozen of her nuns had followed her up the path. Dressed in white tunics and black trousers, their hair in topknots, the nuns enthusiastically began unpacking everything they would need for the next day's ceremony: 15 sacred scriptures, three golden crowns, three bells, two cordless microphones, two lutes, a zither, a drum, a cymbal and a sword. Soon the nuns were plucking and strumming with the confidence of veteran performers. Others set up the altar and hung their temple's banner outside, announcing that for the next few days, Abbess Yin's exacting religious standards would hold sway on this mountain.

The temple she was to consecrate was born of more worldly concerns. Mount Yi is in a poor part of China, and Communist Party officials had hit upon tourism as a way to move forward. They fenced in the main mountain, built a road to the summit and declared it a scenic park. But few tourists were willing to pay for a chance to hike up a rocky mountain. Enter religion. China is in the midst of a religious revival, and people will pay to visit holy sites. So the local government set out to rebuild the temple, which was wrecked by Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, modestly rebuilt then torn down when the park was first constructed. Officials commissioned a 30-foot statue of the Jade Emperor, had it hauled to the peak and encased in the brilliant red pavilion. They then built a bell and a drum tower, as well as another set of halls devoted to minor deities.

All that was missing was a soul. For that, the temple had to be properly consecrated. The officials got in touch with Abbess Yin, widely regarded as a leading expert in Taoist ritual, and soon she was driving the 350 miles from her nunnery to Mount Yi.

As her rehearsals drew to a close, the abbess went over the next day's schedule with a local official. All was in good shape, he said, except for one detail. Government officials were due to give speeches at 10:30 a.m. She would have to be finished by then, he said.

"No," she replied. "Then it won't be authentic. It takes four hours." Could she start earlier and wrap up by then? No, the sun won't be in the right position, she replied. The official peered up from the schedule and took a good look at her — who was this?

Abbess Yin smiled good-naturedly. At a little over five feet tall, she was solidly built, with a full, smooth face tanned from spending much of her life outdoors in the mountains. Her dress was always the same plain blue robe, and she did not wear jewelry or display other signs of wealth. She shunned electronics; her temple did not have a phone or Internet access. But over the past 20 years she had accomplished a remarkable feat, rebuilding her own nunnery on one of Taoism's most important mountains. Unlike the temple here on Mount Yi — and hundreds of others across China — she had rejected tourism as a way to pay for the reconstruction of her nunnery, relying instead on donors who were drawn to her aura of earnest religiosity. She knew the real value of an authentic consecration ceremony and wasn't about to back down.

The official tried again, emphasizing the government's own rituals: "But they have planned to be here at 10:30. The speeches last 45 minutes, and then they have lunch. It is a banquet. It cannot be changed."

She smiled again and nodded her head: no. An hour later the official returned with a proposal: the four-hour ceremony was long and tiring; what if the abbess took a break at 10:30 and let the officials give their speeches? They would cut ribbons for the photographers and leave for lunch, but the real ceremony wouldn't end until Abbess Yin said so. She thought for a moment and then nodded: yes.

RELIGION HAS LONG played a central role in Chinese life, but for much of the 20th century, reformers and revolutionaries saw it as a hindrance holding the country back and a key reason for China's "century of humiliation." Now, with three decades of prosperity under their belt — the first significant period of relative stability in more than a century — the Chinese are in the midst of a great awakening of religious belief. In cities, yuppies are turning to Christianity. Buddhism attracts the middle class, while Taoism has rebounded in small towns and the countryside. Islam is also on the rise, not only in troubled minority areas but also among tens of millions elsewhere in China.

It is impossible to miss the religious building boom, with churches, temples and mosques dotting areas where none existed a few years ago. How many Chinese reject the state's official [atheism](#) is hard to quantify, but numbers suggest a return to widespread religious belief. In contrast to earlier surveys that showed just 100 million believers, or less than 10 percent of the population, a new survey shows that an estimated 300 million people claim a faith. A broader question in another poll showed that 85 percent of the population believes in religion or the supernatural.

Officially, religious life is closely regulated. The country has five recognized religions: Buddhism, Islam, Taoism and Christianity, which in China is treated as two faiths, Catholicism and Protestantism. Each of the five has a central organization headquartered in Beijing and staffed with officials loyal to the Communist Party. All report to the State Administration for Religious Affairs, which in turn is under the central government's State Council, or cabinet. This sort of religious control has a long history in China. For hundreds of years, emperors sought to define orthodox belief and appointed many senior religious leaders.

Beneath this veneer of order lies a more freewheeling and sometimes chaotic reality. In recent months, the country has been scandalized by a Taoist priest who performed staged miracles — even though he was a top leader in the government-run China Taoist Association. His loose

interpretation of the religion was hardly a secret: on his Web site he used to boast that he could stay underwater for two hours without breathing. Meanwhile, the government has made a conscious effort to open up. When technocratic Communists took control of China in the late 1970s, they allowed temples, churches and mosques to reopen after decades of forced closures, but Communist suspicion about religion persisted. That has slowly been replaced by a more laissez-faire attitude as authorities realize that most religious activity does not threaten Communist Party rule and may in fact be something of a buttress. In 2007, President [Hu Jintao](#) endorsed religious charities and their usefulness in solving social problems. The central government has also recently sponsored international conferences on Buddhism and Taoism. And local governments have welcomed temples — like the one on Mount Yi — as ways to raise money from tourism.

This does not mean that crackdowns do not take place. In 1999, the quasi-religious sect [Falun Gong](#) was banned after it staged a 10,000-person sit-down strike in front of the compound housing the government's leadership in Beijing. That set off a year of protests that ended in scores of Falun Gong practitioners dying in police custody and the introduction of an overseas protest movement that continues today. In addition, where religion and ethnicity mix, like Tibet and Xinjiang, control is tight. Unsupervised churches continue to be closed. And for all the building and rebuilding, there are still far fewer places of worship than when the Communists took power in 1949 and the country had less than half the population, according to Yang Fenggang, a [Purdue University](#) professor who studies Chinese religion. "The ratio is still radically imbalanced," Yang says. "But there's now a large social space that makes it possible to believe in religion. There's less problem believing."

Taoism has closely reflected this history of decline and rebirth. The religion is loosely based on the writings of a mythical person named Laotzu and calls for returning to the Dao, or Tao, the mystical way that unites all of creation. Like many religions, it encompasses a broad swath of practice, from Laotzu's high philosophy to a riotous pantheon of deities: emperors, officials, thunder gods, wealth gods and terrifying demons that punish the wicked in ways that make Dante seem unimaginative. Although scholars once distinguished between "philosophical Taoism" and "religious Taoism," today most see the two strains as closely related. Taoist worshipers will often go to services on important holy days; they might also go to a temple, or hire a clergy member to come to their home, to find help for a specific problem: illness and death or even school exams and business meetings. Usually the supplicant will pray to a deity, and the priest or nun will stage ceremonies to summon the god's assistance. Many Taoists also engage in physical cultivation aimed at wellness and contemplation, like qigong breathing exercises or tai chi shadowboxing.

As China's only indigenous religion, Taoism's influence is found in everything from calligraphy and politics to medicine and poetry. In the sixth century, for example, Abbess Yin's temple was home to Tao Hongjing, one of the founders of traditional Chinese medicine. For much of the past two millennia, Taoism's opposite has been Confucianism, the ideology of China's ruling elite and the closest China has to a second homegrown religion. Where Confucianism emphasizes moderation, harmony and social structure, Taoism offers a refuge from society and the trap of material success. Some rulers have tried to govern according to Taoism's principle of *wuwei*, or nonaction, but by and large it is not strongly political and today exhibits none of the nationalism found among, say, India's Hindu fundamentalists.

During China's decline in the 19th and 20th centuries, Taoism also weakened. Bombarded by foreign ideas, Chinese began to look askance at Taoism's unstructured beliefs. Unlike other major world religions, it lacks a Ten Commandments, Nicene Creed or Shahada, the Muslim statement of faith. There is no narrative comparable to Buddhism's story of a prince who discovered that desire is suffering and sets out an eightfold path to enlightenment. And while religions like Christianity acquired cachet for their association with lands that became rich, Taoism was pegged as a relic of China's backward past.

But like other elements of traditional Chinese culture, Taoism has been making a comeback, especially in the countryside, where its roots are deepest and Western influence is weaker. The number of temples has risen significantly: there are 5,000 today, up from 1,500 in 1997, according to government officials. Beijing, which had just one functioning Taoist temple in 2000, now has 10. The revival is not entirely an expression of piety; as on Mount Yi, the government is much more likely to tolerate temples that also fulfill a commercial role. For Taoists like Abbess Yin, the temptation is to turn their temples into adjuncts of the local tourism bureau. And private donors who have helped make the revival possible may also face a difficult choice: support religion or support the state.

Zhengzhou is one of China's grittiest cities. An urban sprawl of 4.5 million, it owes its existence to the intersection of two railway lines and is now one of the country's most important transport hubs. The south side is given over to furniture warehouses and markets for home furnishings and construction materials. One of the biggest markets is the five-story Phoenix City, with more than four million square feet of showrooms featuring real and knockoff Italian marble countertops, German faucets and American lawn furniture. Living in splendor on the roof of this mall like a hermit atop a mountain is one of China's most dynamic and reclusive Taoist patrons, Zhu Tieyu.

Zhu is a short, wiry man of 50 who says he once threw a man off a bridge for the equivalent of five cents. "He owed me the money," he recalled during a nighttime walk on the roof of Phoenix City. "And I did anything for money: bought anything, sold anything, dared to do anything." But as he got older, he began to think more about growing up in the countryside and the rules that people lived by there. His mother, he said, deeply influenced him. She was uneducated but tried to follow Taoist precepts. "Taoist culture is noncompetitive and nonhurting of other people," he says. "It teaches following the rules of nature."

Once he started to pattern his life on Taoism, he says, he began to rise quickly in the business world. He says that by following his instincts and not forcing things — by knowing how to be patient and bide his time — he was able to excel. Besides Phoenix City, he now owns large tracts of land where he is developing office towers and apartment blocks. Although he is reticent to discuss his wealth or business operations, local news media say his company is worth more than \$100 million and have crowned him "the king of building materials." Articles almost invariably emphasize another aspect of Zhu: his eccentric behavior.

That comes from how he chooses to spend his wealth. Instead of buying imported German luxury cars or rare French wines, he has spent a large chunk of his fortune on Taoism. The roof of Phoenix City is now a 200,000-square-foot Taoist retreat, a complex of pine wood cabins, potted fruit trees and vine-covered trellises. It boasts a library, guesthouses and offices for a

dozen full-time scholars, researchers and staff. His Henan Xinshan Taoist Culture Propagation Company has organized forums to discuss Taoism and backed efforts at rebuilding the religion's philosophical side. He says he has spent \$30 million on Taoist causes, a number that is hard to verify but plausible given the scope of his projects, including an office in Beijing and sponsorship of international conferences. His goal, he says, is to bring the philosophical grounding of his rural childhood into modern-day China.

Last year, Zhu invited several dozen European and North American scholars of Chinese religion on an all-expenses-paid trip to participate in a conference in Beijing. The group stayed in the luxurious China World Hotel and were bused to Henan province to visit Taoist sites.

Demonstrating his political and financial muscle, Zhu arranged for the conference's opening session to be held in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, the Stalinesque conference center on Tiananmen Square. It is usually reserved for state events, but with the right connections and for the right price, it can be rented for private galas. In a taped address to participants, Zhu boasted that "I'll spend any amount of money" on Taoism.

Zhu's chief adviser, Li Jinkang, says the goal is to keep Taoism vital in an era when indigenous Chinese ideas are on the defensive. "Churches are everywhere. But traditional things are less so. So Chairman Zhu said: 'What about our Taoism? Our Taoism is a really deep thing. If we don't protect it, then what?'"

Balancing this desire with the imperatives of China's political system is tricky. While the Communist Party has allowed religious groups to rebuild temples and proselytize, its own members are supposed to be good Marxists and shun religion. Like many big-business people, Zhu is also a party member. Two years ago, he became one of the first private business owners to set up a party branch in his company, earning him praise in the pages of the Communist Party's official organ, *People's Daily*. He has also established a party "school" — an indoctrination center for employees. His company's Web site has a section extolling his party-building efforts and has a meeting room with a picture of [Mao Zedong](#) looking down from the wall. Although it might seem like an odd way to mix religion and politics, Taoism often deifies famous people; at least three Taoist temples in one part of China are dedicated to Chairman Mao.

Until recently, Zhu mostly ignored the contradiction, but he has become more cautious, emphasizing how he loved Taoist philosophy and playing down the religion. Still, Zhu continues to support conventional Taoism. His staff takes courses in a Taoist form of meditation called *neigong*, and he has sent staff members to document religious sites, like the supposed birthplace of Laotzu, who is worshiped as a god in Taoism. He also has close relations with folk-religious figures and plans to establish a "Taoist base" in the countryside to propagate Taoism. "The ancients were amazing," Zhu says. "Taoism can save the world."

WHEN ABBESS YIN started to rebuild her nunnery in 1991, she faced serious challenges. Her temple was located on Mount Mao, among low mountains and hills outside the eastern metropolis of Nanjing. It had been a center of Taoism from the fourth century until 1938, when Japanese troops burned some of the temple complex. As on Mount Yi, communist zealots completed the destruction in the 1960s. Her temple was so badly damaged that the forest reclaimed the land and only a few stones from the foundation could be found in the underbrush.

Unlike Mount Yi, Mount Mao is an extensive complex: six large temples with, altogether, about 100 priests and nuns. Just a 45-minute drive from Nanjing and two hours from Shanghai, it is a popular destination for day-trippers wanting to get out of the city. Even 20 years ago, when Abbess Yin arrived, tourism-fueled reconstruction was in full swing on Mount Mao. Two temples had escaped complete destruction, and priests began repairing them in the 1980s. The local government started charging admission, taking half the gate receipts. But the Taoists still got their share and plowed money back into reconstruction. More buildings meant higher ticket prices and more construction, a cycle typical of many religious sites. Although pilgrims began to avoid the temples because of the overt commercialism, tourists started to arrive in droves, bused in by tour companies that also got a cut of gate receipts. Last year, ticket sales topped \$2.7 million.

Abbess Yin opted for another model. Trained in Taoist music, she set up a Taoist music troupe that toured the Yangtze River delta in a rickety old bus, stopping at communities that hired them to perform religious rituals. When I first met her in 1998, she used the money to rebuild one prayer hall on Mount Mao but refused to charge admission. Word of her seriousness began to spread around the region and abroad. Soon, her band of nuns were performing in Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

More nuns began to join. In the Quanzhen school of Taoism, which Abbess Yin follows, Taoist clergy members live celibate lives in monasteries and nunneries, often in the mountains. (In the other school, known as Zhengyi, they may marry and tend to live at home, making house calls to perform ceremonies.) For Abbess Yin's young nuns, her temple provided security and calm in a world that is increasingly complicated. "Here, I can participate in something profound," said one nun who asked to be identified only as Taoist Huang. "The outside world has nothing like this." For Abbess Yin, the young people are a chance to mold Taoists in the image of her master. "The only people who are worth having are older than 80 or younger than 20."

Even now, Abbess Yin's temple is low-key. There are no tourist attractions like cable cars, gift shops, teahouses or floodlit caves — and, unlike at most temples, still no admission fee. The atmosphere is also different. While in some temples, priests seem to spend most of their time hawking incense sticks or offering to tell people's fortunes, her nuns are quiet and demure. Maybe this is why even in the 1990s, when her temple was reachable only by a dirt road, locals said it was *ling* — that it had spirit and was effective. In 1998, I saw a group of Taiwanese visitors abandon their bus and walk two miles to the temple so they could pray. "This is authentic," one told me. "The nuns are real nuns, and it's not just for show."

With a growing reputation came donations. One reason that city people often underestimate Taoism is that its temples are mostly in the mountains, and its supporters rarely want to discuss their gifts. But one way to gauge its support is to look at the lists of benefactors, which are carved on stone tablets and set up in the back of the temple. In Abbess Yin's temple, some tablets record 100,000 yuan (\$15,000) donations, while others show 10,000 yuan gifts. But even those making just 100 yuan contributions get their names in stone. With the donations came the current plan to build the \$1.5 million Jade Emperor Hall halfway up the mountain, making the Mount Mao complex visible for miles around. It is due to open on this weekend, with Taoists from Southeast Asia and across China expected to participate.

Abbess Yin's success led the China Taoist Association to invite her to Beijing for training. She learned accounting, modern management methods and the government's religious policy. Earlier this year she was placed on one of the association's senior leadership councils. She has also begun speaking out on abuses on the religious scene, urging greater strictness inside Taoist temples and less emphasis on commerce. Many Taoists, she wrote in an essay reprinted in an influential volume, have become obsessed with making money and aren't performing real religious services but just selling incense. Too many traveled around China, using temples as youth hostels instead of as places to study the Tao or to worship.

"Taoism is a great tradition, but our problem is we've had very fast growth, and the quality of priests is too low," she told me. "Some people don't even know the basics of Taoism but treat it like a business. This isn't good in the long-term."

THE DAY AFTER Abbess Yin's standoff with the official, the big event on Mount Yi was due to start. She arrived early, making sure her nuns were ready at 7. The muddy path was now covered with stones that farmers had just hosed down, making them glisten in the early-morning sun. Workers scraped paint off the floor, inflated balloons and hung banners, while a television crew set up its equipment to film the politicians.

Inside the Jade Emperor Pavilion, the nuns milled around, checking one another's clothes and hair. All, including the abbess, were wearing their white tunics and black knee breeches. They pulled on fresh blue robes and pink capes, while the abbess donned a brilliant red gown with a blue and white dragon embroidered on the back. She and her top two lieutenants affixed small golden crowns to their topknots. She was now transformed into a *fashi*, or ritual master. Something was about to happen.

Abbess Yin walked over to a drum about two feet in diameter and picked up two wooden sticks lying on top. She began pounding in alternating rhythms. The nuns knew their roles by heart and lined up in two rows, flanking the statue of the Jade Emperor, golden and beautiful, the god's eyes beatific slits and his mouth slightly parted as if speaking to the people below. Still, for now the statue was just a block of wood. The ceremony would change that. It is called *kai guang* or "opening the eyes" — literally, opening brightness. Abbess Yin could open them, but it would take time.

Five minutes passed and sweat glistened on her forehead. Then, six of the nuns quietly took their places and started to play their instruments. A young woman plucked the zither, while another strummed the Chinese lute, or *pipa*. Another picked up small chimes that she began tinkling, while a nun next to her wielded a cymbal that she would use to punctuate the ceremony with crashes and hisses. Abbess Yin stopped drumming and began to sing in a high-pitched voice that sounded like something out of Peking Opera. Later during the ceremony she read and sang, sometimes alone and at other times with the nuns backing her. Always she was in motion: kneeling, standing, moving backward, turning and twirling, the dragon on her back seeming to come alive. It was physically grueling, requiring stamina and concentration. During the occasional lull, a young nun would hand her a cup of tea that she delicately shielded behind the sleeve of her robe and drank quickly. Gradually, people began to pay attention. The wives of several officials stood next to the altar and gawked, first in astonishment and then with growing respect for the intensity of the performance. When a police officer suggested they move back,

they said: “No, no, we won’t be a bother. Please, we have to see it.” Workers, their jobs finished, sat at the back. Within an hour, about 50 onlookers had filled the prayer hall.

On cue, at 10:30, she stopped. A group of local leaders had assembled outside the hall. They announced the importance of the project and how they were promoting traditional culture. A ribbon was cut, applause sounded and television cameras whirred. Then the group piled into minibuses and rolled down to the valley for the hotel lunch.

The speeches were barely over when Abbess Yin picked up again. As the ceremony reached its climax, more and more people began to appear, seemingly out of nowhere, on the barren mountain face. Four policemen tried to keep order, linking arms to barricade the door so the nuns would have space for the ceremony. “Back, back, give the nuns room,” one officer said as the crowd pressed forward. People peered through windows or waited outside, holding cameras up high to snap pictures. “The Jade Emperor,” an old woman said, laying down a basket of apples as an offering. “Our temple is back.” Abbess Yin moved in front of the statue, praying, singing and kowtowing. This is the essence of the ritual — to create a holy space and summon the gods to the here and now, to this place at this moment.

Shortly after noon, when it seemed she had little strength left, Abbess Yin stopped singing. She held a writing brush in one hand and wrote a talismanic symbol in the air. Then she looked up: the sun was at the right point, slanting down into the prayer room. This was the time. She held out a small square mirror and deflected a sunbeam, which danced on the Jade Emperor’s forehead. The abbess adjusted the mirror slightly and the light hit the god’s eyes. *Kai guang*, opening brightness. The god’s eyes were open to the world below: the abbess, the worshipers and the vast expanse of the North China Plain, with its millions of people racing toward modern China’s elusive goals — prosperity, wealth, happiness.

Ian Johnson is the author of “A Mosque in Munich” and “Wild Grass: Three Stories of Change in Modern China.” He is based in Beijing.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/07/magazine/07religion-t.html>

November 8, 2010

"30 Ways in 30 Days" rolls out more solutions to climate change challenge

United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi, Kenya - Week two of UNEP's 30 Ways in 30 Days reveals how an investment of US\$100,000 has improved vital reservoirs in Togo, shows the true environmental impact of the buildings we live and work in and reveals how cleaner stoves are improving health, benefiting the environment and potentially generating millions of dollars in saleable certified emissions.

The "30 Ways in 30 Days" initiative, launched last week by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), aims to show that across the world, in myriad ways, from community-

based programmes to entrepreneurial endeavours, solutions are available to help confront the challenges of climate change and to help countries, communities and businesses move towards low-emission, climate-resilient growth.

With governments set to meet later this month in Cancun, Mexico to assess and respond to the urgent challenge of climate change, UNEP is focusing on a success story each day to show that much can - and already is - being done to fight climate change.

Every country and many institutions have their own 30 success stories to demonstrate that action is being taken across the globe, initiatives that with funding and technology support can become the status quo rather than the exception.

Week two's stories also include efforts to assess and reduce the vulnerability of Jamaica's shoreline to the effects of climate change and a project to help smaller developing countries maximize their carbon-market opportunities through the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism.

To find out more about these innovative programmes, go to www.unep.org/unite/30ways today.

Come back to the site once a day until into December to discover all 30 ways in which UNEP is working with governments and communities around the world on projects, big and small, that together could save our climate and help ensure the future well-being of the planet.

Notes to Editors

The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP16/CMP6) will be held in Cancun, Mexico from 29 November to 10 December 2010.

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http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=651&ArticleID=6820&l=en&WT.rss_f=pr&WT.rss_a=651-6820

November 9, 2010

Toward a global green economy

Financial sustainability will not happen just by fixing the contradictions inherent in existing economic models.

By Achim Steiner

UN Undersecretary General and Executive Director of UNEP

JoongAng Daily

The G-20 has acted to stabilize banks and to counter the financial and economic crisis: A recovery is under way, albeit and in many places, still fragile.

But what about the G-20's future role in embedding a fundamental transition to a more sustainable global economy that looks beyond the current, narrow definition of wealth and GDP?

Could this week in Seoul be a watershed in international financial and economic affairs, where the pledge, made at the G-20 in London, toward a green and more sustainable recovery moves from communique to concrete commitment?

There are encouraging signs, not least from the G-20's Korean hosts, whose own economic stimulus package had earmarked close to 90 percent of its funds to a short- and long-term vision of green growth.

The country's leaders have also made the indivisible link between the leadership role of public policy making in terms of unleashing private sector investment into clean tech and other green sectors.

For the first time at a G-20 Summit, about 100 CEOs are meeting at a business summit, which is expected to provide invaluable input toward shaping the outcome inked by world leaders.

Finance and trade are two of the key themes before CEOs but so, too, are how to advance green growth and corporate social responsibility.

Themes that look into how future - perhaps more traditional - economic crises can be minimized must also look into the even bigger and more complex ones emerging as a result of climate change, environmental degradation and unsustainable overexploitation of the planet's natural assets.

Business in the broadest sense is certainly looking long and hard to governments for more forward-looking and imaginative responses, which clearly emerged last month in Nagoya, Japan, at the Convention on Biological Diversity.

An increasing number of banks and pension funds see rising risks to their investments from the loss of ecosystems, such as forests and wetlands, and the multitrillion dollar services they produce.

And a rising number now see the disruption to food supplies, supply chains and other challenges linked with natural resource losses as a bigger threat than that from international terrorism.

This dramatic shift is in part linked with the findings of the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), an assessment requested by the G-8 and developing country environment ministers.

It has calculated the global, multitrillion dollar losses being sustained while spotlighting the huge returns - including social returns such as new green jobs - from investing and reinvesting in natural systems.

Some countries have begun to take the lead. Brazil and India, for example, announced that they will be carrying out similar country-level TEEB studies: a first step toward factoring and mainstreaming the economics of nature into policy making.

Japan and the European Union have also signaled interest, as has the Asian Development Bank for a continentwide assessment.

The World Bank, in partnership with organizations including UNEP, will be assisting initially up to 10 developing countries ranging from Colombia to Mexico with developing national, green accounts.

By acting in concert and cooperation, G-20 as a whole has the potential to become a key and pivotal enabler of these transitions.

In terms of combating climate change and restoring fish stocks, canceling or phasing-down global subsidies totaling up to \$800 billion and over \$27 billion a year respectively would be a good start.

However, financial sustainability, more sustainable employment prospects and wider challenges such as addressing poverty in the 21st century will not happen just by fixing the contradictions inherent in existing economic models.

It will only happen if public policy and private sector investments are aligned in ways that meet the short-term recovery challenges with a longer-term vision of opportunity for the many and not just the few.

A year ago in London, G-20 leaders articulated this vision as building an “inclusive, sustainable and green recovery.”

In Seoul, this vision needs to be evolved toward not only a green recovery, but to inclusive, sustainable green growth underpinned by clean technologies and the economic importance maintaining nature’s multitrillion dollar services.

<http://joongangdaily.joins.com/article/view.asp?aid=2928102>

November 13, 2010

Forum on Teilhard Attracts 300

By Marie Elena Giossi
The Tablet

An evening film and lecture presentation illuminating the life and thought of Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin drew more than 300 people to the Immaculate Conception Center, Douglaston, Nov. 4.

The Tablet Forum on Teilhard de Chardin was the fifth event in a free forum series, sponsored by The Tablet and organized by Father Frank Mann. The format includes a film and talk regarding the life and works of notable 20th century religious figures.

Just after 7 p.m. Father Mann introduced the 2005 documentary, "Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: The Wings of Spirit," directed by Robert Mugnerot. The hour-long film begins with the opening words of Pope John Paul II's encyclical, Faith and Reason: "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth ... so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves."

This quote leads into a narrative overview of the life of Teilhard, 1881-1955, a philosopher, priest, paleontologist and geologist, whose ideas and writings bridging Christian faith and modern science have been deemed both mystical and controversial.

Asserting that "with Teilhard, religion didn't seek to stifle science" and vice versa, the film explores his thoughts on man and the universe, including the cosmic Christ and the Omega point; describes his anthropological achievements; and offers his view on male-female complementarity. Black and white photos and interviews with scientists and religious leaders, including Cardinal Paul Poupard, president emeritus, Pontifical Council for Culture, furnish a portrait of an innovative and oft-misunderstood mind.

The thoughts of Teilhard's mind piqued the interest of Doug Hertler, who wanted to know more about the French Jesuit priest he read about in The Tablet.

"I believe the social implications of his work are vital in the world," Hertler said. "Large segments of our population revel in division while deep down they're yearning for unity. Ultimately the fundamental message of his work and research was unity on a social and Christological level."

Father Peter Schineller, S.J., associate editor of America magazine and a native of Richmond Hill, spoke about the priest-scientist who was unafraid to stand on "the front line where the Church intersects with the world."

As a novice, Father Schineller raked leaves near Teilhard's grave at the former Jesuit novitiate, St. Andrew-on-Hudson, Poughkeepsie. Like Teilhard, he became a writer on theology and spirituality, developed an interest in the expanding universe and served in Africa.

"Teilhard's goal and method," he explained to forum-goers, "... is to mutually illuminate, or correlate the Christian message ... and the world as we see and understand it with its problems and opportunities." He argued that Teilhard wanted to replace the "old view" of the universe as something static and immobile with the understanding that it is "unfinished and evolving."

He also noted that people once accused Teilhard of pantheism, a view that God and the world are one. "I think he'd advocate pantheism, God in all things and all things in God," he said.

Citing Sacred Scriptures, Church teaching and Teilhard's writings, he reflected on the priest-scientist's vision in three areas: God/universe, Jesus Christ, and Christian life and mission, and explained how his views have been incorporated into Church teaching.

Following his talk, he addressed a question regarding the Church's position on Teilhard, whose ideas have been praised by Church leaders, most notably Pope Benedict XVI, despite the fact that a monitum was issued against several of his works. The Church issued a warning to affirm that his ideas didn't represent official Church teaching.

Father Schineller explained that Teilhard was ahead of his time and some of his writings were tentative, not meant to be authoritative.

For extra photos from the event, visit:

<http://www.thetablet.org/extrateihardforumphotos.aspx>

<http://www.thetablet.org/teilhardattracts300.aspx>

November 15, 2010

The Hindu Method to Save the Planet

By Pankaj Jain
Patheos

An eminent scholar recently came to our university campus and spoke about the role of diverse religious communities of the world and their attitude toward the environment. He showed examples from several indigenous communities from the North America, South America, and Asia. However, when he made a reference to Indian traditions and ecology, he used these words: "India has the most bizarre culture in the world where even a cobra is worshipped. This is a bit of an overshoot." What amazed me was that even in this supposedly globalized world that we live in, India continues to mystify scholars. While most Americans are familiar with the terms such as "yoga" and "Bollywood," Indian perspectives toward the ecology seem to be largely unknown.

It is true that cobras are worshipped by many Hindus, especially on a specific festival dedicated to them (just as there are specific festivals for mountains, rivers, cows, trees, and hundreds of other gods and goddesses throughout India). What is not commonly known is that Mahatma Gandhi had a brief encounter with a cobra at his ashram (retreat) once and he too did not want it to be killed by his colleagues. This is one of the shining examples of Indian environmentalism, not an "overshoot" as called by our scholar friend mentioned above.

Several scientific studies have pointed out that every being in nature is intrinsically valuable because every other being is directly or indirectly dependent on each other's survival; this is the fundamental motivation of scientists and environmentalists to save the biodiversity in every part of our planet. So, even a cobra has the right to survive. Moreover, other beings have an intrinsic duty to protect it as long as it is not a threat to them.

More than 2500 years ago in India, Mahavira and Buddha taught the same concept, although in a different framework of philosophy, spirituality, and ethics. Mahavira, the last great teacher of Jainism, even proclaimed that Ahimsa (Nonviolence) is the greatest Dharma (Dharma's meanings include religion, ethics, duty, virtue, righteousness, and cosmic law). Several [Hindu](#) and [Buddhist](#) texts also propound the same principle in different languages. According to most of these texts, Ahimsa improves one's karma. For observant Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists, hurting or harming another being damages one's karma and obstructs advancement toward moksha (liberation). To prevent the further accrual of bad karma, they are instructed to avoid activities associated with violence and to follow a vegetarian diet. They also oppose the institutionalized breeding and killing of animals, birds, and fish for human consumption.

Although yoga is widely known in the West, what is not so widely known is that yoga is a system of eight "limbs" or components. The very first step of the first limb of yoga is Ahimsa. Unless one is firmly rooted in Ahimsa in one's thoughts, speech, and actions, true practice of yoga cannot begin. And since Gandhi was a dedicated practitioner of Ahimsa (and other yogic principles), he can be called a great Yogi even though he might not have practiced all the stretching exercises that we commonly refer to as yoga. It is this practice of yoga that develops one's harmony with and reverence for nature in which even a cobra is not to be killed.

When I first mentioned this to my own students recently, one immediately questioned me and asked if Indians in India are not following the principles of Gandhi, how can we expect others? And I agreed with her. India (and many other emerging nations in the world) is enthusiastically aping the West with its ever-expanding economy and ever-shrinking natural resources. I was also asked recently at a conference on World Religions and Ecology, what do the non-Western countries expect of the Western countries? If the rest of the world is eager to make the same mistakes as the West did, what route should the West now take to ensure the planet's survival?

The simple answer would be to embrace Gandhi and his ecological practices. If the West is to remain the intellectual leader of the world, the quicker it reforms and transforms itself, the better for our planet. While the West continues to crave more natural resources without changing its lifestyle, it will continue to lack the moral authority to preach to other cultures. It was the West who led the world with its modern scientific and technological innovations for the last several centuries. It will have to be the West who emerges as a new ecological leader, with Gandhi as the

foundation of its lifestyle. All voices to save the planet's ecology are hollow rhetoric until that happens. On this birthday of Gandhi, which just passed on October 2nd, we hope to start [this process with the Hindu and Jain immigrant communities in this country](#).

Several decades ago, in his non-violent movement for civil rights, Dr. Martin Luther King said, "Christ furnished the spirit and motivation, while Gandhi furnished the method." It is time again to go back to these cherished values propounded by Christ, Gandhi, and Dr. King: nonviolence not just toward other human beings but toward the entire earth. All three also practiced and preached an absolute simple lifestyle and it is time again to widely practice the same lifestyle.

Dr. Pankaj Jain is an Assistant Professor of South Asian Religions and Ecology at the University of North Texas. He has taught Indian Films, Sanskrit, Hindi/Urdu languages, and literatures at North Carolina State University, Rutgers, Kean University, Jersey City University, and the University of Iowa. In his scholarship he connects the ancient Indic traditions of Hinduism and Jainism with contemporary issues -- particularly the environment.

<http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Hindu-Method-to-Save-the-Planet.html>

November 19, 2010

Ecological Civilization

By James Miller
Sustainable China Blog

I was in Beijing and Tianjin recently for a week of conferences related to “ecological civilization” (shengtai wenming 生态文明) an important new buzzword, the precise meaning of which thought leaders and government officials are vying to define.

The first conference I attended was one on “Traditional Culture and Ecological Civilization”, held in conjunction with the Beijing branch of the Chinese society for the study of the Yijing. The conference was a curious mix of academics, Daoists, fengshui practitioners and Yijing enthusiasts. From an intellectual point of view, one of the most interesting and radical presentations came from Lu Feng 卢风, a Tsinghua University philosophy professor. His talk began with the bold claim that the era of industrial civilization was at an end, and that to usher in a new era of ecological civilization demanded nothing short of a “civilization revolution 文明革命” (in Chinese, just one character different from “cultural revolution 文化革命”). In his view, it is necessary to overhaul the intellectual foundations on which our present industrial civilization, and our model of industrial development, are based. In his analysis, ecological civilization represents not just a development of the modern industrial paradigm, but a radical transformation.

This view was not universally held, however. The next day I had the opportunity to meet Chen Zhishang, a senior philosophy professor at Peking University, who had organized a large conference on ecological civilization on Hainan Island. Trained in orthodox Marxist philosophy, and well connected within the Party, he views ecological civilization more as a continuation of the materialist/humanist paradigm, but one that is reformed and extended to take the natural environment into account.

At the Bureau of Compilation and Translation, a Marxist think-tank attached to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, I pressed the issue of where ecological civilization could fit within a standard reading of Marxist theory. I was intrigued to learn that Marx could be interpreted in China using a wide range of theoretical lenses, similar to the way that feminists or ecologists generate readings of sacred texts in Western religions. In this sense, Marx's writings function as a kind of common reference work, to be re-interpreted, commented upon, and extended according to the perspective of the interpreter.

Another exciting new development that I witnessed in China is the rapid spread of process philosophy throughout the Chinese philosophy community. With the tireless enthusiasm of Wang Zhihe, from the [China project of the Claremont Center for Process Studies](#) process philosophy centers and conferences have been established throughout China, and indeed I attended one of their conferences on Process Philosophy and Spiritual Ecology. On the face of it, process philosophy challenges the very foundations of the Western humanistic tradition, including Marxist theory, and yet it is a subject of a lively debate in China. At the moment it seems as though a wide range of intellectual options are on the table as the government struggles to work out a new form of civilization, that is to say, a mode of social and economic relations that recognizes that human prosperity is inextricably bound up with ecological prosperity. It is quite clear to me that China is going to work out for all of us what this means simply because it has to.

But for now, what exactly does ecological civilization mean in practical terms? In Tianjin after a seminar on ecological civilization at the Tianjin Administrative Institute, where the high level party leaders are trained, I had the opportunity to tour some ecological agriculture projects in the vicinity. At the Demonstration Base of Tianjin Agri-Tourism 天津乡村旅游特色点 I observed new horticultural methods to grow vegetables with a minimum of soil, a minimum of land area (including vegetables stacked high in columns), and to grow fruits from southern China in the north. I've no doubt that this is at least one of the meanings of ecological civilization in China, that is, a scientifically advanced and technologically efficient form of resource extraction designed to provide as much food as possible with the minimum expenditure of space and energy. This form of "ecological civilization" addresses one of the most pressing challenges that China faces: how to feed its 1.3 billion people as efficiently and safely as possible. Although it is far less glamorous than the so-called "eco-cities" whose development is fuelled in part by China's seemingly unchecked property speculators, this will clearly be an important element of China's new relationship with nature.

What is intriguing to me is how the term "ecological civilization" has opened up an enormous cultural space that is being claimed by philosophers, fengshui practitioners, scientists, city planners and tourism developers. On the one hand it seems as though these various groups may

simply be using this term to justify their own work by claiming it is somehow “ecological,” but on the other hand the fact that widely different sectors of society are attempting to do so indicates something about the power of and the attractiveness of “ecology” as a concept. Underlying these various aspirations to claim “ecological civilization,” is the deep-seated recognition that the present mode of industrial civilization simply cannot work any longer, and that it is up to China to change the paradigm.

<http://www.sustainablechina.info/2010/11/19/ecological-civilization-2/>

November 19, 2010

Billions of trees, cleaner stoves and the power of sugar: 30 Ways in 30 Days to meet Climate Change Challenge

"30 Ways in 30 Days" Showcases More Climate Change Solutions from Around the World

United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi, Kenya - The power of building blocks to counter erosion, the effect of a more efficient cooking stove on fragile gorilla habitat, and the inspiring campaign that has registered 10 billion trees planted in four years, all featured in week three of the "30 Ways in 30 Days" initiative.

Mid-way through the initiative and heading into week four, stories include how sugar sweetens the deal for renewable energy, the power of the web for climate pioneers and how eco-communities are good for both people and the planet.

Governments meet in Mexico in just over a week's time to discuss the urgent challenge of climate change, and to try to chart the way forward to assist countries, communities and businesses to move towards low carbon, climate-resilient growth.

30 Ways in 30 Days launched at the beginning of November by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), showcases a wide variety of practical solutions to the complex issue of climate change, demonstrating that it is often the small scale initiatives that can make the biggest impact.

By demonstrating successful initiatives from across the globe, which can all be adapted and replicated elsewhere, UNEP hopes to inspire the rapid and large scale change the world urgently needs in the fight against climate change.

To find out more about these innovative solutions, go to www.unep.org/unite/30ways and visit the site daily until into December to see all 30 ways in which UNEP is working with governments and communities around the world on projects that could save our climate and help ensure the future well-being of the planet.

Editors' Notes

The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP16/CMP6) will be held in Cancun, Mexico from 29 November to 10 December 2010.

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http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=651&ArticleID=6833&l=en&WT.rss_f=pr&WT.rss_a=651-6833

November 21, 2010

Religion, nature develop connections

By Gina Farthing
News Virginian

Americans are discovering a connection between their religion and the environment -- so said a documentary film called "Renewal," produced by filmmakers Marty Ostrow and Terry Kay Rockefeller, who have created films for PBS. The movie was presented Thursday evening by Staunton Green 2020 and Transition Staunton at the Mockingbird restaurant in Staunton.

"Renewal" portrays the diversity among American religious environmental activists, which include Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Christians by presenting a series of eight mini-stories.

Following the movie, the audience of around 20 to 25 people, were treated to a question and answer session moderated by Eric Curren and members of three local religious groups: the Rev. Paul Nancarrow, of Trinity Episcopal Church in Staunton; Jeremy Bacheller, of Harrisonburg's Islamic Center of the Shenandoah Valley; and Rabbi Joe Blair, of Temple House of Israel, in Staunton.

All three religious leaders were impressed with how "Renewal" showed many various groups of environmentalists approaching the problem from a central religious idea.

"It was interesting," said Bacheller, "There were a lot of good projects going on," even though he found some of the groups unusual and unorthodox in their combinations of religions.

Groups portrayed were Christian evangelicals fighting mountaintop removal in Kentucky, a New Jersey interfaith group promoting green utilities and recycling to different churches, an Islamic center in Chicago that promotes ethical and sustainable raising of livestock and produce, a Jewish workshop for children that teaches about where food actually comes from (rather than the

supermarket) and the decomposition of “psolet” or garbage, American Buddhists that wrap trees as ordained monks to ward off loggers and more.

One man from the audience asked the panel about what he perceived as a “huge” disconnect between people and Congressional leadership on environmental issues and how they thought it might have come to be.

The Rev. Nancarrow explained that although evangelicals were new to the environmental movement, “Without being critical, the general thought presented was that the material world was given to them by God to be used and that with being powerful in government, the attitude persisted, cemented and contributed to the disconnect. It is very reassuring that they are moving towards the [environmental] movement.”

Another audience member asked each of the representatives what they, themselves, were doing to encourage change among their congregations.

“We’re beginning to get the people to think about these things,” said Rabbi Blair. “We’re getting out pamphlets or boxes to collect things, such as old cell phones for recycling or to those who might need it for 9-1-1 services.”

Blair said with only about 45 households in the Staunton area and 65 in the Harrisonburg area, it was a small community. “Our psolet bucket is not that big.”

Bacheller said that for Muslims, the Koran says that they will be judged on how they treat the Earth.

“It’s not separate, if we’re not doing what we’re supposed to, it’s a sin against God,” he said. “We aren’t as involved with other groups, because they don’t wish to have ties with us, except the ones who want to, but we try.”

At two previous parish picnics, the Rev. Nancarrow said, “We started using washable items. We went from five big bags of garbage down to just a half a bag.” His church is also doing an energy audit of its facilities and sharing with the congregation things they can do at home.

Sacred Circle book store owner, Carey McCallum, asked the panel if they thought that the Sabbath would help with sustainability. All three religious leaders agreed that taking time to stop, consider one’s actions and how one was living and resetting was always a good route to take, though Bacheller said that Sabbath was not a part of the Islamic way of life.

McCallum thought it was a good idea to have a day set aside as a way to slow down, “To reflect on our relationships with the land, God and get back in rhythm with Nature.”

The Rev. Nancarrow thought it would give people a chance to step back from the daily wasting of things.

“It’s about being in concert with the Earth,” said Rabbi Blair. “There are pieces inserted among texts that tell us what to do.”

For Muslims, Bacheller said it had to do with a person being responsible for what was underneath him.

“There are rules for living,” he said, “Nursing animals, slaughtering animals. You’re responsible for how it lives. If an animal sees the knife blade he is to be slaughtered with and freaks, you’ve just wasted an animal, because now it will get to live.”

Nancarrow agreed. “It’s about honoring your neighbor, which the word in Latin for neighborhood is environment.”

<http://www2.newsvirginian.com/lifestyles/2010/nov/21/religion-nature-develop-connections-ar-668787/>

November 28, 2010

Climate change failure is moral outrage: Faith leaders

Scotland's religious leaders have described the West's failure to help developing nations cope with climate change as a "moral outrage".

BBC News, Scotland

Senior members of the country's Christian and Islamic communities outlined their position in a letter to Prime Minister David Cameron.

They urged the UK government to do all it could to ensure progress was made at the UN climate change conference.

The summit is due to open in Cancun, Mexico, on Monday.

The letter to Mr Cameron has been signed by the Moderator of the Church of Scotland's General Assembly, John Christie, the head of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, Cardinal Keith O'Brien, the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, David Chillingworth, and Shaykh Ruzwan, a senior figure in the Islamic community.

It highlights disappointment at the outcome of last year's UN climate change conference in Copenhagen and says every day that passes sees lives "affected and even lost".

The faith leaders write that: "Millions of people in developing countries are already being affected by increasingly severe storms, droughts and changing weather patterns, despite having done little to cause the problem.

"Faith-based international aid organisations such as SCIAF, Christian Aid and Islamic Relief are already working hard to help affected communities."

'Fair' agreement

The letter continues: "This is why it is vital that the UK government does everything it can to ensure agreeing a fair, ambitious and legally-binding global agreement on climate change is at the forefront of negotiations in Cancun.

"The final agreement must also include vastly improved greenhouse gas emission reduction targets for the wealthiest nations and greater financing for poor countries to help them cope with the challenges brought on by climate change."

It adds: "It is a moral outrage that as yet developed countries appear unwilling to find the money so urgently needed to deal with this issue."

Scotland's climate change minister, Stewart Stevenson, will be part of the UK delegation at Cancun.

Mr Stevenson has said he will use the opportunity to call for the international community to be more ambitious in its efforts to tackle climate change.

And he will argue that the transition to a low carbon economy is sensible, sustainable and ultimately unavoidable.

However, the Mexican government has already warned it is unlikely that a comprehensive deal will be secured in Cancun.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-11857143>

November 30, 2010

Beliefs and Biodiversity: Rediscovering Religion and Conservation in Sumatra

By Jeanne E. McKay
Ravenswood Media Newsletter

Several hours after leaving the oppressive heat and congestion of the West Sumatran capital of Padang, we reach Guguak Malalo. I am immediately struck by the refreshing climate and calming influence of the dense tropical vegetation surrounding me. Sitting in the shade provided by a strangling fig tree, I reflect upon this often overlooked benefit that ecosystem services provide us as well as the many others such as clean water, a crucial yet dwindling resource now facing humanity. The big challenge for conservation is to make it relevant to the lives of local people and I believe this project has a chance of doing that.

[West Sumatra](#) still contains some of the most pristine rainforest in Indonesia and a watershed that services more than a million people. It is also home to the indigenous [Minangkabau](#) (or Minang) ethnic group.

Strongly Islamic, the Minang have a rich heritage of religious and cultural traditions, or [adat](#) which still have a strong influence on daily life. Guguak Malalo is one of three sites where the [Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology](#) (DICE) is implementing a faith-based community conservation programme. It is funded by the British Government's [Darwin Initiative](#) (DI) programme, through a three-year project entitled '[Integrating religion with conservation: Islamic beliefs and Sumatran forest management](#)'. The project has just entered its second year.

Our partners are excited about this innovative project that promotes conservation in the context of Minang culture and Islamic teachings. The initial DI scoping trip in 2008 found that local people immediately connected with the concept and gave it their overwhelming support. It is one of the few projects to integrate conservation and Islam anywhere in the world. Local partner Fachruddin Mangunjaya from [Conservation International-Indonesia](#) says, "There is no guarantee that conservation awareness will grow and people's behavior changed without any effort to move people's hearts and minds. Hearts and minds can only be touched by religion, or what they believe."

There are several key principles in the [Al-Qur'an](#) that underpin conservation and outline the human role in conserving natural resources and ecosystem services. The DI project is supporting local partners to incorporate these principles into conservation action. Three land-use systems directly apply Islamic principles within conservation:

1. [Hima](#) - management zones established for sustainable natural resource use;
2. [Harim](#) - inviolable sanctuaries used for protecting water resources and their services;
3. [Ihya Al-Mawat](#) - reviving neglected land to become productive.

We are concentrating our efforts on strengthening and integrating these religious management systems through mapping of land and forest uses. The management systems are now protecting the forest through joint community/Dept. Forestry patrols (Hima), conducting outreach focusing on ecosystem management (Harim) and creating tree nurseries to reforest degraded lands (Ihya Al-Mawat).

With support from the [British Council](#), [Fauna and Flora International](#) and the [Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences](#), the project is working to implement faith-based conservation activities within state and Islamic boarding schools in Padang and within project field sites. It's also working with the provincial government to develop teaching materials for a conservation-themed Ramadan curriculum. We have already seen some positive results. A recent survey of teachers and Ulama (religious leaders) revealed that those understanding ecosystem services rose from 50% to 92% after the training, whereas those who understood the Islamic systems for natural resource management rose from 0% to 100%.

The project has collaborated with the [Center of Irrigation, Land and Water Resources](#), and the [University of Andalas](#) to provide full scholarships for two Minangkabau students. The students

will conduct research on the interaction among adat, the state and Islamic law on forest management systems. They will also investigate the role of religious leaders within our DI project sites. Although, publications are produced with a West Sumatran focus, the project hopes that the lessons learned here will serve as a catalyst for similar conservation work across Indonesia and the rest of the Muslim world.

Jeanne McKay trained in International Studies, specializing in community development and sustainable resource use in Latin America and later in Conservation Biology at DICE. Working for the IUCN/SSC Declining Amphibian Populations Task Force (DAPTF) as the International Coordinator and as a consultant to Conservation International(CI), she was responsible for developing global amphibian conservation strategies. At DICE, Jeanne worked as a Research Associate continuing her work with CI to develop and launch the IUCN/SSC Amphibian Specialist Group before becoming a Darwin Initiative Project officer in Indonesia where she now lives.

<http://www.midwestfrogs.com/newsletter/december2010/rmnewsletter.htm>

November 30, 2010

Vatican scientists urge support for engineered crops

By Andy Coghlan
New Scientist

Scientists have both the right and a moral duty to be "stewards of God" by genetically modifying crops to help the world's poor, scientific advisers to the Vatican said this week.

In a [statement condemning opposition to GM crops in rich countries as unjustified](#), a group of scientists including leading members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences is demanding a relaxation of "excessive, unscientific regulations" for approving GM crops, saying that these prevent development of crops for the "public good".

The statement was agreed unanimously by 40 international scientists after [a week-long closed meeting held in May 2009 at the Vatican](#), convened by Ingo Potrykus. Potrykus is a member of the Pontifical Academy based at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, where he developed "golden rice", a variety [engineered with extra vitamin A to prevent childhood blindness](#).

Although the academy has yet to officially endorse the statement, it was approved by the seven members at the meeting, including academy chancellor Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo. "The Catholic Church has 1 billion members," says academy member Peter Raven, president of the Missouri Botanical Garden in St Louis, which once received funds from Monsanto. He adds that although this global community will never have a unified official line on GM crops, "our statement is about as close as you can get to one".

Immaterial Risks

The academy expressed provisional support for GM crops in 2000, but the scientists say that it can now back the technology with more confidence. The statement calls for a revision of the [Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety](#), agreed in 2000 to regulate the movement of GM organisms between countries.

It says the environmental risks envisaged when the protocol was drafted have not materialised, adding that regulatory hurdles make it too expensive for anyone other than large multinational firms to develop crops benefiting the poor, such as drought-resistant cassava and yams.

Also challenged is the objection made by critics of GM that, by messing with nature, genetic engineers are "playing God" (see "[No uncertain terms](#)"). The statement denounces as outdated many allegations made by GM critics. "There has not been a single documented case of [harm to consumers or the environment](#)," says Potrykus.

He and the co-authors therefore argue for relaxation of what they say are draconian regulations preventing development of crops for the poor. Potrykus says his attempts to bring golden rice to poor consumers demonstrate the scale of the problem. "It took 10 years longer and \$20 million more than a normal variety to commercialise it," he says. "The time and investment required is prohibitive for any public sector institution, so the future use of this technology for the poor totally depends on reform of regulation," he says.

Anti-GM group Friends of the Earth maintains that GM crops are not the solution. "We need food and farming policies that put the [needs of people](#) before the profits of a handful of GMO companies," says campaigner Mute Schimpf.

<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn19787-vatican-scientists-urge-support-for-engineered-crops.html>

November 30, 2010

Building a movement for climate justice in the Episcopal Church

By P. Joshua 'Griff' Griffin
Episcopal News Service

When the "externalities" of fossil fuel production and consumption cause suffering for our neighbor, is it still possible to live ethically in a fossil fuel economy? What is the ecological debt owed by those affluent segments of human society to those who live in material need? These are some of the questions that will be considered at a landmark gathering this December.

Unfortunately, I'm not speaking of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), 16th Conference of the Parties (COP 16) taking place in Cancún, Mexico. Rather, I'm

talking about a parallel gathering of Episcopalians and Anglicans being convened by the bishops of two companion dioceses from Dec. 7-10 in San Pedro de Macorís, Dominican Republic.

In San Pedro, Bishop Marc Andrus, of California, and the Bishop Naudal Gomes, of Curitiba, Brazil, hope to raise the banner of climate justice to the church and the world. The intersections of poverty and catastrophic climate change will be the focus for the four-day theological reflection and dialogue in which participants will begin to discern how our church might model justice and global reconciliation given the harsh ecological realities facing our world.

The two companion bishops Gomes and Andrus, will also be joined by bishops from Central Ecuador, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Panama. The meeting will draw lay and ordained representatives from six additional Episcopal dioceses, as well as the Episcopal Church Center, the Anglican Province of Brasilia, the Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias (CLAI), Yale Divinity School and the Dominican diocesan seminary, El Centro de Estudios Teologicos (CET). Proceedings from the gathering, including video, will be posted in near real time at the new [blog](#).

As the U.N. gathers in Cancún, as in Copenhagen, NGOs and grassroots activists are also on hand calling for a just, binding, and ambitious treaty, based on scientific data. But prospects are even lower than they were a year ago. The most vulnerable nations of the world -- small island nations, most of the Global South, and indigenous groups -- will once again make impassioned pleas for their survival. And once again, overdeveloped countries, and countries with aspirations to "develop" in a particular way, will dominate the discourse.

In particular, the politicians who govern the United States, are unlikely to address climate change in any way which would challenge the exceptional global dominance they currently enjoy. In an effort to find some pragmatic traction within the limited public discourse in the United States, some make the case that addressing climate change is an issue of national security. It may be so, but the self-preserving logic of the nation state is anathema to a Christian ethic, which reminds us that the Christian life is anything but secure.

In this season of Advent, as we await the coming of an infant who would be born in a stable, to refugee parents, I am reminded of our universal human vulnerability. Likewise, I would suggest that when it comes to environmentalism, as Christians we have a moral obligation to privilege the life-experience of the most ecologically vulnerable communities.

We needn't look past our own communion for examples: amid the abundance of corporate monocultures, Anglicans in Brazil struggle for food sovereignty. We needn't look past the Episcopal Church: in arctic Alaska, in Kivalina, our sisters and brothers are in danger of losing their homes, parish, and their very lives, as the permafrost melts out from under them. No, we needn't look past our own dioceses. In California, where I live and work, those Episcopalians who live, play, and worship in Rodeo, Crockett, and Richmond suffer the "externalities" of oil production as they breathe contaminants from nearby oil refineries.

In our ministries we must seek solidarity with the ecologically marginalized. As baptized Christians, having pledged before God to "strive for justice and peace among all people,"

through advocacy, organizing, and service, we must further the struggle for justice --climate justice.

-- *The Rev. P. Joshua Griffin is the environmental justice missionary for the Episcopal Diocese of California.*

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/80050_125944_ENG_HTML.htm

November 30, 2010

Let there be solar

As the moral implications of climate change become more apparent, faith communities around the world are taking action, both personal and political.

By Nathan Rice
The Daily Climate

Give us all a reverence for the Earth as your own creation, that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honor and glory.

The prayer was recited regularly by a young Sally Bingham growing up in San Francisco.

Only years later, as an ordained Episcopal Church priest, did Bingham realize something was amiss with the childhood supplication.

"There was this terrible hypocrisy," she said. "This disconnect between what we said we believed in and how we behaved."

This bothered her for years until 1998 when, in her 50s, she finally took action.

Bingham founded what today is Interfaith Power and Light, a national campaign promoting "a religious response to global warming" that works with 10,000 congregations in 38 states.

"Climate change is one of the most challenging moral issues of our time," she said in an Earth Day sermon at San Francisco's Grace Cathedral where she is now Reverend Canon for the Environment.

Faith communities around the world are taking action - both personal and political - as the moral implications of climate change become more apparent.

While politics is split on climate change and governments worldwide have failed to pass meaningful climate legislation, faith communities are becoming a powerful force in the transition to green energy. By focusing on values rather than politics, they are transcending partisan pigeonholes and taking care of what they see as God's creation, and the people - particularly the poor - who depend on it.

"If you are called to love your neighbor, you don't pollute your neighbor's air," Bingham said.

More than 300 evangelical leaders have signed the Evangelical Environmental Network's climate call to action, including mega-church leaders like Rick Warren and Bill Hybels. A 2007 poll commissioned by the group found that 84 percent of evangelicals support legislation to reduce carbon emissions.

While mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics and Reformed Jews may have a stronger environmental presence, according to religious political scholar John C. Green, evangelicals - 26 percent of the U.S. population - are the most influential religious environmental faction.

"As evangelicals become more vocal on climate change, they have the potential to alter the position of the Republican party," said Green, director of the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics for Religious Studies at the University of Akron and senior fellow at Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

But it's not there yet.

Religious political sway wasn't enough to push climate legislation through Congress this year. And a [Pew Research Center poll](#) of 3,000 respondents found that most religious environmentalists do not derive their green leanings from their faith. Solid majorities of all major religious traditions favor strong environmental laws and regulations, according to the poll, and just under half of those who attend worship services regularly say their clergy speaks out on the topic. Yet the poll found that only six percent said their environmental views were primarily influenced by religion. Education and the media were more influential.

The poll, conducted over the summer, had a margin of error of 2.5 percent.

Still, Dan Lashof, Climate Center director for the National Resources Defense Council, sees results from political action in faith communities.

"It has a significant impact," said Lashof. "Faith communities put a high priority on ensuring that the United States makes a fair contribution to global efforts to address the impacts of climate change in developing countries."

President Obama's 2011 budget reflects the religious influence, Lashof said, with \$1.9 billion requested for international climate adaptation. The U.S. Senate this summer released 2011 budget recommendations for over \$1.2 billion in "fast start" investments for developing countries to address the impacts of climate change, speed a shift to clean energy and reduce tropical deforestation - part of the U.S. commitment to the Copenhagen Accord.

"All of these [religious] voices have had considerable impact on climate change because they have been able to mobilize many of their followers to favor regulation or other efforts to ameliorate climate change," said Green.

The movement eclipses religious divides. In 2008, the Vatican erected 2,700 solar panels and expects to have a 100-megawatt solar power plant running by 2014, making it the first nation state powered solely by the sun. New York City's controversial Ground Zero Islamic cultural center intends to be LEED certified.

The Interfaith network, a campaign of the Regeneration Project that seeks to "deepen the connection between ecology and faith," has churches with solar, synagogues with geothermal systems and a completely green mosque in Washington, D.C., said Bingham.

The religious community also harbors its share of climate deniers. In the recent election, these voices gained clout, among them Rep. John Shimkus (R-Ill.), a hopeful for the House Energy and Commerce Committee chairmanship who stands by his 2009 [congressional testimony](#) citing God's promise to Noah not to destroy the Earth as reason to not worry about climate change.

That argument doesn't hold theological water and doesn't represent the view of the majority in the evangelical community, said the Rev. Jim Ball, director the Pennsylvania-based Evangelical Environmental Network.

"God's not going to be destroying the Earth," said Ball, who runs the networks' Creation Care campaign, rallying evangelicals to climate action. "We are going to be destroying the Earth."

Like the evangelical network, Interfaith Power and Light also crosses into the political realm. Bingham lobbied Congress for this year's failed climate bill and encourages religious leaders to talk about climate change "as a matter of faith, not as a matter of Republican or Democrat," she said.

"Because we are deeply rooted in theology that says we are the stewards of creation, we need to be the people who lead this movement," Bingham said.

Part of the success of religious climate action is made possible by reframing the climate issue in religious, value-based terms rather than political or scientific, Bingham explained. That recasting, she added, prompts action on such basic tenets as universal love, charity, and aiding the poor.

"If we can take a values-based message to our legislators," Bingham said, "we have a better shot of getting climate legislation than an environmental community or, quite frankly, even a scientist."

Green agrees. Religious leaders, he said, "can cast environmental issues in religious language... rather than couching it in scientific language which appeals to scientists but might not necessarily appeal to religious people."

Outside the political sphere, faith communities are also taking local action on the ground.

Through a program called Cool Congregations, Interfaith families compete against each other to reduce their carbon footprint by making faith-based pledges to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions by 10 percent, the amount of a traditional church tithe.

In April, Unity Church in Boulder, Colo. took the solar leap. The non-denominational congregation raised \$130,000 in six months to surround its steeple with solar panels.

"We are all part of this great creation," said the Rev. Jack Groverland, Unity Church's minister. "It is our inspiration and our ideal to do whatever we can on behalf of the environment that gives us life and breath and opportunity."

In sermons and Sunday school, Groverland also asks his congregation to address climate change in their personal lives by driving less, saving water and using energy-efficient light bulbs.

Andy Lenec, 57 and a member of Unity Church, saw the light and followed his spiritual and environmental ideals "down the pay scale." He once worked for an electric utility. Today he consults for various non-profit environmental groups, and recently directed Boulder's Clean Energy Action.

"A lot of mainstream religion misses the point," said Lenec. "It's one Earth. It's God's Earth. It's our Earth and we have an obligation. Dominion doesn't mean domination. It literally means to take care of that which has been entrusted to us."

Unity Church isn't afraid to dig into local politics, either.

In last year's 350 Day of Climate Action in Boulder, Groverland and much of the Unity Church congregation rode their bikes to the nearby Valmont coal plant to rally for clean energy.

This election, Unity backed a local proposition to ditch a franchise with local utility Xcel Energy and allow Boulder to purchase more green energy. The measure passed with 68 percent of the vote, according to official results. But the church stops short of endorsing particular candidates. "We ask people to just vote from conscience," said Groverland. Behind the politics, the faith-driven environmental movement offers a plain mandate for the complex problem of climate change - as only religion can.

"If you love your neighbors, you don't pollute their air," Bingham said. "And you certainly don't destroy the basic stability of poor nations around the world to even live." As for the legislators who failed to pass the federal climate bill, Bingham reserves harsher words.

"They are committing crimes against humanity."

Nathan Rice is a freelance reporter living in Boulder, Colo.

<http://www.dailyclimate.org/tdc-newsroom/2010/11/climate-faith>

December 1, 2010

Rvfo-Rakko, “Big Winter”

By James Treat

Muscogee Nation News

The ancient Mvskoke calendar is grounded in astronomical observations. Each new year, for example, begins with *posketv*, the ceremony known in English as Green Corn, traditionally held around summer solstice. And the sequence of twelve *hvse* approximates the number of lunar months occurring in an annual period.

So *cokv-walv Mvskoke* is structured by the sun’s yearly migration between north and south and the moon’s monthly passage through fractional phases. But its months are named for vital aspects of the earth’s seasonal ecology, those subsistence foods and weather patterns that sustained our Mvskoke ancestors. They understood natural cycles both celestial and terrestrial, and their time-honored calendar synthesizes the astronomical and ecological knowledge they found to be useful.

The first five months of the Mvskoke year name pursuits and perceptions that signify traditional Mvskoke life: harvest, chestnut-thrashing, glistening (frost). The sixth month, on the other hand, refers to a season familiar in most temperate climates: *Rvfo-Rakko*, “Big Winter.” The name was formed by modifying the word *rvfo*, “winter,” with the augmentative suffix *-rakko*, “big.”

Several later months also are based on common seasonal terminology. These references to seasons in the names of months made me curious about Mvskoke knowledge of seasonal divisions.

The most recent Mvskoke-English dictionary includes entries for *rvfo*, “winter”; *tasahcē*, “spring”; and *meskē*, “summer.” (The Koasati language—another member of the Muskogean family—has a very similar word for “winter,” so *rvfo* is probably very old.) But “there is no fixed expression for ‘autumn’ in Creek,” the authors note, “though *rvfo hakof*, ‘when it becomes winter,’ may be used.” The same entries can be found in an earlier Mvskoke-English dictionary published in the late nineteenth century.

No Mvskoke term for “autumn”? If your language lacks a word for a basic element of worldview, it’s a good bet that particular idea is not a native concept. Of course, every living language is always changing; *rvfo hakof* may be analogous to the descriptive terms for days of the week coined by Mvskokes after European colonists imported their seven-day cycle.

Could it be that our agrarian forebears recognized only three seasons per year?

The dominant culture in North America would have you think that astronomical phenomena—solstices and equinoxes—are the only basis for seasonal distinctions. But many factors influence seasonal variation, and there are other ways to conceptualize the seasons.

Meteorological seasons are determined by weather conditions. In Sweden and Finland, for example, seasonal change is noted when the daily averaged temperature remains above or below a certain threshold for a week.

Ecological seasons are defined by the physiology of plants and animals as they respond to environmental variation over the course of a year. Some ecologists use six seasons to describe temperate climes, with the two additional seasons falling between winter and spring (pre-vernal) and between summer and fall (seritonal).

Many indigenous peoples around the world still observe their own traditional seasons. In Australia, various Aboriginal calendars have as few as two and as many as six named seasonal periods, depending on local climate and subsistence practices.

So there is nothing unusual, unnatural, or unscientific about a three-season calendar for Mvskoke country. And Muskogean oral tradition bears at least one compelling piece of evidence in support of this hypothesis.

A hundred years ago, anthropologist John R. Swanton visited the Koasati communities in Louisiana and Texas, transcribing dozens of oral narratives. This English-language collection of nature myths and trickster tales opens with a short story titled “The Ordering of the Months and Seasons,” a creation account in very condensed form.

“All things were made at the same time,” it begins. “The earth, sun, moon—all things—got ripe and were left to man.” The animals, however, took charge of organizing the calendar. “The creatures having assembled, any who liked a certain month took it and ran off,” then “threw it down on the ground as he ran and it started a new moon.” And so things went for the seasons as well. “When it was summer,” for example, “the Humming Bird said, ‘I will stay about and kiss the flowers.’” When all was said and done, “winter, spring, and summer were made together.”

Winter, spring, and summer—no sign of autumn, here or anywhere else in Swanton’s book of Creek, Hitchiti, Alabama, Koasati, and Natchez stories, just those three seasons preserved in the Mvskoke language since time immemorial: *rvfo*, *tasahcē*, and *meskē*. They demarcate seasonal boundaries ideally suited for an agricultural society, incorporating both astronomical and ecological intelligence.

Recovering this wisdom, thinking critically about the ways we mark time in space, can help us understand our environmental crisis and the industrial civilization that produced it.

<http://mvskokecountry.wordpress.com/2010/12/01/december-2010/>

December 2, 2010

Vatican has not endorsed genetically modified food

By Carol Glatz
National Catholic Reporter

VATICAN CITY -- The Vatican did not endorse an 11-page final statement in favor of easing restrictions on and allowing more widespread use of genetically modified crops, especially in poorer nations, said a Vatican official.

"The statement is not a statement of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences because the Pontifical Academy of Sciences as such -- 80 members -- wasn't consulted about it and will not be consulted about it," Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, the academy's chancellor, told Catholic News Service.

The statement, which was recently made public by a private science-publishing company in the Netherlands, also "has no value as the magisterium of the church," he said in an e-mail response to questions Dec. 1.

Later the same day, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman, issued a similar communique, adding that the pro-GM statement "cannot be considered an official position of the Holy See."

Some news agencies had mistakenly reported that the statement represented the Vatican's endorsement of easing regulations on and promoting the use of genetically modified food crops.

The Pontifical Academy of Science's headquarters hosted a study week in May 2009 on "Transgenic Plants for Food Security in the Context of Development."

The final statement summarized the week's proceedings and recommended that genetic engineering techniques be freed from "excessive, unscientific regulation" so that modern and predictable GM technologies could be used to enhance nutrition and food production everywhere.

It called for greater cooperation among private corporations, governments and nonprofit organizations with the aim of increasing funding from governments and charities so that GM crops could be "cost-free" for poorer regions.

It also encouraged more widespread use of sustainable and sound agricultural practices to help improve the lives of the poor.

The statement said its conclusions were "drafted and endorsed by all participants of the study week," which included 33 outside experts and only seven academy members, including the academy's chancellor, Bishop Sanchez.

Bishop Sanchez told CNS that the final statement was signed by all of the participants and "therefore it is a statement that has the authority and value of the participants."

Most of the 40 participants were longtime supporters of using modified crops for boosting food production and creating new sources of energy from nonfood crops.

A number of participants have invented genetically modified foodstuffs or work for companies that sell genetically modified seeds.

There also were at least four speakers who have ties to the U.S. agribusiness giant Monsanto, which created a synthetic bovine growth hormone to boost cow milk production as well as insect- and herbicide-resistant seeds.

Bishop George Nkuo of Kumbo, Cameroon, attended the closed-door study week with the idea that he would talk about a warning by African bishops against claims that genetically modified crops would solve Africa's food crises.

A working document for the Synod of Bishops for Africa released two months before the meeting in 2009 said that using modified crops risks "ruining small landholders, abolishing traditional methods of seeding and making farmers dependent on the production companies" selling their genetically modified seeds.

Those in charge of organizing and inviting speakers for the study week were academy members Ingo Potrykus, who invented a genetic strain of rice that is rich in beta carotene; Werner Arber, a 1978 Nobel Prize winner in medicine; and Peter Raven, retired president of the Missouri Botanical Garden, which is home to the Monsanto Center and its offices, laboratories and millions of plant specimens.

"Finally, for the moment, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences is not planning another meeting on this topic," Bishop Sanchez wrote to CNS.

The academy hosted talks in 2000 and 2004 on whether genetic modification should play a role in promoting food security. After co-hosting the 2004 meeting on modified foods with the U.S. Embassy to the Vatican, the academy showed its support for the potential of modified foods when it released a statement -- based on the conference discussions -- that praised the important contributions such foods could make in fighting hunger.

However, the Vatican has never taken a formal position supporting or opposing genetically modified foods.

Pope Benedict XVI has denounced the continued scandal of hunger in the world, saying its root causes have more to do with problems of distribution and sharing than with there not being enough food in the world.

The Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, said earlier this year that it was not a coincidence that in 2009 the use of genetically modified food crops grew by 13 percent in developing countries and that GM crops covered almost half of the world's total arable land. And yet "the number of hungry people in the world has for the first time reached 1 billion people," the paper said.

December 3, 2010

What is an ethical Christmas?

By Rev. Ian Galloway
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)

One of the dilemmas of the age is how to celebrate a Christian Christmas or, if you prefer, a mid-winter festival without costing the earth and without being labelled a scrooge!

We are told it is our duty to support the economy by shopping and economists monitor the retail sales figures with an eagle eye. An increase in consumer spending and everyone is happy; a glitch and the economy will catch another cold. As we consume more so our carbon footprint grows and the more we buy the more we think we need. Is this what an ethical Christmas is all about?

The Christian message is far from materialistic. There was a birth in a stable at a hard time of year, with shepherds for company; a picture that has no tinsel and, until the arrival of the wise men, no hint of extravagant expenditure. That child gave us the golden rule “love your neighbour (and the stranger) as you would have them love you”. Alongside the Christian story are the old stories of a midwinter festival, the celebration of the winter solstice and the turning of the year.

At Maes Howe in Orkney the passageway into the great chamber is precisely orientated to the setting of the midwinter sun. Maes Howe is part of the Orkney landscape and the ancient Orcadian rhythm of life. Christianity shares the midwinter festival with other faiths, each investing this mid-winter time with a spiritual importance: a turning point, the end of the year, the birth of something new, better and greater.

How then should we celebrate this in a way that does not trash the planet or do harm to others? If by our actions we cause harm to others then our celebrations can scarcely be called ethical. If by our excessive consumption we contribute to unhappiness elsewhere that becomes an ethical challenge to us to consider our choices.

This is not the time to rehearse the arguments about our carbon footprint and how it is hurting others; we all know it is and that we have to reduce our consumption. It is our consumption that drives the economy to bring huge container ships full of goods from factories in China to be sold in Scottish stores at Christmas. It might make sense to some economically, but can be called ethical? It is certainly not sustainable.

Excessive consumption does not make us happier; Christmas and New Year are peak times for violence in the home, according to Scotland’s Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). An advent calendar highlighting the horror of domestic abuse in Scotland was unveiled by the VRU on 1 December this year drawing attention to the shocking relationship between the holiday season

and the increase in domestic abuse. Excessive consumption is no protection against violence and no route to happiness.

The human condition is rooted in the search for contentment. That place where peace is felt within as well as achieved in others. That is something that can never be purchased, only experienced. It comes from the quality of our relationships with each other and the world about us. That quality is nurtured and fed by that most precious of gifts, time; time to be together, time to reflect, time to be still, time to see what we miss even when its right in front of us. It is a gift we can both give ourselves and give to others with little cost but great value. We can pause from the hurly burly, reflect on the year we have lived, celebrate our blessings with our friends and family and give to those we love (and even those we struggle to love) something special that cannot be bought.

These are not new messages, they will not cost the earth but they may change the world. The break from work, for those that can enjoy it, is a once in a year chance to do all these things. It is a chance to meet people we may have lost touch with during the year, to remind ourselves of the invaluable and essential gift of friendship. We can celebrate together in a church and reach out to people of other faiths. We can still give material gifts that are simple and personal, gifts that will endure; gifts with time and attention, gifts that have a value that is not about the price tag.

We can buy local, buy fair trade, or buy a gift from one of Scotland's superb charity shops – shopping that gives us a better chance of knowing the impact of our gifts and improving the chances that they will cause good not harm to those that made them. It might not change the world immediately but it will witness to another way of being; as a baby in a stable once did. We can take the opportunity at Christmas to pause from our normal lives and reconnect to others around us, discover the contentment that we search. We can celebrate and it need not cost the earth.

<http://www.scvo.org.uk/tfn/columns/what-is-an-ethical-christmas/>

December 3, 2010

Hindus laud Pope's interest in solar-powered electric "popemobile"

ANI

Nevada (US): Hindus have praised Vatican's preference in having solar-powered electric popemobile, thus showing care for the planet and promotion of sustainable and green energy.

Distinguished Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, in a statement in Nevada (USA) today, besides the solar-powered electricopemobile idea, also commended His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for putting photovoltaic cells on Vatican auditorium's roof, installation of solar cooling unit for the cafeteria, frequent environment friendly moves and calls to save the planet and curb environmental degradation.

Faiths coming out in support of the environment was a remarkable signal, Rajan Zed, who is president of Universal Society of Hinduism, further said and urged all world religious leaders, religions and denominations to openly bless the environmental causes. Ancient Hindu scriptures, especially Atharva-Veda, were highly respectful of mother nature, Zed added.

We may believe in different religions, yet we share the same home-our Earth. We must learn to happily progress or miserably perish together. For man can live individually but can only survive collectively, Rajan Zed says quoting scriptures.

Pope Benedict heads the Roman Catholic Church, which is the largest of the Christian denominations. Hinduism, oldest and third largest religion of the world, has about one billion adherents and moksh (liberation) is its ultimate goal. (ANI)

<http://www.newstrackindia.com/newsdetails/193776>

December 6, 2010

If an island state vanishes, is it still a nation?

By Charles J. Hanley
Associated Press

CANCUN, Mexico – Encroaching seas in the far Pacific are raising the salt level in the wells of the Marshall Islands. Waves threaten to cut one sliver of an island in two. "It's getting worse," says Kaminaga Kaminaga, the tiny nation's climate change coordinator.

The rising ocean raises questions, too: What happens if the 61,000 Marshallese must abandon their low-lying atolls? Would they still be a nation? With a U.N. seat? With control of their old fisheries and their undersea minerals? Where would they live, and how would they make a living? Who, precisely, would they and their children become?

For years global negotiations to act on climate change have dragged on, with little to show. Parties to the 193-nation U.N. climate treaty are meeting again in this Caribbean resort, but no one expects decisive action to roll back the industrial, agricultural and transport emissions blamed for global warming — and consequently for swelling seas.

From 7,000 miles (11,000 kilometers) away, the people of the Marshalls — and of Kiribati, Tuvalu and other atoll nations beyond — can only wonder how many more years they'll be able to cope.

"People who built their homes close to shore, all they can do is get more rocks to rebuild the seawall in front day by day," said Kaminaga, who is in Cancun with the Marshallese delegation to the U.N. talks.

The Marshallese government is looking beyond today, however, to those ultimate questions of nationhood, displacement and rights.

"We're facing a set of issues unique in the history of the system of nation-states," Dean Bialek, a New York-based adviser to the Republic of the Marshall Islands who is also in Cancun, told The Associated Press. "We're confronting existential issues associated with climate impacts that are not adequately addressed in the international legal framework."

The Marshallese government took a first step to confront these issues by asking for advice from the Center for Climate Change Law at New York's Columbia University. The center's director, Michael B. Gerrard, in turn has asked legal scholars worldwide to assemble at Columbia next May to begin to piece together answers.

Nations have faded into history through secession — recently with the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, for example — or through conquest or ceding their territory to other countries.

But "no country has ever physically disappeared, and it's a real void in the law," Gerrard said during an interview in New York.

The U.N. network of climate scientists projects that seas, expanding from heat and from the runoff of melting land ice, may rise by up to 1.94 feet (0.59 meters) by 2100, swamping much of the scarce land of coral atolls.

But the islands may become uninhabitable long before waves wash over them, because of the saline contamination of water supplies and ruining of crops, and because warming is expected to produce more threatening tropical storms.

"If a country like Tuvalu or Kiribati were to become uninhabitable, would the people be stateless? What's their position in international law?" asked Australian legal scholar Jane McAdam. "The short answer is, it depends. It's complicated." McAdam, of the University of New South Wales, has traveled in the atoll nations and studied the legal history.

As far as islanders keeping their citizenship and sovereignty if they abandon their homelands, she said by telephone from Sydney, "it's unclear when a state would end because of climate change. It would come down to what the international community was prepared to tolerate" — that is, whether the U.N. General Assembly would move to take a seat away from a displaced people.

The 1951 global treaty on refugees, mandating that nations shelter those fleeing because of persecution, does not cover the looming situation of those displaced by climate change. Some advocate negotiating a new international pact obliging similar treatment for environmental refugees.

In the case of the Marshallese, the picture is murkier. Under a compact with Washington, citizens of the former U.S. trusteeship territory have the right to freely enter the U.S. for study or work, but their right to permanent residency must be clarified, government advisers say.

The islanders worry, too, about their long-term economic rights. The wide scattering of the Marshalls' 29 atolls, 2,300 miles (3,700 kilometers) southwest of Hawaii, give them an exclusive economic zone of 800,000 square miles (2 million square kilometers) of ocean, an area the size of Mexico.

The tuna coursing through those waters are the Marshalls' chief resource, exploited by selling licenses to foreign fishing fleets. "If their islands go underwater, what becomes of their fishing rights?" Gerrard asked. Potentially just as important: revenues from magnesium and other sea-floor minerals that geologists have been exploring in recent years.

While lawyers at next May's New York conference begin to sort out the puzzle of disappeared nations, the Marshallese will grapple with the growing problems.

The "top priority," Kaminaga said, is to save the isthmus linking the Marshalls' Jaluit island to its airport, a link now swept by high tides.

Meantime, a lingering drought this year led islanders to tap deeper into their wells, finding salty water requiring them to deploy emergency desalination units. And "parts of the islands are eroding away," Kaminaga said, as undermined lines of coconut palms topple into the sea.

This week in Cancun and in the months to come, the Marshalls' representatives will seek international aid for climate adaptation. They envision such projects as a Jaluit causeway, replanting of protective vegetation on shorelines, and a 3-mile-long (5-kilometer-long) seawall protecting their capital, Majuro, from the Pacific's rising tides.

Islanders' hopes are fading, however, for quick, decisive action to slash global emissions and save their remote spits of land for the next century.

"If all these financial and diplomatic tools don't work, I think some countries are looking at some kind of legal measures," said Dessima Williams, Grenada's U.N. ambassador and chair of a group of small island-nations. Those measures might include appeals to the International Court of Justice or other forums for compensation, a difficult route at best.

In the end, islanders wonder, too, what will happen to their culture, their history, their identity with a homeland — even to their ancestors — if they must leave.

"Cemeteries along the coastline are being eroded. Gravesites are falling into the sea," Kaminaga said. "Even in death we're affected."

http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20101206/ap_on_sc/climate_disappearing_nations

December 6, 2010

Climate justice is focus of four-day Episcopal/Anglican gathering in Dominican Republic

By Lynette Wilson
Episcopal News Service

Anglican and Episcopal leaders from North, South and Central America and the Caribbean are arriving Dec. 6 in the Dominican Republic for a four-day gathering to explore the intersection between poverty and climate change.

"We're hoping to change the conversation in the church from one of climate change to climate justice," said the Rev. P. Joshua "Griff" Griffin, environmental justice missionary in the [Diocese of California](#) and one of the conference's organizers.

Representatives from Cuba, the United States, Ecuador, Panama, Colombia, Haiti, Mexico, Brazil, Guatemala, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic will meet Dec. 7-10 at the Bishop Kellogg Center in San Pedro de Macorís, east of the capital Santo Domingo, for the first Episcopal Climate Justice Gathering, convened by Bishop Marc Andrus of the Episcopal Diocese of California, and Bishop Naudal Gomes, Diocese of Curitiba, Brazil.

Click [here](#) for the gathering's blog.

The gathering in the Dominican Republic will take place as world leaders convene a second week of climate talks in Cancún, Mexico, for the 2010 U.N. Climate Change Conference, which kicked off Nov. 29. The first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, signed and ratified by 191 nations -- the United States signed but didn't ratify it -- is set to expire in 2012. The protocol commits 37 industrialized nations to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent (below 1990 levels) by 2020 and 80 percent by 2050.

At the 2009 U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, negotiators failed to reach a binding deal to cut greenhouse gases when Kyoto expires. Developing nations are pushing for a second phase of the protocol, including deeper emissions cuts of up to 40 percent by 2020.

Anglicans and Episcopalians meeting in the Dominican Republic in parallel with world leaders in Mexico is "symbolic," said Mike Schut, the Episcopal Church's economic and environmental affairs officer, in a telephone interview.

"If governments are not going to get it together, it's time for grassroots awareness building and action," he said. "This time together in the Dominican Republic could be one significant way to make that happen on an international level."

The gathering, in fact, is the result of a companion diocese relationship between the [Episcopal Diocese of California](#) and the Anglican Diocese of Curitiba, in the [Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil](#), Griffin said, in a telephone interview.

The gathering's participants will share information from their own countries; look at climate justice from diverse perspectives; consider the climate change issue in the Dominican Republic; discuss the intersection of Christian theology and climate justice; and explore commitments to work together.

In addition to forming partnerships, the hope, Griffin added, is for the gathering "to build relationships that could be the fabric, the root, of a church- and communion-wide network for climate justice."

Christians are called to take care of creation, said Gomes, in an e-mail.

The church, Gomes added, must work with the United Nations and civic and other organizations to change habits and use technology to reverse the damage humans have had on the environment.

"The church cannot remain outside this call, and other organizations of society should be positioned to act, so that decisions of our governments, which are political decisions, are actually carried out," he said.

Shared faith and companion relationships have the potential to effect great change, said Andrus, in a telephone interview.

"[Archbishop of Canterbury] Rowan Williams wrote a number of years ago that it takes a global body to address global challenges," Andrus said. "The communion -- before the tensions that have caught our minds the last few years -- was a virtual communion; we didn't really function together.

"The attention that we've placed on the existence of the communion over the last few years gives us the chance to be a functioning body regarding globalized challenges. A great deal can be done and has to be done by individuals and congregations in their local context, but we also have to see how we can coordinate efforts across our shared faith and commitments ... This presents a great possibility."

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/79425_126033_ENG_HTM.htm

December 6, 2010

Has Environmentalism Lost Its Spiritual Core?

By Bryan Walsh
Time

Environmentalism began as a religion. Certainly that's how paleo-greens like John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, would have seen it. Muir was awakened to nature when he first explored

Yosemite in the 1860s, and he felt it in a religious way — he called what would become one of the nation's first national parks "the grandest of all special temples of Nature."

Muir's biographer, Donald Worster, has written that Muir saw his mission as "saving the American soul from total surrender to materialism." David Brower, a spiritual successor to Muir who would found Friends of the Earth, would say of his staunchest green allies that they had "the religion." Environmentalism — rooted in nature and the outdoors — was an antidote to secular, technological modern life. ([See TIME's special report on the environment.](#))

Except it's not quite that way anymore. As greens have pivoted to focus on climate change, the environmental movement has changed as well. It has become more wonky, focused on complex economic policies like cap and trade and new technologies like concentrated solar power. Its constituency has become more urban, more likely to be riding the subway than hiking the Sierra Nevada. The biggest event on the green calendar this year is the U.N. climate-change summit going on now in Cancún, Mexico, where international diplomats are jousting over protocols defining energy efficiency and technology transfer. Even one of the most promising subjects at Cancún — avoided deforestation, which allows tropical nations to be paid for keeping trees standing — turns a tree from something that should be valued for its own qualities into a living carbon bank. Not exactly romantic.

Wangari Maathai, for one, would like to change that. The Kenyan activist won a Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 — making her the first environmentalist to earn the award — for her work with the Green Belt Movement, a nonprofit that focuses on planting trees, conserving the environment and fighting for women's rights. Now Maathai has a new book called *Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World*, and she's preaching a green gospel. To Maathai, environmental work needs to be linked to spiritual values — and spiritual values should drive us to care about the environment, contributing to what's called in Judaism *tikkun olam*, the healing of the world. "We've become detached from nature," Maathai told me recently during a trip to New York City. "And as you move away from nature, you become lost." ([See TIME's "Heroes of the Environment 2009."](#))

In her book, Maathai tells the story of how she began working for conservation in 1977, launching the Green Belt Movement. At the time her focus wasn't on religion or spirituality, though she grew up and was educated in the Catholic faith. Maathai wanted a practical way to help the rural women of Kenya with their basic needs: clean drinking water, food, energy for cooking and heating. Planting trees and restoring natural habitat was a way to achieve those practical goals. "I didn't think digging holes and mobilizing communities to protect or restore the trees, forests, watersheds, soil or habitat for wildlife that surrounded them was spiritual work," Maathai writes.

But over time, her feelings changed. She found what was driving those who joined the Green Belt Movement — and in time, what was driving Maathai herself — wasn't just about fixing material needs. It was about meeting something intangible within people. The poisoning of the earth, the destruction of the forest — Maathai came to believe that human beings could feel these losses. "If we live in an environment that's wounded — where the water is polluted, the air is filled with soot and fumes, the food is contaminated with heavy metals and plastic residues, or the soil is practically dust — it hurts us, chipping away at our health and creating injuries at a physical, psychological and spiritual level," Maathai writes. "In degrading the environment, therefore, we degrade ourselves." ([Watch TIME's video "TimeFrames: A Planet Polluted."](#))

Maathai came to understand, however, that the opposite is true as well. As we work to heal the earth, we heal ourselves as well. There's even an emerging field of treatment behind this — "eco-therapists" have begun prescribing nature walks and time spent outdoors for the depressed. The challenge is that we're growing more and more divorced from nature. Today more than half of the world's population now lives in cities, and even Maathai's largely rural Africa is becoming more and more urbanized, and more and more industrialized. "In Africa, we're busy trying to catch up with the West and live the same kind of life that we see on TV," says Maathai. "But we end up destroying the environment to get the things that we perceive as development." ([Comment on this story.](#))

As we learn to develop smarter, we can help avoid some of those problems — in fact, sustainable development is really at the heart of environmentalism today, as we attempt as a species to manage natural resources and grow without choking the planet. That need will only become more pressing in the age of climate change, which the world has so far failed to deal with — just look at the gridlock in Cancún. But Maathai is right when she points out that we can't forgo the natural connection that we feel for nature, even if we are becoming an urban animal. "A certain tree, forest or mountain itself may not be holy, [but] the life-sustaining services it provides — the oxygen we breathe, the water we drink — are what make existence possible," she writes. "The environment becomes sacred, because to destroy what is essential to life is to destroy life itself."

That's a religion that John Muir would recognize — and one we shouldn't surrender.

<http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,2035271,00.html>

December 8, 2010

Faith-based Organizations Advocate for Climate Justice

Presented by the World Council of Churches (WCC), Action by Churches Together (ACT Alliance), and Caritas Internationalis (CI)

ENB on the side
International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

This event discussed the work of faith-based organizations in the context of climate change.

Martina Liebsch, CI, reminded participants that climate policy is about people and working towards “climate justice.” She said the key message of the event is to adopt a new paradigm for “reconciliation with creation.”

Salvador Urteaga Gutieérrez, Comisión Episcopal para la Pastoral Social (CEPS), discussed the destruction caused by natural disasters resulting from climate change, saying CEPS is committed to investing in caring for the poor affected by these events.

Carlos Javier Cardenas Martínez, Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua (CEPAD), emphasized addressing climate change as a matter of justice. He highlighted the ACT Alliance’s efforts on health, resilience and relief efforts at the community level and underlined the importance of technology transfer, early warning systems and capacity building.

Recalling the 2010 Cochabamba Declaration, Abraham Colque Jimenez, Instituto Superior Ecuémico Andino de Teología (ISEAT), called for: a climate justice tribunal; and all churches to invest in “eco-centric spirituality” by supporting government bodies to take greater responsibility in caring for the earth.

M. Abdus Sabur, Asian Muslim Action Network, said the Qur’an states that ownership of resources belong to the creator, and although everyone has the right to these resources, they must leave them intact. He expressed the Muslim community's interest in working on a common vision towards climate change, but that more information and translation into Asian languages was needed to involve local communities. He described his Network’s consultations on climate change which highlighted the need for water and land rights.

In the discussion, the audience highlighted: the role churches can play in working with scholars to develop a moral and ethical language for the UNFCCC delegates; using congregations as the vehicle to facilitate behavior change to address climate change; overpopulation; and the responsibility and opportunity for faith-based organizations to learn the science of climate change.

<http://www.iisd.ca/climate/cop16/enbots/pdf/enbots1295e.pdf>

December 10, 2010

The Risk of Ocean Death from CO2

Planetnetwork

Cancun – The new trump card in climate change will be ocean acidity, or what might be better called ocean death. This newly recognized threat makes drastically cutting CO₂ astronomically more urgent, even as negotiators are just now barely beginning to agree to the emissions reductions required to avert dangerous climate change.

Destabilizing the chemistry of the oceans threatens to irreversibly wipe out the fisheries that humanity depends on for food, while jeopardizing the Earth's entire ecosystem. It is not an overstatement to describe this as the risk of the death of the oceans as we know them.

There is already enough extra CO₂ in the atmosphere to crash the oceans 50 years from now. This is due to the 50-year delay between the CO₂ level in the atmosphere, and the effect of that level on ocean acidity. We are already at, or above, an atmospheric level now that could cause a future tipping point in the oceans. This means that within 50 years, or less, we must bring the CO₂ level back down to where it is now, and then continue to reduce it further. This is vastly more ambitious than the reductions currently imagined in climate negotiations.

As the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere increases, the oceans absorb more CO₂. This has previously been regarded as a good thing, as it has held down the atmospheric CO₂ level and thereby slowed global warming. However, when CO₂ dissolves in water it forms carbonic acid. This reacts with calcium carbonate in the water, decreasing the amount of calcium available to organisms that need it to build their shells. At even higher concentrations the increased acidity would begin to weaken existing shells by pulling calcium out of them.

Ocean Death now poses a far more severe, certain, and immanent threat than climate change – at much lower CO₂ levels. These CO₂ levels have long been discounted for climate change, but the new threat to oceans has yet to be understood and considered by negotiators.

The IUCN side event at the UNFCCC COP16 disclosed that a strong consensus of ocean research shows that even 350ppm CO₂ might be too high. Researchers say the current level, rapidly approaching 400ppm, is already close to, or beyond, the maximum that oceans could survive. All agreed that 450ppm would cause collapse of the oceans. If we crash the food web in the oceans we would throw the whole world into ecological collapse and famine, and we could do it within less than 50 years if we continued on our current trajectory.

This is in sharp contrast to the CO₂ numbers currently under discussion for climate, where politicians and negotiators routinely accept projected temperature increases associated with CO₂ levels of 550ppm and beyond. The science around ocean acidity is simpler, more direct, and far more certain than for climate change, yet it is difficult to predict whether the scientific recognition of this new threat will cause the US wake up from well funded denial any faster. We will likely be closer to 400ppm before we begin to act seriously, and a large amount of additional CO₂ overshoot is built in to the system. From where we stand now it looks like it would take a miracle to achieve peak CO₂ at as low as 450ppm. However, the science now tells us that we face an even more urgent race to take fossil emissions to zero

and then begin to rapidly remove net carbon from the atmosphere, before the effects of the carbon we have already emitted catch up with us in the oceans.

Background on avoiding Ocean Death

The first point to understand is that the risk from ocean acidity is purely a function of CO₂, not CO₂ equivalents, such as methane, nitrous oxide, and other greenhouse gasses. These other gases remain important for temperature, where they could still potentially trigger dangerous runaway feedback loops, but assuming that we do cut CO₂ quickly and deeply enough to avoid ocean death, we will also solve climate change.

Secondly, it will not be enough to simply stop emitting fossil carbon; we need to actively remove carbon from the atmosphere to reduce the total atmospheric CO₂ level to below where it is now.

Third, we have far less time to do this than has previously been assumed; less than 50 years. After we finish wasting time in well funded denial, we will need to undertake a crash global program to decarbonize the world – on a par with WWII and the space program.

What can we do about it?

The first step will be to simply face the truth, and work to make society understand both the seriousness of the danger and the actions that we must take to address the threat and protect our children. This will be like round two of the climate change debate, but with new science that now shows a simple direct linear relationship between the CO₂ level and a new catastrophic global threat. We need to steel ourselves, rise to the challenge, and put PR people rather than scientists in charge of the language and the message.

Taking CO₂ emissions to zero – far more rapidly than we have imagined

The first part of the challenge is well understood from climate change. What is frightening is just how rapidly we must do it to avoid the new threat. What is lacking are the will and resources to do it so quickly. While daunting, it is technically achievable to de-carbonize the world's energy infrastructure in a matter of decades. In addition to efficiency, and the standard renewables, wind, solar, biomass, geothermal, wave and tidal, the other huge wildcard is nuclear, especially the new fast breeder reactor design from Argon National Labs.

Removing net CO₂ from the atmosphere

The other new factor that separates the risk of ocean death from previously understood risks of climate change is the need to actively remove CO₂ from the atmosphere – very quickly. We will need to actively remove a huge amount of CO₂ from the atmosphere over the next 50 years.

While many policy makers assume that CCS (carbon capture and storage) will be the solution to both CO₂ emissions and removing net CO₂, CCS actually remains an unproven technology, and may potentially still be fatally flawed due to problems with produced water (dirty liquids and gas forced to the surface), CO₂ leakage, and the sheer volume of suitable formations required. At best CCS may help reduce point-source fossil emissions, such as from coal-fired power plants. Using CCS to sequester carbon released from biomass energy to achieve net carbon removal remains one of the big speculative solutions for removing net carbon from the atmosphere.

In response to concerns about ocean acidity a few scientists in the geoengineering community have suggested adding calcium carbonate to oceans, but this would require massive additional energy inputs and would also raise new unanswered questions for ocean ecosystems. At the far end of sci-fi geoengineering ideas are proposals for synthetic trees to actively scrub CO₂ out of the atmosphere. These would also require vast amounts of extra energy and presuppose that CCS will work to actually store the CO₂ removed from the atmosphere.

Increased net forest cover and low carbon agriculture and rangeland management techniques are the lowest cost way of achieving one-time increases in total terrestrial carbon storage. Preserving and ultimately re-expanding, tropical forests are at the core of the REDD+ initiative and are certainly the first place to start. Soil carbon is also beginning to be discussed and is expected to become important at COP17 in South Africa, but all land use changes combined will not be able to provide more than a fraction of the total carbon removal needed. There is simply not enough capacity to remove the bulk of the net surplus fossil carbon from the atmosphere.

So far, perhaps the best-proven method of removing and storing large amounts of excess carbon from the atmosphere may be biochar. Biochar can also initially be cost-effective based on value-added benefits from soil fertility, pollution mitigation and increased total biomass. Sustainable biochar made from only a small fraction of available agricultural residues could remove almost a gigaton per year of carbon, while other calculations suggest that biochar could remove as much as 5 gigatons per year using 10% of all available waste biomass. The biggest benefit of biochar over CCS alone is that it can increase total productive lands by reclaiming depleted tropical land and thereby taking pressure off intact tropical forests. If seawater were used to irrigate salt tolerant plants on coastal deserts the total might exceed those numbers.

Increased carbon cycling in the oceans is the other major potential source of photosynthetic activity. The ocean scientists at the IUCN event at COP16 did not like the idea of seeding the ocean with iron, and claimed that all of the major ocean NGO's agree with their position on this. However, photosynthesis in the oceans is the most likely place to look beyond terrestrial biomass to achieve gigaton-scale carbon removal over time.

The direct photosynthetic capture of CO₂ by algae for biofuels production shows promise as an alternative to fossil carbon feedstocks, but it is not clear whether this will ultimately be helpful for net carbon removal from the atmosphere.

How much carbon?

CO₂ absorbed by the ocean has accounted for about 1/3 of all fossil emissions, while terrestrial sinks are estimated to have absorbed about another 1/3 of fossil emissions. The oceans will give up CO₂ on the way back down to lower atmospheric levels, but terrestrial sinks will not.

One ppm of atmospheric CO₂ is equivalent to about two metric tonnes of solid carbon, so once we get to zero fossil emissions, we will need to remove about two gigatons of carbon per 1ppm reduction in the atmospheric CO₂ level. Once we reduce the atmospheric CO₂ level enough that the oceans begin to emit CO₂ rather than absorb it, then we will need to remove more like three gigatons of carbon per 1ppm reduction in the atmospheric CO₂ level.

The apparently insurmountable challenge over the next 50 years will be to keep the oceans from seeing atmospheric CO₂ levels above 400ppm for any significant period. To avoid this, we will need to undertake crash programs to both slash fossil emissions and to actively remove net carbon from the atmosphere – as rapidly as possible. If we can do so, the same programs can continue to remove net carbon once we curtail fossil emissions and take us back down to 350ppm, or below. To hold the CO₂ level at 400ppm will require slashing total emissions much faster than we currently imagine possible, while also removing several gigatons per year of net carbon from the atmosphere. To eventually go from 400ppm back down to 350ppm will require removing more like 150 gigatons of carbon, as once the oceans start to release CO₂ that extra carbon will need to be removed and retired as well.

Risk of Ocean Death [PDF download](#)

Background on Avoiding Ocean Death [PDF download](#)

<http://www.planetwork.net/climate/>

December 10, 2010

Gift endows interdisciplinary studies of theology and the environment at Yale

By Rich Heffern
Press Release

NEW HAVEN, CT - A gift pledge of \$3 million will endow a joint senior faculty appointment between Yale Divinity School/Berkeley Divinity School and the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies in honor of H. Boone Porter, a Berkeley and Yale graduate, and his wife, Violet M. Porter.

The endowment promises to substantially enhance the interdisciplinary study of theology and the environment that has taken hold at Yale in recent years, culminating in the establishment of a

joint degree program. The gift, finalized on Nov. 29, comes from the children of the Porters through the Porter Foundation. Boone Porter, who died in 1999, was a scholar, priest, writer, and environmentalist, and both he and his wife had a particularly significant impact on the life of the Episcopal Church.

Yale Divinity School Dean Harold Attridge said, "This gift from the Porter Foundation will ensure that the collaboration that has developed in recent years between Yale Divinity School and the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies will continue and expand into an even more fruitful partnership. The environmental challenges that we face involve not only scientific and technical issues, but also issues of fundamental values and moral commitments."

Peter Crane, Dean of the School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, said, "We are delighted and humbled by the commitment of the Porter family and truly excited by the new opportunity to further develop the already-strong connections between religion and environmental stewardship at Yale."

"For Berkeley, this gift is not only an important contribution to addressing the urgent ecological issues of our day," observed Berkeley Dean Joseph Britton. "It also places the seminary in the forefront of theological education in the Episcopal Church, vividly demonstrating the larger horizon in a university divinity school."

Yale has been at the leading edge of the burgeoning religion/ecology synthesis and created the nation's first joint Master's degree program in religion and the environment. In recent years, several faculty with a faith/ecology focus have come to the University, and a number of major conferences on religion and the environment have been hosted by Yale. Divinity School alumni continue to be nationally prominent in the field.

Porter Foundation President Nicholas T. Porter, who graduated from both Yale College and the Divinity School and is a trustee of Berkeley Divinity School, said, "As a graduate of Yale College, Berkeley Divinity School, and Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, my father knew that his work and life was deeply shaped, informed and enriched by these great institutions. As a memorial to both him and my mother, we are delighted to be able to similarly enrich the lives and studies of future students of Berkeley and Yale."

"The field of religion and ecology is growing at a rapid rate," said Mary Evelyn Tucker, who has joint faculty appointments in the Divinity and Environment schools. "The Porter Chair is a sign of this growth and will be the first such chair in the United States. It is an historic moment and a great contribution, not only to Yale Divinity School but to seminary education across the country and beyond."

In 1954 Boone Porter began a teaching career at Nashotah House, an Episcopal seminary near Milwaukee, WI, then was appointed the first tenured professor of liturgy at The General Theological Seminary in New York City. Later in his career he was editor of the weekly magazine *The Living Church*, a publication focused on the Anglican tradition. He also had a major role in the development of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. He graduated from Yale

College in 1945, then earned degrees from Berkeley in 1950 and the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies in 1996. In 1997 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from Berkeley.

In addition to the endowment for a Porter professorship, the Porter family also donated Boone Porter's papers to Yale, working especially through H. Boone Porter III, a 1972 graduate of Yale College. They have been deposited in the Yale Divinity School Library, and document the fecundity of Boone Porter's lifelong commitment both to the church and environment.

Yale Divinity School and Berkeley Divinity School, a seminary of the Episcopal Church, began their affiliation in 1971. Berkeley maintains an independent board of trustees and dean, but both schools are located on the Yale campus at Sterling Divinity Quadrangle. Berkeley students receive Yale degrees, along with a diploma or certificate in Anglican Studies from Berkeley.

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/gift-endows-interdisciplinary-studies-theology-and-environment-yale>

December 13, 2010

Advent: Let's start to heal our planet

By Mallory McDuff
USA Today

As a child during Advent, I fought with my three siblings over Jesus. We didn't argue about conversion, but rather the right to put a one-dimensional infant the size of a thumbnail onto the Advent calendar made from red felt and glitter glue. My mother devised a rotational system, which meant that every four years, each child would place baby Jesus into his glittered manger on Christmas Day.

For my children, that same Advent calendar represents one step in our preparations for Christmas. (In a more secular waiting game, my cousins use the Elf on a Shelf, that magical spy for St. Nick.)

The start of Advent, this season of waiting and watching, coincided with the [United Nations Climate Change Conference](#) in [Cancun](#), Mexico. We are not waiting for climate change. It is here. And religious communities are taking the lead with incremental solutions to a warming planet.

Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning arrival. It might be more apt to consider Advent as a season of imagination, says Jack Jezreel, executive director of Just Faith Ministries. Advent thus becomes a time to imagine a just world in the face of environmental changes that result in disproportionate impacts on those who contribute the least to the problem.

In a recent issue of *The Economist*, the cover story "[How to live with climate change](#)" calls us to respond to current climatic conditions, not some apocalyptic prediction. We must reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, adapt now with changes in infrastructure and food security, and focus on how we deal with human migration.

People of faith involved in disaster relief have already become first responders to climate change. "The church was the catalyst for getting things back in order after (Hurricane) Katrina, not the government," says [Jackie Robinson](#) of St. John Baptist Church in New Orleans. On an international scale, religious organizations such as [Catholic Relief Services](#) in Guatemala are helping farmers adapt to less predictable weather conditions by diversifying crops and soil management practices.

Faith communities, unlike legislative bodies, emphasize justice and helping your neighbor. Many of the 10,000 congregations involved in Interfaith Power and Light have joined a [Carbon Covenant](#), which connects congregations in the Global North and South to mitigate the impacts of global warming such as deforestation.

In the U.S., congregations are adopting innovative financing to harness solar power. Beth El Synagogue in Margate, N.J., leveraged \$175,000 from a state grant to install 286 solar panels, which will produce 50% of its energy needs. Such imaginative change challenges our society based on fossil fuels, much as abolitionism contradicted the economic foundations of the 19th century.

Confronting climate change will require societal shifts similar to those that changed attitudes and behaviors around smoking and even slavery, according to a study by Andy Hoffman at the University of Michigan. "If we developed feasible and scalable renewable energy tomorrow, public opinion on climate would shift fairly quickly," Hoffman tells DailyClimate.org. Social marketers know that increasing benefits and decreasing barriers can change behavior and attitudes.

During this season of Advent, we must not wait for polls or votes to harness the power of religion for the challenge of climate change. We also need to imagine the possibilities and passions that children see in the spirit of Advent, in glittered mangers and even an elf on a shelf. Let every heart prepare for innovative actions grounded in a moral imperative. The time isn't coming. It's here.

Mallory McDuff is the author of Natural Saints: How People of Faith are Working to Save God's Earth. She teaches at Warren Wilson College in Asheville, N.C.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/2010-12-13-column13_ST1_N.htm

December 16, 2010

WikiLeaks cables: Dalai Lama called for focus on climate, not politics, in Tibet

Exiled Buddhist leader told US ambassador to India that 'political agenda should be sidelined' in favour of climate issues

By Jason Burke
The Guardian

The [Dalai Lama](#) told US diplomats last year that the international community should focus on [climate change](#) rather than politics in [Tibet](#) because environmental problems were more urgent, secret American cables reveal.

The exiled Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader told Timothy Roemer, the US ambassador to [India](#), that the ["political agenda should be sidelined for five to 10 years and the international community should shift its focus to climate change on the Tibetan plateau"](#) during a meeting in Delhi last August.

"Melting glaciers, deforestation and increasingly polluted water from mining projects were problems that 'cannot wait', but the Tibetans could wait five to 10 years for a political solution," he was reported as saying.

Though the Dalai Lama has frequently raised environmental issues, he has never publicly suggested that political questions take second place, nor spoken of any timescale with such precision.

Roemer speculated, in his cable to Washington reporting the meeting, that "the Dalai Lama's message may signal a broader shift in strategy to reframe the Tibet issue as an environmental concern".

In their meeting, the ambassador reported, the Dalai Lama criticised [China](#)'s energy policy, saying dam construction in Tibet had displaced thousands of people and left temples and monasteries underwater.

He recommended that the Chinese authorities compensate Tibetans for disrupting their nomadic lifestyle with vocational training, such as weaving, and said there were "three poles" in danger of melting – the north pole, the south pole, and "the glaciers at the pole of Tibet".

The cables also reveal the desperate appeals made by the Dalai Lama for intervention by the US during unrest in Tibet during spring 2008.

As a heavy crackdown followed demonstrations and rioting, he pleaded with US officials to take action that would "make an impact" in Beijing.

At the end of one 30-minute meeting, a cable reports that the Dalai Lama [embraced the embassy's officials and "made a final plea"](#).

"Tibet is a dying nation. We need America's help," he was reported as saying.

Other cables reveal US fears that the influence of the 75-year-old Dalai Lama over the Tibetan community in exile might be waning or that a succession to his leadership could pose problems.

In June 2008, officials reported that their visit to six Tibetan refugee settlements across north and north-eastern India "underscores concerns that frustrated and dissatisfied Tibetan youth ... could pose serious problems".

["A widening generational divide finds Tibetan leaders unable to resolve growing dissatisfaction among younger Tibetans."](#) the officials said.

In February, following the ninth round of talks in Beijing between the Tibetan government in exile, known as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), and Chinese officials, US diplomats predicted that ["the Chinese government's international credibility on human rights will continue to decline as Tibetans gain further access to media tools"](#).

In a section of the cable entitled "A militant Shangri-La?", a reference to the fictional mythical Himalayan kingdom, the officials explained: "Their frustration's effect on the Tibetan movement could be exacerbated by the passage of time, as the Dalai Lama's increasing age inevitably slows down his gruelling travel schedule and his potential ability to continue to capture the world's attention on his people's plight."

A final point, made repeatedly by officials, is that the Indian government's policy towards the Tibetans in exile is likely to be decided by public sentiment.

In one confidential cable of March 2008, an official told Washington that Shiv Shankar Menon, the current Indian national security adviser and then India's top diplomat, had explained to the US ambassador that though ["the Tibetan movement has the sympathy of the Indian public, and India has been a generally supportive home to tens of thousands of Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama, for nearly 50 years ... the tacit agreement that Tibetans are welcome in India as long as they don't cause problems is being challenged at a time when India's complex relationship with Beijing is churning with border issues, rivalry for regional influence, a growing economic interdependence, the nascent stages of joint military exercises, and numerous other priorities"](#).

The US officials concluded that "while the [government of India] will never admit it", New Delhi's "balancing act with India's Tibetans [would] continue for the foreseeable future, with the caveat that a rise in violence – either by Tibetans here or by the Chinese security forces in Tibet – could quickly tip the balance in favour of the side with greater public support".

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/dec/16/wikileaks-dalai-lama-climate-change>

December 16, 2010

Himalayan monks to launch green movement in Kolkata

Indo-Asian News Service

Kolkata - The fast-melting glaciers in the Himalayas could destroy Hindu pilgrimage spots as well as the caves where thousands of sadhus meditate, and monks have decided to launch a green movement by planting trees in and around Kolkata city and the Sundarbans area, said a spiritual leader just back from the Cancun climate summit.

Talking about the ill effects global warming, Soham Baba, chief of Naga Sadhus, said here Thursday: 'The glaciers across the Himalayan region are melting at an alarming rate which may lead to destruction of Hindu pilgrimage spots and meditative places of thousands of monks. A large number of birds and medicinal plants have also disappeared from the mountain range.'

'In continuation of my Global Green Movement, to protect mother nature the 'Soham Baba Mission' (a NGO run by Baba) has planned to plant a large number of trees in and around the city of Kolkata. We also plan to undertake mangrove plantation in the Sunderbans,' he told a media gathering.

'The Himalayan region is the most sensitive area, where three nations - India, China and Pakistan - with large nuclear power are existing. Lately, the huge flood in Pakistan and Ladakh due to the melting snow of the Himalayan peaks, were never so devastating in history. If this climate change of melting ice continues, there will be a huge shortage of drinking water in these countries, and then, the world will face most terrible and devastating scenario,' warned the Baba.

Soham Baba, who hails from Bengal, lives in the caves in Himalayas. He was invited to participate at the United Nations Framework Convention On Climate Change at Cancun, Mexico.

Sharing his experience at the Cancun meet, he said: 'I went there with the hope that there will be a settlement on the Kyoto Protocol, but I was disappointed. The problem of climate change cannot be solved only by investing funds from the developed countries and implementing bureaucracies or diplomacies. A global awareness about a green, healthy and happy planetary community must be manifested,' he said.

<http://news.in.msn.com/national/article.aspx?cp-documentid=4706474>

December 21, 2010

Biodiversity Year Ends on a High Note as UN General Assembly Backs Resolution Signing into Life an 'IPCC-for Nature'

United Nations Environment Programme

New York/Nairobi - A new international body aimed at catalyzing a global response to the loss of biodiversity and world's economically-important forests, coral reefs and other ecosystems was born yesterday by governments at the United Nations 65th General Assembly (UNGA).

It underlines a further success of the UN's International Year of Biodiversity and should provide a boost to the International Year of Forests which begins in January 2011, and the international decade of biodiversity, also beginning in January 2011.

The adoption, by the UNGA plenary, was the last approval needed for setting up an Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

Governments gave a green light to its establishment in June at a meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea, coordinated by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), but this required a resolution to be passed at the UNGA.

The independent platform will in many ways mirror the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which has assisted in catalyzing worldwide understanding and governmental action on global warming.

The new body will bridge the gulf between the wealth of scientific knowledge on the accelerating declines and degradation of the natural world, with knowledge on effective solutions and decisive government action required to reverse these damaging trends.

Its various roles will include carrying out high-quality peer reviews of the wealth of science on biodiversity and ecosystem services emerging from research institutes across the globe in order to provide gold standard reports to governments.

These reports will not only cover the state, status and trends of biodiversity and ecosystems, but will also outline transformational policy options and responses to bring about real change in their fortunes.

The IPBES will achieve this in part by prioritizing, making sense of and bringing consistency to the great variety of reports and assessments conducted by United Nations bodies, research centres, universities and others as they relate to biodiversity and ecosystem services.

"IPBES represents a major breakthrough in terms of organizing a global response to the loss of living organisms and forests, freshwaters, coral reefs and other ecosystems that underpin all life-including economic life-on Earth," Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director said.

"2010, the International Year of Biodiversity, began on a mute note after it emerged that no single country had achieved the target of substantially reversing the rate of loss of biodiversity. But it has ended on a far more positive one that underlines a new determination to act on the challenges and deliver the opportunities possible from a far more intelligent management of the planet's nature-based assets," he added.

Builds on Biological Diversity Convention Achievements

Mr. Steiner said the sign-off by the UNGA came in the wake of the successes at the meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity that took place in Nagoya, Japan, in October.

Here governments adopted a new strategic plan including targets for addressing biodiversity loss to be met by 2020.

For example, governments agreed to increase the extent of land-based protected areas and national parks to 17 per cent of the Earth's surface, up from around 12.5 per cent now, and to extend marine protected areas to 10 per cent, up from under one per cent currently.

Other elements of the extensive plan include, by 2020 lifting the extinction risk from known threatened species.

The meeting agreed to study resource mobilization for assisting developing countries to meet the new targets in the plan based on a methodology that relates support to needs and gaps.

Other decisions included taking a 'precautionary approach' in terms of emerging areas such as geo-engineering in order to combat climate change and the development of synthetic biofuels.

Builds on Green Economy TEEB Successes

Nagoya also delivered a sea change in the global understanding of the multi-trillion dollar importance of biodiversity and forests, freshwaters and other ecosystems to the global economy and to national economies, and in particular for the "GDP of the poor".

The case has been built via The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), an initiative hosted by UNEP, requested by G-8 environment ministers as well as developing country ones and supported by the European Commission and governments including Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom.

The TEEB partnership also brings together a wide network of contributing organizations, institutes and individuals from the world's of science to economics from developing and developed countries.

In Nagoya the final global TEEB report—a major stream of the UNEP Green Economy Initiative- was launched as countries including Brazil and India announced they would be launching their own national TEEB studies.

A parallel and supporting partnership was also announced by the World Bank in collaboration with organizations including UNEP to 'green' national accounts in order to mainstream 'natural capital' within national economic and development plans.

The project is initially set to be implemented in between six and 10 countries including Colombia and Mexico.

Mr. Steiner said the formal go-ahead for an IPBES meant much of what had been possible in 2010 had been transformed into a reality.

He said the UNGA backing now triggered a series of steps needed to get the work of the new body up and running.

UNEP, as the interim Secretariat, will now organize a plenary or meeting of governments in 2011 to decide on issues such as which country will house the independent IPBES and which institutions will host it alongside other institutional arrangements.

Notes to Editors

IPBES-what is it likely to do?

There have been and are currently a myriad of global, regional and national assessments being carried out from time to time that relate to biodiversity and ecosystem services.

These include the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment; the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development; UNEP's Global Environment Outlook; the Global Biodiversity Outlook and the Global Forest Resources Assessment.

Others include the State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture; the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity and the IUCN Red List of threatened and endangered species.

While most, if not all are important, many of the findings are failing to translate into meaningful and decisive action by governments on the ground and in global and national planning.

This is in part due to different methodologies and standards operating across such assessments.

IPBES can bring greater rigor to such assessments while bringing together their findings in order to provide governments with greater clarity and confidence on the conclusions in order to act.

Other areas include bringing to the attention of governments 'new topics' identified by science, outlining what is known and also aspects where more research is needed.

Some scientists, for example, claim that evidence that deoxygenated dead zones in the world's oceans took too long time to migrate from scientific circles into the domain and in-trays of policy-makers.

A similar argument is made concerning the pros and cons of biofuels. IPBES could provide better early warning of such new topics to governments before decisions are taken.

While IPBES will support some capacity building in developing countries, its main role will be to catalyze funding to assist developing country scientists and developing country assessments through, for example, harnessing funding via UN agencies; foundations and other sources.

Unraveling the precise role of animals, plants, insects and even microbes within ecosystems and their functions in terms of the services generated—from water purification to soil fertility—could also be a major thrust.

Some experts are convinced that many scientific discoveries, from the identification of new lower life forms to the fast disappearance of others, can often remain within the corridors of research institutes and universities for many years before they reach the wider world.

By that time it may be too late to act to either conserve or protect the species concerned whereas early warning might have put the species on the political radar giving it a better chance.

For more details including the history of IPBES www.ipbes.net

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<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=653&ArticleID=6872&l=en>

December 28, 2010

Doing the right thing on climate change a moral obligation

By Bob Doppelt
The Register-Guard

The holidays are a time of friends, family and faith. For many, gift-giving is part of the holiday tradition.

One of the most important offerings anyone can bestow to others is the gift of life. Taking ethical action to address global climate change worldwide is a bequest that will give life to people now and in the future.

The moral obligation to reduce climate-damaging consumption and carbon emissions is the central message of the new book, “Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril.” Co-edited by Kathleen Moore, a professor at Oregon State University, the manuscript describes 14 moral imperatives, depicted by 83 different authors, for dealing with climate change.

Unless human-produced emissions are rapidly reduced, climate instability will alter profoundly conditions for humans and all other organisms on Earth. With only 4.5 percent of the world’s population, the United States has contributed about 30 percent of the cumulative atmospheric emissions that are destabilizing the climate. We have failed to address the problem.

Why haven’t we acted? Lack of information about the risks is obviously not the problem. Plenty exists. But factual data do not tell us what we ought to do. Moral conviction is required for that purpose, and clarity over the moral imperatives to act on climate change has been missing.

Professor Moore told me that she and a group of colleagues came to this conclusion about three years ago. They decided to hold a meeting at the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest in Blue River to discuss what to do. The book is one of the results.

One of the moral messages of the book concerns the need for a change in thinking about who we are as humans and the role we play in the world. Many people believe that humanity exists separately from all other processes and species on Earth. From this perspective, everything is created for our use alone, right now. We are thus not obligated to control our behavior to safeguard other people, species or future generations.

Ecological science, quantum physics and almost all of the world’s religions have found this view to be wrong and dangerous. We know that nothing exists by itself. An intricate and interdependent web of climatic, biotic and ecological systems creates and sustains all life on Earth, including each of us.

If you doubt this, take a deep breath. Now think about what just happened.

Oxygen entered your body and sustained your life. About three-quarters of the oxygen was produced during photosynthesis in single-celled green algae and bacteria in marine environments. The remainder came from the same process in forests and other vegetation. Complex interactions occurring in the oceans and other landscapes created the oxygen that makes your life possible.

One group of moral arguments discussed in the book thus focuses on “the consequences of acting or failing to act” on climate change. Every person has an obligation to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and to support collective efforts to do so, because ignoring this responsibility puts all of the organisms and processes that support life on Earth, including us, at grave risk.

Another theme of the book is our moral obligation to “do what is right.” A number of theologians said that God calls on all of us to be stewards of divine creation, and that we fail in our moral duty if we fail to protect what God created.

Other writers said that doing the right thing has nothing to do with a God. Humans have a duty to act in a just manner. It is unjust for Americans to undermine the livelihoods and cultures of people in Africa, Asia and the Arctic, and the poor in this country, that have contributed little to climate change. But that is exactly what we are doing through our consumption and emissions.

The last category of moral arguments is “based on virtue.” It focuses on the virtues that should shape our character as human beings.

Some writers said that human virtue requires that we honor our obligations to the future. Controlling our behavior today is virtuous because what we do now will determine the options available to our children and their children.

Other writers said we have an obligation to be the best we can be as individuals and as a nation. When we fail to slash our emissions, we become much less than we can or should be.

Through beautifully written narratives, the book makes a compelling case that each of us has a moral obligation to protect current and future life on Earth by curbing our consumption and carbon emissions. One of the greatest gifts anyone can give this holiday season is to take that message to heart.

Bob Doppelt directs The Resource Innovation Group and teaches about global warming at the University of Oregon.

<http://www.registerguard.com/csp/cms/sites/web/opinion/25688705-47/moral-climate-emissions-obligation-book.csp>
