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Global Responsibility and the Enhancement of Life

By William Schweiker
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This article advances a conception of global ethics in terms of the centrality of responsibility to the moral life and also the moral good of the enhancement of life. In contrast to some forms of global ethics, the article also seeks to warrant the use of religious sources in developing such an ethics. Specifically, the article seeks to demonstrate the greater adequacy of a global ethics of responsibility for the enhancement of life against rival conceptions developed in terms of Human Rights discourse or the so-called Capabilities Approach. The article ends with a conception of ‘conscience’ as the mode of human moral being and the experience of religious transcendence within the domains of human social and historical life. From this idea, conscience is specified a human right and capacity to determine the humane use of religious resources and also the norm for the rejection of inhumane expressions of religion within global ethics.

http://www.de-ethica.com/archive/articles/v3/i1/a05/de_ethica_16v3i1a05.pdf

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Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute Newsletter

<http://us6.campaign-archive1.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=19a325b944&e=a758405790>

May 2016

Eco-Congregation Scotland Newsletter

<http://us9.campaign-archive2.com/?u=a37b4ff760ffcc7fd1c3611b4&id=ef58e56a98&e=709fe41ec4>

May 2016

Unfriendly Climate

Texas Tech's Katharine Hayhoe is one of the most respected experts on global warming in the country. She's also an evangelical Christian who is trying to connect with the very people who most doubt her research. Too bad the temperature keeps rising.

By Sonia Smith
Texas Monthly

One clear day last spring, Katharine Hayhoe walked into the limestone chambers of the Austin City Council to brief the members during a special meeting on how prepared the city was to deal with disasters and extreme weather. A respected atmospheric scientist at Texas Tech University, the 43-year-old had been invited to discuss climate change, and she breezed through her PowerPoint slides, delivering stark news in an upbeat manner: unless carbon emissions were swiftly curbed, in the coming decades Texas would see stronger heat waves, harsher summers, and torrential rainfall separated by longer periods of drought.

"Why do we care about all of this stuff?" Hayhoe asked. "Because it has huge financial impacts." The number of billion-dollar weather disasters in the United States had ballooned from one or two per year in the eighties to eight to twelve today, Hayhoe explained as she pulled up a slide with a map of the country. "Texas is in the crosshairs of those events, because we get it all, don't we? We get the floods and the droughts, the hailstorms and the ice storms, and even the snow and the extreme heat. And we get the tornadoes, the hurricanes, and the sea-level rise. There isn't much that we don't get."

Soon afterward, Don Zimmerman, a conservative councilman who, before being elected, regularly sued the city over tax increases, declared from his seat on the dais that climate change was a "nebulous" and "foolish" field of study. Zimmerman, wearing a banker's collar and projecting an officious air into the room, continued, "We have maybe thirty years of satellite data, and the world is maybe millions of years old. I have a really visceral reaction against the climate-change argument, for the simple reason that when you look back in time, there have been dramatic climate changes before humanity ever existed.

"The worst thing that can be done to humanity is put government bureaucrats in charge of carbon dioxide emissions," he said as Hayhoe listened politely. "You don't have to be as smart as a fifth grader to know that what causes the climate is the sun. I have people tell me, 'Carbon dioxide warms the earth.' No, it doesn't. The sun warms the earth, and there is more energy in our sun than humanity can comprehend." Zimmerman then insisted that the sun didn't need "a permit from the EPA" to emit solar flares.

An uncomfortable silence settled over the chamber for a moment before Hayhoe joked, "I think if the EPA could be in charge of the sun, that could create bigger problems than we have today." She then proceeded to gut Zimmerman's arguments. "A thermometer is not Democrat or Republican, and when we look around this world, it's not about trusting what our thirty-year-old

satellites say. It's about looking at 26,500 indicators of a warming planet, many of them we can see in our own backyards," she said. The climate was not changing because of orbital cycles, which bring about ice ages, Hayhoe maintained. "The Earth's temperature peaked eight thousand years ago and was in a long, slow slide into the next ice age until the Industrial Revolution," she said. Instead of being in this cooling period, the planet had seen its average temperature steadily rise. The sun was also not the culprit: "If the climate were changing because of the sun, we'd be getting cooler, because energy from the sun has been going down over the last forty years," she said.

But Zimmerman, it seemed, had no use for facts, and after the meeting he continued to harangue Hayhoe. The encounter, however, came as no surprise. In fact, it was depressingly familiar to Hayhoe, who has auburn hair, hazel eyes, and a calm, affable nature that is reminiscent of an excellent physician's bedside manner. And she often likens herself to a doctor, but her patient is the planet. After taking its temperature, she feels compelled to report her diagnosis: because of man-made carbon emissions, the earth is running a fever. She knows that this message doesn't always find a receptive audience. Over the past fifteen years, climate change has emerged as one of the most polarizing issues in the country, ahead of guns, the death penalty, and abortion. And there is no group that is more unconvinced of climate change's reality than evangelical Christians, who primarily identify as conservative Republicans. As Brian Webb, the founder of the faith-based Climate Caretakers, recently told Religion News Service: "The United States is the only industrialized country in the world where denial of climate change has become inextricably linked to a dominant political party."

All of which puts Hayhoe in a unique position. A co-author of the last two National Climate Assessments and a reviewer on the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Hayhoe—the daughter of missionaries and the wife of a pastor—is herself an evangelical Christian. In her talks, she uses the Bible to explain to Christians why they should care about climate change and how it affects other people, from a poor family on the island nation of Kiribati who will be displaced by rising sea levels to an elderly couple in Beaumont who can't afford to pay for air-conditioning in Texas's increasingly sweltering summers. As she puts it, "The poor, the disenfranchised, those already living on the edge, and those who contributed least to this problem are also those at greatest risk to be harmed by it. That's not a scientific issue; that's a moral issue."

Hayhoe maintains a dizzying schedule. In the past year, she has attended the historic United Nations climate summit in Paris, traveled to the edge of Hudson Bay, in Canada, to witness the annual polar bear migration, curated a special *Good Housekeeping* issue on climate change, and appeared onstage in New York with Gloria Steinem at a talk at the Rubin Museum of Art. That's in addition to teaching her graduate-level seminars, serving as a co-director of Texas Tech's Climate Science Center, and publishing seventeen scientific papers. (Travel is essential for Hayhoe's job but to do her part—and perhaps head off criticism about her carbon footprint—Hayhoe buys carbon offsets to reduce the impact of her trips.) One warm afternoon in October, on a day spent in Lubbock between visits to Colorado and Houston, Hayhoe spoke at a Phi Beta Kappa ice cream social inside Texas Tech's Hall of Nations, a room draped with the flags of 190 countries and featuring a glossy terrazzo map of the world on the floor. The crowd, mostly professors from across the university's departments and a smattering of students, dug into

Styrofoam bowls of vanilla and cookies and cream as Hayhoe, who was wearing a red top and flowing linen pants, began her speech.

“I’m a professor here at Tech, and what I’m going to talk about today is not my research. I’m going to talk about the experience that I have talking about my research. Now, most of you are not going to have the same experience I do. If you study literature, you don’t have to spend a lot of time convincing people that books are real. If you study engineering, most people will agree that engineering is real and it’s an important part of our society. But I study something that about half of the country and much more than half of Texas thinks is a complete hoax,” she said. “Many people view having climate science at Texas Tech as similar to having a Department of Astrology. But we don’t use crystal balls, we use supercomputers; we rely on physics, not brain waves.”

The study of climate science dates to 1824, when French physicist Joseph Fourier discovered what would become known as the greenhouse effect, in which gases trapped in the atmosphere absorb heat and raise the temperature of the planet. It took 35 more years for John Tyndall, an Irish chemist, to pinpoint carbon dioxide as one of the heat-trapping gases in the earth’s atmosphere. And in 1896, a Swedish chemist named Svante Arrhenius declared that burning coal contributed to the greenhouse effect, after spending almost 2 years calculating (by hand!) how increasing carbon dioxide concentrations raised the earth’s temperature. So the basic science, as Hayhoe often points out, has been settled since before the start of the twentieth century. Today, there is robust scientific consensus that global warming is “real, caused by humans, and dangerous”; a [study](#) found that 97 percent of climate scientists agree that anthropogenic climate change is happening, and many scientific organizations have issued [statements](#) that it is a threat.* The Department of Defense calls climate change a “threat multiplier,” because it exacerbates existing problems. And the year 2015 was the warmest on record, breaking the previous mark, which was set in 2014.

So why is climate science greeted with so much skepticism? Part of the reason can be attributed to the way the topic is often handled in the media. On cable news, two people from opposite sides of the debate are typically paired to argue about the subject, but that can lead to a false equivalency between scientists on the one hand and paid spokesmen on the other. As historians Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway chronicled in the book *Merchants of Doubt*, some of the most prominent climate-change skeptics are the same politically conservative scientists who were previously funded by Big Tobacco to spread falsehoods about cigarettes. Their employer this time around? The fossil-fuel industry.

And part of the reason is the suspicions that conservatives have of government intervention. Hayhoe has found that some people don’t reject the reality of climate change because they disagree with the science but because they fear that the solutions will upend their lives. This seems to be the case for U.S. senator James Inhofe, a Republican from Oklahoma, who once told journalist Rachel Maddow, “I thought it must be true until I found out what it would cost.” That day at Tech, Hayhoe recounted an anecdote about an experience she’d had speaking to a group of water managers for the Brazos River a few months back. At the end of that talk, an older man stood up and said, “Everything you said makes sense, but I don’t want the government telling me where to set my thermostat.”

Some critics feel so threatened that they resort to ad hominem attacks on climate scientists. Hayhoe receives a steady stream of hate mail, which she files away in a special folder. When I asked her when this started, she replied, “The first time I was ever quoted in a newspaper article.” The ugliness reached its height in 2012, during the presidential race. At the time, Hayhoe was writing a chapter on global warming for a book Republican hopeful Newt Gingrich was co-authoring about the environment. Rush Limbaugh mentioned it on his radio program, dismissively referring to Hayhoe as a “climate babe.” A few days later, an Iowa voter buttonholed Gingrich on camera to ask him about it, and Gingrich swiftly replied, “That’s not going to be in the book. We didn’t know that they were doing that—we told them to kill it.” Hayhoe took to Twitter to respond: “What an ungracious way to find out, eh? Nice to hear that Gingrich is tossing my #climate chapter in the trash. 100+ unpaid hrs I cd’ve spent playing w my baby.”

Most of the time, she laughs these incidents off. “I got one today that was exceptional,” she told me in late September, as we sat inside the Climate Science Center. “Most of the stuff is rambling, but this one was not. Someone wrote on Facebook, ‘She is a lying lunatic, and probably a witch.’ That was very concise,” she said with a grin. But sometimes the comments veer into violent territory. Hayhoe recalls one email that prompted her to call authorities. “You are a mass murderer and will be convicted at the Reality TV Grand Jury in Nuremberg, Pennsylvania,” the email began. “After the Grand Jury indicts you, I would like to see you convicted and beheaded by guillotine in the public square, to show women that if they are going to take a man’s job, they have to take the heat for mass murder.” But most of the time, Hayhoe doesn’t let such vitriol drive her to despair, though dealing with it can be exhausting. “What frustrates me the most, and what I find difficult not to take personally, is how much of the hate mail comes from so-called Christians.”

That bile is something Hayhoe never anticipated when she was applying to graduate school 22 years ago. A native of Toronto, she had double-majored in physics and astronomy at the University of Toronto and spent every clear night one summer gazing through the telescopes on top of the physics building. She found that the astronomer’s life appealed to her and planned to study that in graduate school. Then she took a climatology class her junior year. “Until I took that course, I did not realize that climate change is affecting everything, from poverty to biodiversity to health, and so you can’t fix any one of them if you leave climate change out of the picture,” she told me. She also realized that her background in physics had perfectly positioned her to study climate modeling.

If she was going to leave astronomy behind, Hayhoe wanted to do policy-relevant climate science. When she was considering graduate programs, she was thrilled to learn that Don Wuebbles, who had been instrumental in addressing the chlorofluorocarbon problem in the eighties, was the new head of the department of atmospheric science at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. He would serve as her adviser for both her master’s degree and her doctorate. Under Wuebbles’s guidance, Hayhoe eventually began focusing on statistical downscaling, which was still a relatively new field when she started graduate school, in 1995. “There was very little of this being done at the time,” Wuebbles recalled recently, “and the methods were not capturing the full extent of the science, so she set about to develop a new technique and very successfully did so. She’s brilliant.”

Statistical downscaling involves combining historical weather observations with global-climate models to better predict what the future could look like in a particular place. “The local environment, whether it’s hilly or flat, with crops or forest, urban or rural, modifies the weather patterns we get,” she said. “So, for example, if we had identical high-pressure systems over Lubbock and Houston, it would mean something different for the temperature, for the humidity, for the rainfall patterns.” Hayhoe also tries to see if the global models reflect real-world conditions on the ground. “When we get an El Niño, we see a very wet winter from here in Lubbock all the way across to Florida. Do the models pick that up or not? We need to know,” she explained.

Hayhoe runs simulations on a supercomputer, then she combs through the data to interpret the output. On a practical level, this means Hayhoe exists in a world of numbers, thousands upon thousands of lines of them. A single file dealing with one variable—say, temperature across the country over the next hundred years—can be almost five gigabytes in size. And she runs these simulations for multiple variables and scenarios on multiple climate models. (Some 42 global-climate models exist today, run by labs around the world.) These reams of data are shapeless until she translates them by writing code. “What a lot of people don’t realize is that the most important skill any climate scientist has is programming,” she told me over pizza in Lubbock one afternoon last fall.

Hayhoe has used downscaling in her consulting work for the cities of Washington, D.C.; Boulder; and Chicago, as well as federal entities, including the Department of Defense and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She helps analyze problem areas, such as sewer overflow during heavy rain or warped train rails during heat waves, and tries to pinpoint how often those things will be a problem in the future, based on changing climate patterns. In 2004 Hayhoe was an author on a paper that examined California’s future from different angles, from water supply to agriculture to tourism. She was heartened when, a few months later, that research prompted Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to sign an executive order limiting greenhouse-gas emissions. He was the first governor to do so. “When Schwarzenegger signed that bill, he had the authors from California standing in a semicircle behind him. The reason why I left astrophysics is to do policy-relevant research, and when I saw that picture, I thought to myself, ‘I did it. This works.’”

Hayhoe’s scientific credentials are impeccable, but what has made her an international star are her skills as a communicator. John Abraham, an associate professor of thermal sciences at the University of St. Thomas, in Minnesota, has called her “one of the best climate communicators in the world.” Abraham told me, “She is extraordinary at relaying very complex topics into language that other people can understand, without speaking down to them. The other thing she’s good at is hearing questions. We all listen, but she has this innate ability to understand the perspective of the person making the inquiry,” he said. “She has this knack for honestly presenting the science but doing it in a disarming way for people who are often anti-science.”

One mild Friday in early October, I flew to Houston with Hayhoe and her eight-year-old son, who spent the short flight absorbed in the game Minecraft on his iPad while Hayhoe tapped away on her laptop. She was to give a keynote speech at Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church, a collection of limestone buildings nestled between pine trees in one of Houston’s most affluent neighborhoods. The weekend symposium was called “Faithful Alternatives to Fossil Fuel

Divestment.” Hayhoe arrived with some tough talk for her audience. “There’s no way to sugarcoat this, and I wish I could, because I know I’m in Houston, but the way that we get our energy does matter. If we continue to rely only on fossil fuels, we’re going to end up on a very different pathway than if we gradually and sensibly transition to clean and renewable energy that we can grow here in Texas—and that many of our energy companies are already investing in very heavily.”

The conference was organized in response to the Presbyterian Church (USA)’s proposal to divest church resources from fossil fuels, a move the Houston chapter had rejected as a symbolic one that unfairly vilified the people who work in the fossil-fuel industry. The group instead proposed that the national organization take steps to reduce its carbon footprint and advocate for a carbon tax. Hayhoe, too, is a proponent of putting a price on carbon and letting the markets sort it out. She thinks that a reasonable tax on gasoline would be around 6 cents a gallon. “Regulations just get more and more complicated, and you have to hire new people to deal with them,” she explained. “It gets expensive and difficult to plot your strategy, but any business—from the ma-and-pa shop around the corner to the biggest multinational in the world—knows what to do with a simple price change. Business is all about maximizing profit and minimizing costs. So in a sense, putting a price on carbon just frees up business to do what it does best.”

But the most revealing part of her talk centered on why Christians should care about climate change. To lead into this subject, Hayhoe flipped to a slide with a quote from John Holdren, President Obama’s science adviser: “We basically have three choices: mitigation, adaptation, or suffering. We’re going to do some of each. The question is what the mix is going to be. The more mitigation we do, the less adaptation will be required and the less suffering there will be.” Suffering, Hayhoe said, is not a word often deployed by scientists. “As scientists we don’t know a lot about suffering, but as Christians we do. And we know that part of the reason we’re here in this world is to help people who are suffering.” And that suffering will not be meted out proportionally: if global warming continues unchecked, the poor—whether they’re in Houston’s Fifth Ward or in low-lying areas of Bangladesh—who have contributed least to carbon emissions will feel the most pain, from enduring more-intense heat waves to paying the higher food prices that will accompany failed crops. Throughout the Bible, God charges Christians to serve others, Hayhoe said, from Genesis, where God makes man in his image so that he can be responsible for every living creature on earth, to 1 Peter 4:10: “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”

“We’ve been given this commandment to love others as Christ loved us,” Hayhoe said as a slide quoting John 13:34–35 flashed on the screen: “Let me give you a new command: love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other.” She continued: “You can see, you just go through the Bible for verse after verse. They’re not verses about climate change; they’re not verses about the environment. They’re verses about our attitudes and perspectives to other people on the planet. We are to be recognized for our love for other people.” The members of the crowd nodded along in agreement as she spoke. The year 2015 was a good one to be proclaiming this message: in June, Pope Francis sent out his 192-page papal encyclical imploring the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics to care about climate change, and in October, the National Association of Evangelicals issued a similar call to action.

Hayhoe can speak honestly about suffering because of a lesson she learned when her parents became missionaries and moved the family to Colombia when she was nine. There, she witnessed true poverty. Her father would travel to remote villages to speak at tiny churches, and she remembers hearing stories of landslides washing away homes after heavy rains. She now recognizes that these early memories of poverty and vulnerability have informed her work. Hayhoe was raised as a member of the Plymouth Brethren, a conservative, evangelical offshoot of the Anglican Church that emphasizes reading the Bible and interpreting it for oneself. This lent itself well to science, Hayhoe told me. “My dad was very much of the perspective that the Bible is God’s first book and nature—creation—is God’s second book.”

Though Hayhoe has always been serious about her faith, connecting with groups of fellow Christians about climate change was not something she did before moving to Texas. In 2006 she and her husband, Andrew Farley, relocated from South Bend, Indiana, to Lubbock, one of the most conservative cities in the country, so that they could both take jobs at Texas Tech, he as a linguistics professor, she as a researcher. He also became the pastor at a small nondenominational church on the southwest side of town, now called Church Without Religion. People were surprised when they learned what the pastor’s wife did, and Farley started getting lots of questions about it. And at Texas Tech, the invitations for Hayhoe to speak about climate change started rolling in. The volume of these questions and the lack of resources to point people to spurred her and Farley to write a book together, *A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions*. The questions they tackle in the book were familiar territory for the couple, who had met through a Christian organization while in graduate school. A few months into their marriage, Hayhoe realized that Farley, who had grown up in a conservative household in Virginia, did not think climate change was real, and they began vigorously debating the topic. “It took about two years, but now we’re on the same side,” she said.

But beyond just speaking to Christian groups, Hayhoe prides herself on being able to talk to anyone with an open mind about the reality of climate change. She bemoans the fact that global warming has come to be viewed as a niche environmental issue. “To care about climate change, all you have to be, pretty much, is a human living on planet Earth. You can be exactly who you are with exactly the values you have, and I can show you how those values connect to climate change,” Hayhoe told me.

Hayhoe’s first step is always to “genuinely bond over a shared value,” with an emphasis on that shared value’s being genuine. “The key is not to pretend; we can all smell someone who is not genuine a mile away,” she said. “If I’m talking to farmers or ranchers or water managers, I start off by talking about what we all care about, which is making sure we have water. And that, for many Texans, is almost as strong of a value as whatever it says in the Bible.” Her next step is to connect that issue to climate change. So when talking about water, she describes how climate change is changing rainfall patterns. “We’re getting these heavy downpours, and then we’re getting longer dry periods in between, and our droughts are getting stronger because the warmer it is, the more water evaporates out of our lakes and rivers and our soil,” she said. She tries to end her talks with solutions that inspire people, ranging from the personal (measuring your carbon footprint and installing energy-efficient light bulbs) to the large-scale (putting a tax on carbon). Hayhoe herself is most excited by the efforts of Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla Motors and founder of SpaceX. “If I had to pick one person to save the world—and I don’t think any one

person will but if I had to pick one—it would be him.” She is excited about the battery packs that Tesla is developing, declaring energy storage the “single technology that will make the most difference.”

Ultimately, she does not care whether people agree with the science, so long as they take action. She compares this to a battle waged in the mid-1800’s, before the germ theory of disease gained widespread acceptance, when a Hungarian physician urged other doctors to wash their hands and instruments before delivering babies. As doctors changed their habits, fewer and fewer women died from “childbed fever.” “I don’t care if they thought germs are imaginary, so long as they washed their hands,” she said. The same is true for climate change, in Hayhoe’s mind. If people start using more-efficient light bulbs or driving more-fuel-friendly cars, it doesn’t matter what they think about the science.

Hayhoe is coy about her own personal politics, and this air of mystery is useful to her. When I asked her about another Canadian-born Texan, climate-change skeptic and senator Ted Cruz, she demurred. She’s a U.S. permanent resident but not a citizen, so she can’t vote in the presidential election, and she seems to enjoy the level of remove this gives her from American politics. “It helps me not to pick sides, because people always ask if you’re Democrat or Republican, and I’m neither. I can’t be,” she told me. “I appreciate the solutions that some Republicans are starting to advance, and I appreciate the fact that Democrats accept the science. But it’s become so polarized that the good people on both sides are being marginalized.” Whoever the next president is, Hayhoe hopes he or she will honor the commitments made at the climate summit in Paris last year and also put a price on carbon.

Hayhoe’s religious background led NOVA’s *Secret Life of Scientists and Engineers* to dub her a “climate change evangelist” in 2011, and the label has stuck, though she is lukewarm on it. “An evangelist is someone who spreads good news, and I feel like I’m not really evangelizing. I feel more like a Cassandra, or an Old Testament prophet spreading bad news, saying, ‘If thou dost not change from thy wicked ways and repent, thou shalt reap the harvest of thy deeds.’” But when Hayhoe talks, she doesn’t sound so pessimistic. That’s a strategic choice, as she realizes that doom and despair won’t motivate others to act. For that, you need hope. “You have to offer people a vision of what the world could look like if we could wean ourselves off fossil fuels, if we could have a clean-energy economy,” she said. “We would all want to live in that world.”

Lyndon Baines Johnson was at his ranch outside Johnson City recuperating from gallbladder surgery on November 5, 1965, when his science advisers published a 317-page report warning about the dangers of air pollution. Tucked away in an appendix were 23 pages about atmospheric carbon dioxide. “Through his worldwide industrial civilization, Man is unwittingly conducting a vast geophysical experiment,” the report states. “Within a few generations he is burning the fossil fuels that slowly accumulated in the earth over the past 500 million years.” This additional carbon in the atmosphere would, over time, raise the earth’s temperature, slowly melt the antarctic ice cap, and lead to increased ocean acidity, the report proclaimed. “The climate changes that may be produced by the increased CO₂ content could be deleterious from the point of human beings,” the report concluded.

Fifty years later, Hayhoe gave the capstone presentation at a daylong symposium in Washington commemorating the first time a president was warned about the danger of climate change. “As several have already said today, we are conducting an experiment with our planet on a scale that has never before been attempted,” she said, echoing the words of the report. The climate models that scientists now use churn out petabytes of data—which is something like, in Hayhoe’s words, “twenty million four-drawer filing cabinets full of text”—that then need to be analyzed to see how these changes will manifest in particular locales. “What’s the point of doing all of that modeling and all of that analysis if we don’t understand how it’s going to affect the system right here that we care about?”

Would LBJ even recognize the future Texas predicted by these models? In the past fifty years, temperatures in Texas have risen half a degree per decade and are set to rise at least 3.5 degrees by mid-century if global emissions aren’t slashed. “Our average summer could look like 2011 within my lifetime if we continue on our current pathway,” Hayhoe told an audience in October, referencing that scorching summer when much of Texas saw more than one hundred 100-degree days. Austin could feel more like Scottsdale, Arizona. Rainfall patterns are shifting, so the state will face longer dry spells punctuated by more bouts of heavy rain. In West Texas, farming and ranching communities have thrived in the semiarid environment by pulling water from aquifers. But as the aquifers dry up, these communities are relying more on rainfall, just as that rainfall is becoming less likely and droughts are getting more intense, Hayhoe said. In LBJ’s beloved Hill Country, this means increased risk of fire. Humans are the ones igniting the fires, but climate change is making them worse by providing the ideal dry conditions they need to spread. On the Gulf Coast, where a quarter of the state’s 27 million people live, sea levels are already eight inches higher than they were a hundred years ago and are set to rise an additional one to four feet by the end of the century. And then there’s the danger from stronger hurricanes fueled by record-breaking ocean temperatures.

Texas leaders, however, seem unwilling to tackle the problem or even admit that it exists. Governor Greg Abbott has long voiced skepticism about the science of climate change, telling the editorial board of the *San Antonio Express-News* during his gubernatorial campaign that the climate has always changed over time and further study was needed. “We must be good guardians of our earth, but we must base our decisions on peer-reviewed scientific inquiry, free from political demagogues using climate change as an excuse to remake the American economy,” he told the newspaper. As attorney general, Abbott made a habit of suing the Obama administration, oftentimes over regulatory issues relating to climate change. His successor, Ken Paxton, is continuing that tradition, joining a lawsuit in October over the administration’s Clean Power Plan, which calls on states to curb emissions by phasing out coal plants and shifting to natural gas and renewables. The plan would require Texas to decrease its coal power capacity by 4,000 megawatts, or 25 percent, and Paxton has likened this to the EPA’s mounting a “war on coal and fossil fuels.”

In such a milieu, efforts to incorporate climate change into planning at the state level have fallen flat, and bills that attempt to address it have gone nowhere in recent years in the Legislature. “At the state level, in some circles, climate change is still a taboo subject,” John Nielsen-Gammon, the state climatologist, told me. This leaves cities to do their own resilience planning. Meanwhile, entities such as the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, the operator of the state’s

electric grid, are not taking climate change into account when developing their projections for load growth, which could lead to problems as the mercury creeps upward.

In Congress, Texans are some of the most vocal climate-change skeptics. Congressman Lamar Smith, a Republican from San Antonio, has used his chairmanship of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee to tussle with federal agencies over their climate-change research, going so far as to subpoena the scientists who conducted a study with a conclusion he disagreed with and demand their emails. (Smith, it is worth noting, has received more than \$600,000 in campaign donations from the fossil-fuel industry over his 29 years in Congress.) And then there's Cruz, who in December held a three-hour Senate hearing titled "Data or Dogma? Promoting Open Inquiry in the Debate Over the Magnitude of Human Impact on Earth's Climate," at which he claimed that there was a lack of scientific consensus on global warming.

Hayhoe is hopeful that as green energy gets cheaper, more people will begin using it. "Texas is unique, in that it is one of the states that have the most to lose economically from climate-change impacts, but Texas also has the most to gain by transitioning to a clean-energy economy," Hayhoe told me one day in her office on campus, a cluttered, windowless space. The room's sole decorative flair, a papier-mâché arctic fox that was a Christmas present from her young son, sat perched on a shelf.

If Texas were its own country, it would be the seventh-most-prolific emitter of carbon dioxide in the world. As it stands, Texas is the number one emitter in the U.S.; it released some 641 million metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere in 2013, almost double that of California.

But the state also has a seemingly boundless potential for green energy. Texas leads the nation in wind generation; turbines produced a full 10 percent of the state's power in 2015. By 2030, that number is forecast to jump to 37 percent. One night last September, supply of wind power was so plentiful and demand was so low that the spot price of electricity went negative for a few hours. Solar installation has lagged behind, but when it ramps up, there's enough capacity just in the hundred-square-mile area between Plainview and Amarillo to light the entire United States, as Hayhoe likes to point out. In Pecos County alone, companies have plans to invest \$1 billion in large-scale solar energy farms. "Texas understands energy. Energy is a Texas thing," Hayhoe told me. "We have the land we need to do this, as well as the technology and entrepreneurial spirit. I wish that the whole state could see that this is an opportunity for a better future."

***Clarification:** This sentence has been edited to clarify the conclusions of the study and include the fact that a number of scientific organizations have issued statements about global warming being a threat.

<http://www.texasmonthly.com/articles/katharine-hayhoe-lubbock-climate-change-evangelist/>

May 3, 2016

Green Ribbon Political Awards

Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management (CIWEM)

The Green Ribbon Political Awards are the only awards to celebrate the achievements of politicians, businesses and charities judged by experts of the highest international calibre.

The 2016 Green Ribbon Political Awards were held on Tuesday 3rd May on the Terrace of the House of Commons. The ceremony was hosted by the eminent Jonathon Porritt and special guest speaker, President of the Constitutional Council, President of COP21 and broker of the Paris climate deal Laurent Fabius.

Most inspirational figure internationally

His Holiness Pope Francis

His Holiness Pope Francis has won the Green Ribbon Political Award for the most inspirational figure internationally for the Papal Encyclical *Laudato si'*.

The 180-page encyclical reached an audience of millions and not just Catholics. Its impact in the USA has transformed the climate debate. *Laudato si'* (On Care for Our Common Home), is at its core a moral call for action on phasing out the use of fossil fuels, and for the first time the link between poverty and social justice was linked to climate change. Circulated to the church's 5,000 bishops and 400,000 priests it is a call to action to the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, and can now be considered as the Church's official position on the environment.

It is also the first encyclical to try to influence a global political process. Pope Francis repeated his message of climate justice and change to world leaders at the UN, seeking to influence climate change negotiators ahead of their December meeting in Paris. He also spoke before a joint session of the US Congress.

The social teaching argues that climate change is not just a "global problem with serious implications", but has an impact felt disproportionately by the world's poorest people. The judges praised the encyclical as a perfect example of how to write about climate justice, with juxtaposition to reduce you to tears. They believe that it was the most significant moment of 2015, utterly compelling and inspirational.

See the full list of award winners:

<http://ciwem.org/greenribbon/>

Read the press release:

http://fore.yale.edu/files/Green_Ribbon_Winners_2016.pdf

May 3, 2016

Climate scientist-turned-psychologist seeks paths toward more compassion for the earth

By Sharon Abercrombie
National Catholic Reporter

A recent furniture commercial on TV features a frustrated woman who has too much stuff and no place to stash it. At first, she briefly considers downsizing, but quickly dismisses the notion when she encounters a brand-new bed frame complete with seemingly bottomless storage drawers. The bonus take-away, of course, is the roomy bed frame she purchases allows her to buy even more stuff.

My initial reaction: a sickening chill.

But a recent conversation with climate scientist/psychologist Jeff Kiehl altered my perception, as I see it now as a reflection of the contemporary archetypal myth that economic growth and prosperity are all that matter for our happiness.

In his book *Facing Climate Change: An Integral Path to the Future*, Kiehl explores the worlds of science, Jungian psychology and Buddhist philosophy in an attempt to offer hopeful ways in which we can change to break free of our old patterns to create a new story filled with compassion for the earth.

At one point in *Facing Climate Change*, Kiehl discusses the “Earth Destroyer” myth, written more than 2,000 years ago by the Roman poet Ovid in *Metamorphosis*.

The myth tells of a man who wants to build the largest house in town. To complete his ambitious project, he cuts down the largest tree in the sacred forest -- an action he took despite a warning from Demeter, the forest goddess, that he would suffer for his deed. Foreshadowing what is to come, the tree drips blood on his ax. At Demeter’s request, her sister Famine devises a long-lasting punishment for the sacrilege by breathing into him a never-ending hunger. Seeking to satisfy his now-aching belly, the man, not finding enough food, sells his possessions -- including his house and his only daughter -- before ultimately consuming his own body.

Kiehl said this myth arose around the time when the Greeks built a massive array of ships to expand their control over the Mediterranean Sea. They cut down most of the trees on the Greek Peninsula, leading to deforestation and the loss of agriculturally valuable topsoil.

The allegory of the “Earth Destroyer,” he explains in his book, shows “what happens when we become separated from nature and destroy it.”

“Metaphorically, this depicts how by feeding our current endless hunger, we discount the future for our children,” Kiehl wrote. “In addition, his disconnection from the feminine, represented by the sale of his daughter, means he cannot relate in a healthy way to others.”

The furniture commercial, while free of Ovid's gruesomeness, taps into the basic idea that the hungrier and needier the shopper, the better for industry and the economy.

To truly create a healthier environment, Kiehl said heart and compassion have to enter the equation.

“Science can only do so much explaining,” he said.

A senior scientist who heads the Climate Change Research Section at the National Center for Atmospheric Research, in Boulder, Colo., Kiehl said he devotes little time in lectures on climate change talking about facts, and instead veers toward asking how his audience feels toward the issue: be it, anger, grief, helplessness, or fear -- in particular, fear of change, income loss or lifestyles. All of which are understandable reactions, he noted, particularly from the standpoint of [Maslow's hierarchy of needs](#), which suggests attention to higher-level needs, such as a healthy planet, often get less attention until more primary ones (food, shelter, safety) are first met.

In our conversation, Kiehl also delved into archetypes: those shared lenses, images and metaphors through which we view the world. Some are father, mother and hero; others include the elder, the warrior, the senex -- the latter of which offers particular insights into the caustic climate debate in America.

The senex likes things fixed, rigid and secure, wanting absolute certainty in things; even when he has evidence that change would be better, he continues to balk. His positive side includes careful assessment, along with weighing of the situation and deep reflection, but if it loses out, then the status quo remains.

Examples of the negative side of the senex archetype from history include those who fought against civil rights legislation or regulations on air pollution, Kiehl said. On the climate issue, he pointed to Republican presidential candidate Ohio Gov. John Kasich.

While Kasich acknowledges a human degree to climate change, he insists that environmental protection [shouldn't come at the expense of the economy](#) and cautions against actions [akin to worshipping the earth](#). But inaction could itself disrupt the economy, Kiehl said, whereas shifting to renewable energy could lead to increased employment and economic growth.

“The idea that this would be an economic disaster comes from the fossil fuel industry or those who resist change because they fear change. This is the senex archetype in motion,” Kiehl said.

It was a curiosity that sprouted about 25 years ago into widespread resistance to the notion of human-caused global climate change that led Kiehl, who holds a Ph.D. in atmospheric science, to study clinical psychology from the perspective of Carl Jung at Regis University, the Jesuit school in Denver. Kiehl taps into that Jungian psychology background in *Facing Climate Change*, blending his clear and poetic writing with discussion of science and Buddhist spirituality.

Each chapter begins with a meditation on the beauties of nature Kiehl, who resides in Santa Cruz, Calif., finds during his daily walks. In one particularly memorable account, he and a police

officer stand in admiration of a gorgeous redwood tree “so tall that I must arch backward to see its top.” Standing quietly in awe, Kiehl ran his hand along the tree’s trunk,” the bark soft and fibrous.”

“The contours of the red, corrugated surface reach out to the shape of my hand,” he wrote. “Tree and I are present to the other in a state of 'being with.'”

If we are to survive, Kiehl said, we must return to our authentic spiritual roots, whether they be within our individual religious paths, or, in nature herself. We must learn to feel, to put ourselves in the places of suffering people everywhere in the planet. He offers two striking metaphors for imagining change: the cross, from Christianity, and from his own Buddhist tradition, Indra's net.

Jung perceived the cross image as a vertical-horizontal way of living; the horizontal symbolizes living in the world, and the vertical as being connected to the numinous, or spiritual, dimension. A healthy person, Jung believed, will live at the apex, where the two converge. Kiehl noted that in Jung's book *Aion* Christ is a symbol of the archetype of wholeness.

In Buddhism, Indra's net spreads across the universe, with highly reflective jewels placed at each intersection. Whatever is reflected at one point of the net is seen throughout the whole network.

“I believe this is how transformation can take place now; each individual is a jewel in the global social network, reflecting ideas, feelings, beliefs and actions,” Kiehl said, explaining that Indra's net is a story that focuses on compassionate creation rather than destruction.

Like Passionist Fr. Thomas Berry, Kiehl believes that the arts are superb vehicles for helping to create new, positive archetypal images that will touch into people's consciousness. To that end, he is working with artists and filmmakers to discover images that can strike the hearts of people on the fragile beauty of the planet, to move them to action.

Kiehl's closing message says it all: “Look within and follow the path of your heart. See the basic goodness within yourself and others. This goodness is the ultimate ground from which we all begin. Touch it and stay true to the path of compassion and you will create that world of wonder.”

Wonder that doesn't reside in the bottom drawer, crammed with stuff, of that new bed.

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/climate-scientist-turned-psychologist-seeks-paths-toward-more-compassion-earth>

May 4, 2016

Leaders of different faiths release declaration on ‘Swachhta Kranti’

By FPJ Bureau

The Free Press Journal

Ujjain: A grand assembly of prominent religious leaders representing many faiths came together for a historic first time at the Simhastha Mahakumbh-2016, to appeal for a Swachhta Kranti (Clean Revolution) for Mother India through Sadbhavana Sankalp.

In so doing, they implored the people of India to rise together so that India may shine as a global example of cleanliness. For this, they said that we must do all we can to ensure that our lands and rivers are kept open-defecation free through the use of eco-friendly toilets.

On illuminating a holy lamp at this Sarva Dharma Swachhta Sankalp event, Swami Chidanand Saraswati, co-founder of the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance and president of Parmarth Niketan Rishikesh, stated, “The world is as we dream it, and it is time for a new dream. Every day, 1,200 children die needlessly in India due to lack of clean water, sanitation and hygiene. The deaths are a result of our bad habits. We can change that. By changing our ways, we change the world.” Representing five religions, the faith leaders were brought together by the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance (GIWA), with technical support from UNICEF, under the inspiration of Chidanandji.

Junapeethadishwar Swami Avdheshanand Giri shared his views on water conservation and cleanliness. He said that water is the most basic requirement of all life, but only 0.75 percent is potable; therefore, it is crucial to conserve water. Every religion honours the element of water hence it is beautiful that the interfaith and faith community has come together here on the banks of Kshipra to move in the right direction.

Eminent Sunni leader and president of All India Imam Organisation Imam Umar Ilyasi pledged to bring all of India’s Imams together to spread vital messages on the importance of health, water, sanitation and hygiene in our homes and communities. “All faiths must come together to promote an end to open-defecation and a clean and healthy India, because cleanliness, purity and respect for nature are embedded in every religion,” he said. Similarly, Shia leader, Maulana Dr Syed Kalbe Sadiq, founder of Tauheedul Muslimeen Trust, “From today onwards, let dreams become reality. Our hands should be tools for action. In our hearts should be pledges for change.”

Jain Muni Acharya Lokesh shared that ahimsa (non-violence) and sanitation must be seen as going hand-in-hand. “Unclean choices are causing the deaths of countless children every day. This suffering must end. It is up to all of us to be the change,” said he. Chief Jathedar, Giani Gurbhachan Singh, Amritsar; Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia OBE KSG, Chairman, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ); Paramjit Singh Chandhok, Chairman of DSGMC; Ven Bhikkhu Sanghasena, Founder-President of Mahabodhi International Centre, Leh-Ladakh;

Ujjain Bishop Sebastian Vadakkal; Swami Harichetanandji, Haridwar; Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati, secretary-general GIWA and others also spoke.

<http://www.freepressjournal.in/leaders-of-different-faiths-release-declaration-on-swachhta-kranti/839803>

May 6, 2016

Catholics and Buddhists should work together for the environment

Vatican Radio

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has sent a message to the Buddhists of the world to mark the Feast of Vesakh, which commemorates the his birth, enlightenment and death of Gautama Buddha.

This year's Message was inspired by [Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato si'*](#).

“As the crisis of climate change is contributed to by human activity, we, Christians and Buddhists, must work together to confront it with an ecological spirituality,” writes Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, the President of the Pontifical Council. “The acceleration of global environmental problems has added to the urgency of interreligious cooperation.”

Cardinal Tauran concludes by calling on Catholics and Buddhists to “cooperate together in liberating humanity from the suffering brought about by climate change, and contribute to the care of our common home.”

The full text of the Message is below

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Buddhists and Christians:

Together to Foster Ecological Education

MESSAGE FOR THE FEAST OF VESAKH

2016

Vatican City

Dear Buddhist Friends,

1. In the name of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, we are pleased to extend once again our best wishes on the occasion Vesakh, as you commemorate three significant events in the life of Gautama Buddha – his birth, enlightenment and death. We wish you peace, tranquillity and joy in your hearts, within your families and in your country.

2. This year we write to you inspired by His Holiness Pope Francis's Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si, On the Care for Our Common Home*. His Holiness notes that "the external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion" (n. 217). Moreover, he states that "our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature" (n. 215). "Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment" (n. 211). In response, Pope Francis proposes that "ecological education can take place in a variety of settings: at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis and elsewhere" (n. 213).

3. Dear Buddhist friends, you have also expressed concern about the degradation of the environment, which is attested to by the documents *The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change* and *Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders*. These evidence a shared understanding that at the centre of the eco-crisis is, in fact, an ego-crisis, expressed by human greed, anxiety, arrogance and ignorance. Our lifestyles and expectations, therefore, must change in order to overcome the deterioration of our surroundings. "Cultivating the insight of inter-being and compassion, we will be able to act out of love, not fear, to protect our planet" (*Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders*). Otherwise, "When the Earth becomes sick, we become sick, because we are part of her" (*The Time to Act is Now*).

4. As the crisis of climate change is contributed to by human activity, we, Christians and Buddhists, must work together to confront it with an ecological spirituality. The acceleration of global environmental problems has added to the urgency of interreligious cooperation. Education in environmental responsibility and the creation of an "ecological citizenship" require virtue-oriented ecological ethics such as respect and care for nature. There is a pressing need for the followers of all religions to transcend their boundaries and join together in building an ecologically responsible social order based on shared values. In countries where Buddhists and Christians live and work side by side, we can support the health and sustainability of the planet through joint educational programmes aimed at raising ecological awareness and promoting joint initiatives.

5. Dear Buddhist friends, may we cooperate together in liberating humanity from the suffering brought about by climate change, and contribute to the care of our common home. In this spirit, we wish you once again a peaceful and joyful feast of Vesakh.

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran

President

Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ

Secretary

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/05/06/catholics_and_buddhists_together_for_the_environment/1227858

May 7, 2016

An interfaith view on climate change

By David Boyd
Nelson Star

Here in Nelson, a local interfaith group has come together to advocate for climate justice and to urge all citizens to participate in the transition to a zero-carbon future. The following groups are working together for carbon pollution solutions and sharing spiritual practices: Ascension Lutheran Church, Cathedral of Mary Immaculate, Kootenay Shambhala Meditation Centre, Nelson United Church, St. Saviour's Anglican Church, and Yasodhara Ashram.

Last fall, a large group of more than 75 people participated in discussions of Pope Francis' climate change Encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. Currently, we are working on plans to join other local groups and institutions in creating a plan to get to zero-carbon use in the Nelson area. There is a huge opportunity for us, especially here in the Nelson area, to get to 100 per cent renewable energy use by 2050 at the very latest; in fact, some of us believe we can get there much sooner!

A common complaint leveled against religious leaders who comment on issues like climate justice is that we are told that religion has no place in political discourse. As a religious leader in the Nelson area, I can categorically tell you that spiritual leaders have a moral imperative to speak out for a holistic view of the world in which we live.

As has been demonstrated in the past five years, religious leaders around the world from all faith traditions have called loudly for action with respect to climate justice. Almost every major world religion has issued a call to action with respect to getting off fossil fuels and keeping the global temperature increase to less than 2 degrees by the end of this century.

The most recent call for action from spiritual leaders came ahead of the Paris Agreement signing ceremony at the United Nations on April 22. Two hundred and fifty world faith leaders called for heads of state to ratify the Paris Agreement. In a show of unity and support, 175 countries have signed the Paris Agreement, including our own prime minister, and 15 have already ratified the agreement.

The document signed by world faith leaders on April 18 said in part that "Humanity is at a crucial turning point. We as faith communities recognize that we must begin a transition away from polluting fossil fuels and towards clean renewable energy sources. It is clear that for many people significant lifestyle changes will have to be made. We must strive for alternatives to the culture of consumerism that is so destructive to ourselves and to our planet." (See [this link](#) for the full statement.)

According to the World Bank, Canada is one of the worst emitters of carbon pollution per capita. We emit 14.7 tonnes per person per year. Canadians have traditionally taken a keen interest in

international justice and Canada has been a good partner to many nations. Addressing and reducing our carbon pollution is key to continuing to be a just society. Getting to a zero-carbon future is being a good neighbour.

As a Nelson and area interfaith community, we are committed to a future where human societies live in an integrated manner with the earth. As human beings, we can draw on renewable energy resources that are not damaging to ecosystems and do not comprise the earth's capacity for life.

We can get to 100 per cent renewable energy use and we can do it soon. We can all stand together; I invite you to pay attention for announcements regarding local and national strategies coming from our interfaith community and other activist groups both locally and nationally. The time for action is now.

Rev. David Boyd is with the Nelson United Church.

<http://www.nelsonstar.com/opinion/378290311.html>

May 8, 2016

10 Latin American Indigenous Rights Warriors You Need to Know

Telesur

These Indigenous human rights and environmental activists are making waves in Latin American and beyond.

Indigenous leader around the world are on the front lines of struggle against corporate exploitation, resource extraction, neoliberal policies, and other injustices impacting people and the environment.

Here's a look at some of the most prominent Indigenous leaders fighting for justice and human rights in Latin America.

1. Miriam Miranda, Honduran Garifuna Leader

Miriam Miranda is a leader of Garifuna Afro-Indigenous community and the organization known as Ofraneh, the Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras. She is renowned for her activism resisting mega-tourism projects, the expansion of African palm monocultures, and market-based "false solutions" to climate change displacing Garifuna communities along the Honduran coast as part of a fight for Garifuna survival, self-determination, and food sovereignty.

2. Maxima Acuña, Peruvian Campesina

Maxima Acuña is a Peruvian subsistence farmer who has successfully taken on U.S. mining giant Newmont in a tireless fight for land and livelihood. Acuña's resistance, recognized with the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize this year, has become an iconic David and Goliath tale after she managed to halt Newmont's plans to open a US\$4.8 billion open-pit gold and copper mine in the area. Despite her legal win, Acuña continues to face threats and harassment for her activism.

3. Marcos Terena, Brazilian Trailblazer

Marcos Terena is a Xane leader from Brazil who has spearheaded multiple initiatives to advance the rights of Indigenous people in his home country and around the world. He founded Brazil's first Indigenous political movement, the Union of Indigenous Nations, organized historic global events, and fought for the inclusion of Indigenous rights in the Brazilian constitution.

4. Milagro Sala, Argentine Political Prisoner

Milagro Sala is an Indigenous leader in Argentina considered to be the first political prisoner of President Mauricio Macri's government. She founded and leads the Tupac Amaru movement, a 70,000-strong organization focused on Indigenous rights and other political issues. Sala is also a lawmaker with Parlasur and a member of other political and labor organizations.

5. Feliciano Valencia, Colombian Peace Activist

Feliciano Valencia is a Colombian community leader and winner of the 2000 National Peace Award. The activist was arrested last year despite the Indigenous rights to legal jurisdiction over their territories in Colombia, and his capture became a symbol of the systematic repression suffered by Indigenous movements in the country. Valencia has dedicated his life to fighting for Indigenous rights and supporting the path toward peace.

6. Silvia Carrera, Panamanian History-Maker

Silvia Carrera is the first woman chief of the Ngobe Bugle and the leader of a resistance movements to block unwanted hydroelectric dam and copper mining projects on Indigenous territory. She has represented her people in negotiating with the government for respect for Indigenous rights and self-determination and has become a symbol of dignity and inspiration for Indigenous women in Panama and across Latin America.

7. Humberto Piaguaje, Ecuadorean Chevron-Challenger

Humberto Piaguaje is a leader of the Secoya Indigenous group of Ecuador and has been an important figure in the fight against the U.S. energy giant Chevron and its corporate cover-up of a massive oil spill in the Ecuadorean Amazon. He has long championed the fight of the Secoya people against Chevron, formerly Texaco, and slammed the corporation for human rights abuses and falsified evidence in the court battle.

8. Aura Lolita Chavez Ixcaquic, Guatemalan Feminist

Aura Lolita Chavez Ixcaquic is a Guatemalan Maya K'iche leader and defender of the rights of women and the environment. She is a leader of the Council of K'iche' Peoples in Defense of Life, Mother Nature, Earth and Territory and has fights for the Indigenous right to self-determination over their territories with a focus on the role of women in the movement against resource extraction. She has suffered attacks and threats for her activism.

9. Oscar Olivera, Bolivian Water Warrior

Oscar Olivera was key leader in the so-called Cochabamba Water Wars against the privatization of water in Bolivia between 1999 and 2000. He won the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2001 and is now an important leader in protests related to the Bolivian gas conflict.

10. Nestora Salgado, Former Mexican Political Prisoner

Nestora Salgado is a Mexican community leader who spent more than two years in jail for her activism organizing autonomous police forces in the state of Guerrero to combat drug cartels and state complicity in rampant violence. She was freed earlier this year and has vowed to fight for the rights of other political prisoners in Mexico.

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/10-Latin-American-Indigenous-Rights-Warriors-You-Need-to-Know-20160508-0045.html>

May 9, 2016

Mining and extraction coalition at UN holds countries, companies accountable

By Chris Herlinger
Global Sisters Report

Global Sisters Report is focusing a special series on mining and extractive industries and the women religious who work to limit damage and impact on people and the environment, through advocacy, action and policy. Pope Francis last year called for the entire mining sector to undergo "a radical paradigm change." Sisters are on the front lines to help effect that change.

The quiet corridors of the Church Center for the United Nations, a 12-story building across from U.N. headquarters in New York City, are thousands of miles away from rock-strewn chasms and polluted waterways that characterize so many of the world's mining operations. But Sr. Áine O'Connor and her colleagues feel a connection with sisters and others working to help communities affected by companies seeking silver, gold, copper, coal, zinc and other commodities.

O'Connor and her colleagues who work at the United Nations see a multifront approach in tackling mining — or extractive — issues. As nongovernmental organizations acting in a "consultative status" with the U.N., their role is to bring pressure at the top, working with governments and companies to abide by international standards on environment, safety and

health issues. They also want to raise the issue as an international concern, and there is no better place to do that than at the United Nations.

But their activism is also connected with sisters and others who are working with the local communities that mining directly affects. In recent years, protests against mining operations have become increasingly visible throughout the world, from the Peruvian mountains to the hills of Appalachia.

Catholic sisters are among those focusing on the ramifications of mining and other extractive industries. The Loretto Sisters, whose motherhouse is in Nerinx, Kentucky, [have joined other groups in protests against mountaintop mining](#). In Australia, Sisters of Mercy are adding their voices [about the coal seam gas industry](#), operations that extract natural gas from coal deposits.

In India, Sr. Valsa John, a member of the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary and an outspoken critic of mining operations in the eastern state of Jharkand, was [killed](#) in November 2011 in an attempt to silence her, fellow indigenous rights activists say. India's Roman Catholic hierarchy [spoke out](#) about her death.

At the United Nations, meanwhile, "the voice of Catholic religious are raising the issue as we connect the problems of extraction, climate change and other challenges," said O'Connor, who coordinates the U.N. work of the Sisters of Mercy and the Mercy International Association.

Colleague Amanda Lyons, advocacy officer for Franciscans International, said the foundational questions about mining include: "Does it do harm? Does it serve the common good? Who bears the burdens and who reaps the benefits? How does it affect the health, water, farming and safety of communities and regions nearby?"

The Sisters of Mercy and the Franciscans are members of a coalition of nongovernmental organizations, most of them religious and with robust representation from Catholic sisters, nearly 20 in all, that works under the title [NGO Mining Working Group](#).

The working group, which is allied with local grass-roots organizations throughout the world, is an advocacy coalition. It supports human and environmental rights in the wake of what O'Connor and her colleagues call "the extractive industries."

O'Connor said the group meets at least once a month, either at the U.N. or at Church Center for the United Nations, the base of a number of faith-based organizations working at the U.N.

Advocacy work of this sort focuses on analysis and the development of advocacy positions and documents. Some of this is done in formal meetings, some of it is done in ad hoc sessions, and much of it is done electronically.

"When an official U.N. meeting is in session that we are actively following and doing our advocacy, we meet a couple of days prior to the particular meeting, then we caucus the morning of the meeting, at the middle and at the end of the day," O'Connor said. "During these times, we are making the plan, acting on the plan, then reviewing and revising our advocacy strategy based

on that day's outcome. A few times, with the U.N. member states, we have spent all night at the U.N. following critical sessions, especially around the human right to water and sanitation."

Guiding the coalition's current advocacy is pressing the U.N. to a rights-based model of sustainable development. That means respect for civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights must be the foundation for governmental policies in the future and that actions should be aligned with long-term sustainability of natural resources.

In September, U.N. member states agreed to [17 new sustainable development goals](#) for the good of "people, planet and prosperity." This followed the development in 2000 of the Millennium Development Goals by the U.N. that established targets to help eradicate poverty and other problems by 2015.

This new agenda also calls for "economic, social and technological progress" that "occurs in harmony with nature."

This U.N. [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) is nonbinding; that is, it is not a formal treaty. But it is now up to advocacy groups and coalitions like the NGO Mining Working Group and local grass-roots organizations to keep applying pressure on governments for the cause of human rights and environmental protections.

Why focus on mining, or extraction? Local grass-roots organizations say the extractive industries have done great harm and violated human rights in the name of "development." The extractive model of development, the coalition argues, has damaged the Earth, causing water contamination, the disruption of affected communities, the loss of livelihoods for small-scale farmers, and the displacement of communities. In addition, the coalition says, this model of development has also led to armed conflict and violence as well as the criminalization and persecution of movements that oppose mining.

The NGO Mining Working Group has developed what it calls a "rights-based litmus test" to assess whether instances of "natural resource extraction" can fit into a sustainable model. The four principles of the proposed test:

- Do no harm: Can mining or other extractive activities be carried out without violating human rights?
- Eradicate root causes of poverty: Does the mining or other extractive activity contribute to eradicating poverty, and are human rights respected and even increased as a result?
- People as rights-holders: Can affected communities participate in a process of assessing the effects of mining?
- Sustainability: What are the effects of potential mining activity both in the short and long term?

In a recent interview with *GSR*, O'Connor, Lyons and their colleague, Sr. Angela Reed, also affiliated with Sisters of Mercy and Mercy International Association, said they realize these are

high and demanding bars that are being set. But "people are beginning to connect the dots" between extraction and mining and social ills, Reed said.

With its high concentration of mineral resources, Latin America — and South America in particular — has been a focus of increasing activism about the effects of extractive industries. And the Catholic church is taking an increasingly high-profile role on the issue.

"It's a topic of concern for us because it's a topic of concern in Latin America," said Richard Coll, foreign policy adviser on Latin America and global trade for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a recent interview.

Coll said companies come into communities "painting a rosy scenario about jobs and income," yet the benefits often prove minimal or elusive. Labor is often imported, and few local taxes are ultimately paid.

"Very little trickles down, and it's often easy for the companies to walk away," he said.

One reason mining is becoming an issue of increasing concern is that its impacts are being felt in greater ways because of technological advancements and larger equipment, Coll said.

"Larger equipment can move more earth," he said.

He said investors in companies that do the mining "would be shocked" by some of the impacts extractive industries have, but the issue has not received "the attention it deserves."

Coll praised the Vatican for making the issue a recent focus, saying concerns that Pope Francis raised have been a "coherent part of his message on the environment and the unrestricted role of markets."

In their work, the sisters and their supporters make the same point. They have an important ally in the pope.

"This is 'Gospel time' — to be in this struggle — and Pope Francis has given us an opportunity to be very public about this," O'Connor said.

[The pope sent a message of support](#) to communities affected by mining during a Vatican meeting in July organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and a global grass-roots network called "Churches and Mining."

The pope urged the mining industry to change the way it works, citing "negative consequences" that includes pollution, land grabs, wealth that is not shared with local populations that remain impoverished, and violence and corruption that often occurs in communities where mining is prevalent.

Francis also warned against poor working conditions for miners, as well as human trafficking of women for sexual exploitation in mining communities. He also said mining often occurred

without civil, local and national governmental bodies living up to their "fundamental duty to promote the common good."

Citing the pope's recent environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Cardinal Peter Turkson, the pontifical council's president, said the church "[cannot remain indifferent](#)" to the cry of affected communities. He quoted a letter from a U.S. Catholic bishop, saying, "Some multinational mining operations are associated with 'calamitous public health and environmental consequences.' "

Among those testifying at the Vatican meeting were communities from Africa, Asia and Latin America, though the issue of extraction also weighs on communities in North America, which is dealing with the controversies surrounding fracking.

The conference was not a one-time event or one-time show of commitment to the issue by the Catholic church. One group focused on mining and extractive industries is the Integrity of Creation Working Group, which is part of the wider work of the Justice, Peace & Integrity Commission. The JPIC is part of the ongoing life and mission of both the Union of Superior Generals, known as USG, and the International Union of Superior Generals, known as UISG, and their member congregations, said Franciscan Sr. Sheila Kinsey, executive co-secretary of the JPIC Commission.

Among the Integrity of Creation Working Group's activities has been compiling [a reflective study guide and resource on the impacts of mining](#). Among the resource's recommendations: Local communities "have a right to be consulted and heard in all natural resource exploration and development in their region." The study urged mining companies to adopt "policies that mandate that they obtain comprehensive local community consent," including free prior and informed consent, before "beginning any industry projects." Local communities, the study said, have a right to reject proposed projects.

The [International Council on Mining & Metals](#), a coalition of 23 mining and metals companies and 34 national and regional mining associations publicly committed to responsible mining practices, "recognizes the important role that the Catholic church and Pope Francis have in engaging with society on issues that matter to them," said Tom Butler, CEO of the association.

Butler told *GSR* that ICMM "has been fortunate to have met with representatives within the Catholic church to discuss alternative viewpoints on the industry and how we can address some of the challenges. We have found this dialogue to be most constructive and a conversation that we wish to continue in order to reach better outcomes for all."

On the issue of mining itself, Butler said, "While a mine itself is a finite resource, as the NGO Mining Working Group has stated, our belief is that the economic contribution of a mine — whether through job creation, skills transfer, local content procurement, or taxes paid to central government — can be positively transformational for a host country. Our members strive to achieve that, and governments also need to play their role."

O'Connor and her colleagues say they have a cordial relationship with the ICMM but will remain vigilant in their efforts.

The sisters take a long view, which they acknowledge is needed at the United Nations because pitched arguments and debates can hinge on the language of documents.

Asked what constituted a success for her coalition, O'Connor said "sustained advocacy" helped ensure the recognition of water and sanitation as a human right in the declaration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

To outsiders, language in a U.N. document may seem like a small victory. But for advocates like O'Connor, it has important symbolism and implications.

"For the NGO Mining Working Group and water justice advocates worldwide," she said, "the result is a critical step toward empowering peoples to claim their right while also providing a challenge to corporations and extractive industries that continue to abuse Earth's dwindling water resources."

<http://globalsistersreport.org/news/environment/mining-and-extraction-coalition-un-holds-countries-companies-accountable-39681>

May 9, 2016

Radical art form blazing a trail for environment, indigenous rights

FMT News

PETALING JAYA: An alternative art group born through a love of punk rock has gained popularity across Malaysia in just a matter of six years, from its humble beginnings in Ranau, Sabah, according to a report by the South China Morning Post.

Pangrok Sulap uses woodcut printing for some controversial and confrontational art pieces that aims to address issues affecting locals and the environment, including depleted forests, animals and the indigenous population.

Woodcut printing is used by several radical groups in Southeast Asia. It was a technique that took off after a Yogyakarta-based Indonesia art group Taring Padi produced controversial political designs following the end of former president Suharto's reign in 1998.

"I was amazed by the beautiful designs," said Rizo Leong, one of the founding members of Pangrok Sulap. "We kept experimenting and began to develop our own style."

Leong lives with his wife at Pangrok Sulap's art studio which was formerly a primary school on the outskirts of Ranau town.

Pangrok Sulap was started by Leong, Jerome Manjat and four other original members in 2010, and has since grown with more talents to incorporate a range of artistic skills, the Hong Kong daily writes.

What they all had in common was a love for punk rock, hence the local pronunciation “pangrok” became the first part of the name for their new venture. “Sulap” is a Kadazan-Dusun word for a type of hut.

The group’s efforts in the front line of the fight to protect the environment and the rights of the indigenous population in Sabah was well received and their art soon spread across the state and subsequently to the peninsula, and even Japan, where a third exhibition is to take place.

“I don’t know how we got famous,” Manjat said, adding that it just seemed to have happened spontaneously.

Manjat said that the woodcut prints are displayed in public places, mostly without permission from the relevant authorities.

“But the authorities see these pieces, yet they don’t come and catch us. I think they know what we’re saying is true and they agree with our message,” he said.

According to SCMP, Pangrok has diversified, now creating art works from beads (similar to the traditional Dusun art form used on ceremonial costumes) and silkscreen prints, besides having a carpenter on hand.

The woodcut prints and other art works from Pangrok Sulap have been on display in major galleries all over Malaysia. Such popularity started to attract attention from major corporations too, one of whom was Petronas.

The group was asked by the national oil & gas firm to paint a mural in Kota Kinabalu, as part of the firm’s sponsorship of Malaysia Day celebrations on September 16, last year.

“They wanted us because we have a name and people know who we are.

“But we declined to work for Petronas after they came with the condition that it should not be political,” Manjat said, adding that the company even asked Pangrok to name its price to create the mural.

“That is the whole reason we do the art. From the beginning, we were all about spreading the message. We needed to because we don’t have media for local people here,” he added.

“We are interested in showing the real situation in Borneo, like the people losing land to the Kaiduan Dam.”

Manjat was referring to a project that the state government says is needed to secure water supply until the year 2030. Several Dusun villages will be destroyed with more than 2,000 people displaced.

“I don’t think the government cares about the people,” Leong tells the SCMP, adding “but the art makes them listen.”

<http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2016/05/09/radical-art-form-blazing-a-trail-for-environment-indigenous-rights/>

May 10, 2016

First Nation Wins Historic Victory Over Mammoth Coal Export Terminal

US Army Corps of Engineers denies permit for proposed Cherry Point terminal, which would have been the largest in North America

By Lauren McCauley
Common Dreams

In a move being hailed as a landmark victory for the climate movement, Pacific Northwest communities, and tribal members alike, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on Monday [denied](#) federal permits for the largest proposed coal export terminal in North America.

"This is big—for our climate, for clean air and water, for our future," [declared](#) Mary Anne Hitt, director of the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign.

For years, the Lummi Nation [led](#) the campaign against the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal in Xwe’chi’eXen (also known as Cherry Point), Washington. Last year, tribal leaders [asked](#) (pdf) the Army Corps to reject the project on the grounds that it would violate treaty rights and cause "irreparable damage to important crab and salmon fisheries" in the Salish Sea.

The Army Corps, Hitt said, "did its duty by upholding treaty rights and honoring the U.S. government’s commitment to those treaties." The decision marks the first time that a coal export facility has been rejected based on its negative impacts to the treaty rights of a tribal nation.

Quinault Nation President Fawn Sharp, who also serves as president of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and vice president of the National Congress of American Indians, [called](#) the ruling "an appropriate and just decision."

Sharp said that "everyone who cares about fish and wildlife, the environment and human health should be happy with the Corps’ decision. This is an historic victory for tribal treaty rights as well as for everybody else who lives here."

"Those who understand the great value of our natural resources to our health and culture, as well as the sustainable economy of the entire region, will applaud today's announcement," she added.

"This is an historic win, and we are grateful to the Lummi Nation for their leadership in delivering a tremendous victory for Northwest families," [said](#) Crina Hoyer, executive director of Bellingham's ReSources for Sustainable Communities. "The message rings loud and clear: communities will never accept the health, safety, economic or environmental impacts of dirty coal exports."

The proposed terminal would have exported up to 48 million tons of Powder River Basin coal each year to markets in Asia. That coal would have been carried on coal trains—as many as 18 additional each day—through communities in Washington, Idaho, and Montana, before being loaded on giant ships which would carry the pollutant across the Salish Sea to the Pacific Ocean.

The project's opponents cited a host of negative environmental impacts—from increased coal dust around the terminal and rail lines to the atmospheric effects of burning coal overseas.

Indeed, the denial comes amid a [marked decline](#) in the coal industry, including the recent bankruptcies of fossil fuel giants [Peabody](#) and [Arch Coal](#).

At the same time, climate campaigners worldwide have [launched](#) a series of [peaceful direct actions](#) targeting key [fossil fuel infrastructure](#) to pressure their governments to commit to a clean energy future.

"The Lummi Nation's victory brings even more energy to local movements," said Cesia Kearns, who serves as co-director of the [Power Past Coal](#) coalition, an alliance of health groups and businesses, as well as environmental, clean-energy, faith, and community organizations working to stop coal export off the West Coast.

"From British Columbia, to Longview, Washington, to the Gulf of Mexico," Kearns declared, "we will continue to stand together to say no to corporate special interests and yes to healthy, community-driven futures."

<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/05/10/first-nation-wins-historic-victory-over-mammoth-coal-export-terminal>

May 11, 2016

Can India's Sacred But 'Dead' Yamuna River Be Saved?

By Julie McCarthy
NPR

A fire crackles along the banks of the Yamuna River: a cremation of a young mother, struck by a car while she was fetching water.

The stench of the river engulfs the sad assembly.

Before the hissing funeral pyre, floating down the river, white blocks of what looks like detergent appear like icebergs. It is 95 degrees in Delhi this night. This is chemical waste from factories that have sprung up across the city, manufacturing leather goods, dyes and other goods.

Downstream, the living reside along garbage-strewn banks.

A colony of shacks sits beneath the Old Iron Bridge, a vestige of the British colonial era. Its tracks trundle trains across the Yamuna, on the northern edge of the city. Like the Ganges, the Yamuna is sacred to Hindu believers. The faithful dangle garlands from the bridge's hulking girders and pitch ashes and money from its railings.

Steps away from his hut, 8-year-old Ravi, wearing only his underwear, dives into the contaminated water to retrieve their offerings. He clambers out, tugs on some clothes and, magician-like, pulls the coins he's tucked away for safekeeping from his mouth.

Delhi is about a third of the way down the 855-mile Yamuna River. Its source is the Yamunotri glacier, crystal-clear water from the Himalayas. But by the time it moves down the eastern edge of India's capital, it exits as the dirtiest river in the country.

For the past 18 years, Mohammad Zamir, a laundry man and father of four, has beaten rags against rocks. Washing remnants used on factory assembly lines, he stands up to his knees in the filthy water from dawn to dusk.

But Zamir, 38, says he's not worried about his health. "No," he says matter-of-factly, "the water looks black because of the shadows falling on it. I have no problems. Neither do our elders, who are nearly 80 and did the same work."

Yet according to the Central Pollution Board's most recently published water quality data, from 2011, by the time the Yamuna exits the city, it is lethal. The water contains a concentration of 1.1 billion fecal coliform bacteria per 100 milliliters of water. The standard for bathing is 500 coliform bacteria per 100 milliliters.

"That is the reason why this stretch of the Yamuna is called dead," says noted environmentalist Manoj Mishra. "Because there is no life here. There cannot be life here. There's nothing here."

Mishra walks along the banks, explaining that upstream, huge amounts of water are channeled off to irrigate farmlands, drastically reducing the river's flow. Just before the Yamuna enters Delhi, millions more gallons are siphoned off for Delhi's drinking water, shrinking the flow even further.

"A river that does not flow is no river," Mishra says. He sweeps an arm toward the stagnant water. "And as you can clearly see, there is no flow here. It's a toxic cocktail of sewage, industrial waste and surface runoff. Absolutely unfit for any use whatsoever."

Architect Pankaj Vir Gupta says no fresh water replenishes the entire 13-mile stretch through Delhi. Gupta runs a project with the University of Virginia to rejuvenate the Yamuna, and says only waste flows into this span of the river.

"In fact," he says, "the only time in the year when the river is moderately clean is during the monsoon when fresh rainfall falls directly into the river."

Unbridled urbanization is partly to blame. Over the past two to three decades, new arrivals, drawn to the capital by a liberalized economy and a dearth of opportunities in their own villages, settled wherever they could. About a third of Delhi's 17 million residents live in settlements that are officially illegal — and are not connected to any municipal sewer service.

When this underserved population openly defecates, Delhi Water Board CEO Keshav Chandra says the waste finds its way into drains that dump directly into the river. "The infrastructure to take care of this incoming population could not cope up with this," he says.

But that's not the only thing that hasn't kept up. The Yamuna is a dumping ground because polluters get away with it.

"You will find every law in Delhi, but no enforcement," says Delhi Water Board member R.S. Tyagi, with a wry laugh. He says there's lax enforcement of laws against illegal dumping of arsenic, zinc and mercury, against pouring raw sewage into storm drains and against the illegal cultivation of crops on the contaminated floodplain.

The Yamuna is administered by no fewer than two dozen different local, state and national government agencies, Tyagi says, and that in itself is a problem. "In this way," he says, "nobody can be accountable."

The Yamuna supplies about a third of Delhi's drinking water, which gets channeled to a reservoir in the northernmost corner of the city before the river becomes toxic.

Architect Gupta says residents of the unauthorized slums must depend on "private tankers, bore wells and a water mafia" for their drinking water. "That can't work," Gupta insists, and argues for the need to "democratize the water supply" of Delhi.

But even the condition of drinking water that comes out of the tap has given rise to a lucrative private industry of home water filters, which are relatively expensive. Mishra says families who can't afford them inevitably fall sick.

"That's how their life is," he says. "And it is highly irresponsible, and in some ways, even criminal. But the solution lies in getting the river back."

Some are trying to do exactly that.

An experiment funded by the Delhi Development Authority and overseen by a team of scientists has a small section of the Yamuna floodplain thriving. Concrete high-rises loom on the periphery of this nature reserve, an oasis on the north edge of a noisy and polluted city.

This butterfly- and bird-filled wetland replicates the flora and fauna of what was here 100 years ago, according to field biologist Mohammad Faisal. He says thousands of migratory birds, 20 species of fish and 35 species of dragonflies have returned as a result of nurturing this conservation habitat over the past five years.

"Wetlands act as a nursery for the river itself," he says.

Artist and activist Ravi Agarwal says this 450-acre biodiversity park in the floodplain is the beginning of an overdue healing.

"Nature and the city become two oxymoronic words — they don't sit with each other. Earlier, they used to flow into each other, and there was a beautiful coexistence," he says.

Coexistence can revive the Yamuna, he says, but the residents of Delhi must want it.

<http://www.npr.org/2016/05/11/477415686/can-indias-sacred-but-dead-yamuna-river-be-saved>

May 12, 2016

BC indigenous leaders seek UN support against gas project

WRAL

UNITED NATIONS — First Nations leaders from British Columbia brought their fight against a proposed liquefied natural gas project in the province to the U.N. on Thursday, saying it could threaten the wild salmon habitat on their ancestral lands.

The group sought the support of United Nations members for its demand that the Canadian government reject the \$36-billion Pacific Northwest LNG project, which is being advanced by Malaysia's state oil company, Petronas.

The B.C. government believes the project could generate more than 18,000 jobs and produce billions in revenue.

In a statement, Murray Smith, a leader of the Gitwilgyoots Tribe — one of the Nine Allied Tribes of Lax Kw'alaams — expressed deep concerns about the threat the project poses to the wild salmon habitat.

The project is proposed for just south of Prince Rupert on Lelu Island at the mouth of the Skeena River. Opponents say it threatens wild salmon habitat on what is the second largest salmon bearing river in B.C.

"We will not sell our salmon future for any price," Smith said. "We are not against development, but we are against this dangerous, irresponsible, foreign-owned and illegal intrusion into our sacred homelands."

The First Nations leaders' appearance at the U.N. came just two days after the Canadian government earned cheers at the 15th session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, where Canada pledged to abide fully with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Environment Minister Catherine McKenna has said a cabinet decision on an environmental assessment covering the Pacific Northwest plant should be made by late June.

<http://www.wral.com/bc-indigenous-leaders-seek-un-support-against-gas-project/15700749/>

May 13, 2016

Pursuit of integral ecology

By Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo and Veerabhadran Ramanathan
Science
Vol. 352, Issue 6287, pp. 747

Later this month (23 and 24 May), the United Nations will convene the first World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, where global and local leaders will commit to putting each and every person's safety, dignity, freedom, and right to thrive at the heart of decision-making. More than 125 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, a level of suffering not seen since World War II. The social problems are wide and deep, from war and human trafficking to the gross inequality between the wealthy 1% and the poorest 3 billion of the population. Included in the summit's Agenda for Humanity are climate and natural disasters. Indeed, 1 year ago, Pope Francis emphasized, in the encyclical *Laudato Si*, that complex crises have both social and environmental dimensions. The bond between humans and the natural world means that we live in an "integral ecology," and as such, an integrated approach to environmental and social justice is required.

The need for an integral ecology approach can be seen, for example, in the coupling of economic activities and wealth inequalities with environmental pollution and climate change. Climate pollutants come primarily from the wealthy 1 billion, but the worst consequences of associated climate change will be experienced by the bottom 3 billion, who had little to do with this pollution.

Last year brought two historic global agreements that renewed optimism about a sustainable future. The United Nations' (UN's) declaration of sustainable development goals called for the eradication of poverty and the improvement of human well-being. The Paris agreement was signed by 195 nations to limit global warming to well below a 2°C increase. These global acknowledgements of systemic ecological and social problems have opened a window of opportunity to focus on how problems of poverty, human well-being, and the protection of creation are interlinked. The real innovation is this new synergy between science, policy, and religion.

The origin, transformative potential, and future development of an alliance between science, policy, and religion is based on recent advances at the Holy See, which houses two Pontifical Academies devoted to science: one for natural scientists and the other for social scientists. The members of these academies are chosen not for their religious affiliations but for their scientific preeminence. In May 2014, the two academies of scholars, philosophers, and theologians met to contemplate the sustainability of humanity and nature, and came to a remarkable (for a scientific body) conclusion: The resolution of major environmental problems facing society requires a fundamental reorientation in our behavior and attitude toward nature and toward each other. Both academies convened faith leaders of the major religions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam (both Sunni and Shia), and Judaism to state that slavery and human trafficking are crimes against humanity. Although it is hard for different religions to pray at the same altar, it finally became possible and necessary for them to act together to defend the dignity of human beings and their common home. This new attitude spurred meetings in 2014 and 2015 between scientists, policy-makers, and religious leaders that included UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and governors and mayors from more than 80 large cities. The groups agreed that the mitigation of climate change was a moral and religious imperative, and that the development of a sustainable relationship with the planet also requires a moral revolution. This new alliance also declared that extreme globalization of forms of indifference such as human trafficking and modern slavery should be acknowledged as crimes against humanity.

Pope Francis' effort to unite science, policy, and religion toward an integral ecology approach is just a start. We hope that other religions and moral and political leaders will join this new synergy and nudge society toward equitable solutions to ecological and social justice problems without losing sight of the values of the human person and the common good.

<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/352/6287/747.full>

May 13, 2016

Catholic social teachings call to the dignity of creation

By Denis M. Hughes and Brian Jordan
National Catholic Reporter

On May 15, 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued the seminal encyclical for workers [*Rerum Novarum*](#) (On the Condition of Labor). This memorable encyclical officially ushered in the transition in

Catholic social thought from a basis in agrarian economy to the understanding of the industrial evolution throughout the world through manufacturing and other industries.

Pope Leo XIII secured the foundation that work is at the center of the church's reflection on human identity and activity. *Rerum Novarum* and many papal encyclicals for the past 125 years have argued for the protection of workers and the right to form a union. With each encyclical, each generation addresses the challenge of the central nature of work within the changing and ever complex situation of its time.

Before it was popularly defined, the concept of globalization was addressed in the first paragraph of *Rerum Novarum* in connection with new development of industry, new techniques striking out new paths, changed relations of employer and employee, abounding wealth among a very small number and destitution among the masses. This was written in the context of the industrial revolution. Since 1891, each generation is faced with a similar challenge in its efforts to evaluate how developments in industry and technology affect "the condition of the worker."

Many church historians claim that *Rerum Novarum* is the starting point of an important tradition of Catholic social teaching on the economy, politics, world order, and peace that has served as a compelling alternative to secular politics. For example, within *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XII writes, ". . .by degrees it has come to pass that working men have been surrendered, isolated and helpless, to the hardheartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition." Leo XIII warned of the injustices created by the reliance on the free market while at the same time warning of the dangers of state socialism.

In its day, *Rerum Novarum* had a threefold effect. First, it was seen as a reformist rather than a radical document by workers' associations. Second, priests, not laity, were urged to take up the cause of the workers. (That has practically reversed itself in 2016. There is a scarcity of labor priests but a surplus of committed lay Catholic labor leaders.) Third, the encyclical took on secular socialism as well as rampant capitalism. A large part of the church's social teaching is determined by important social questions to which social justice is the proper answer. As we rediscover *Rerum Novarum*, we also uncover salient issues that were as important in 1891 as they are today pertaining to capital and labor.

The encyclical captures the spirit of the Industrial Revolution and the rights of workers:

The most important of all are workingmen's unions, for these virtually include all the rest. History attests what excellent results were brought about by the artificer's guilds of olden times. They were the means of affording not only many advantages to the workmen, but in no small degree of promoting the advancement of art, as numerous monuments remain to bear witness. Such unions should be suited to the requirements of this our age -- an age of wider education, of different habits, and of far more numerous requirements in daily life. It is gratifying to know that there are actually in existence not a few associations of this nature, consisting of either workmen alone, or of workmen and employers together, but it were greatly to be desired that they should become more numerous and more efficient. We have spoken of them more than once, yet it will be well to explain here how notably they are needed to show that they exist of their own right and what should be their organization and their mode of action.(49)

Catholic social teaching states that the right to organize is based on the human right of freedom of association that is found in the natural law. The right of workers to freely choose unions necessarily involves their right to decide how they shall decide for or against a union. More importantly, *Rerum Novarum* marked the bestowal of significant papal approval of emerging Catholic social movements. This gave the impetus to establish the rights of workers to organize into benevolent and protective societies with the twofold objective of implementing corrective reform and encouraging social betterment.

As Catholic union promoters, we staunchly support the Roman Catholic moral teaching on abortion, family values and the danger of the so called right-to-die movement. We also support the 1986 U.S. Catholic Bishops pastoral letter, "[Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy](#)." We support the U.S. bishops' teaching on labor unions: "The purpose of unions is not simply to defend existing wages and prerogatives of the fraction of workers who belong to them, but also to enable workers to make positive and creative contributions to the firm, the community, and the larger society in an organized and cooperative way."

It is our hope that the U.S. bishops are just as consistent with Catholic social teachings as they are with Catholic sexual teachings. Both are called to the dignity of creation. The twofold purpose of marriage is mutual love between husband and wife and the procreation of children while Catholic social teaching teaches the dignity of the human person and the creation of a just workforce called unions. However, 125 years later in 2016, the sacramental union of marriage is also threatened, along with the right of labor unions to exist. The number of Catholic sacramental unions and Americans joining private sector unions has declined dramatically in the last 10 years.

We believe there are four major concerns regarding the future of labor unions:

Right to association. In recent years, the AFL-CIO has witnessed an erosion of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 by the courts and the U.S. Congress. In many cases, employers with deep pockets can make it nearly impossible within the law for employees to organize. Proof of this claim lies in recent legislative measures in Wisconsin and Indiana to weaken the rights of public sector unions.

All papal encyclicals dealing with labor unions such as *Rerum Novarum*, Pope John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens*, and Pope Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate*, have one primary point in common. Catholic social teaching is not just seeking charity to alleviate the plight of the poor but true justice for all workers, especially union employees. Nowadays, organized labor faces union-busting schemes by unscrupulous employers who want to eradicate private sector unions. Also, there is a growing number of unenlightened elected officials who want to ban public sector unions in their respective states. Recently, West Virginia became the 26th state to be designated as "right to work," meaning little or no unions.

Currently, we are grateful for the deadlocked Supreme Court vote allowing the teachers' union in California to require dues for all in that public sector profession. We understand and support

states' rights and federal law. We hope that our laws continue to support the right to association as does Catholic social teaching.

Immigration. In recent decades, there have been dramatic changes in the age, gender and ethnic make-up of the workforce. This is largely due to undocumented immigrants competing for blue-collar jobs as well as the increase of available work visas for highly trained immigrant workers competing for white collar jobs.

The AFL-CIO is not anti-immigrant. In fact, it supports comprehensive immigration reform with the hope that the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants will, after legalization, wish to join unions. We also note that the majority of the undocumented are Roman Catholics who would formally join their parishes and help support them with their just wages.

Wage theft: The Seventh Commandment and the right to strike. We support the compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic church that the Seventh Commandment, "Thou shall not steal," is not merely about property and stealing but also about social justice and human dignity.

Many corporations have the unrestricted ability to move capital to another nation or another state to exploit the cheapest labor available. This has led to the huge loss of U.S. manufacturing jobs to other nations or, within the U.S., to states that do not uphold union labor laws. This is wage theft that reduces the wages of many eligible workers. There are corporations today that are emotionally and financially committed to foment a union-free environment. Why? They simply do not want to pay a just wage and offer necessary medical and retirement benefits. That is wage theft and is a matter of social justice and the pursuit of human dignity.

In addition, we support the right of Catholic school teachers to strike whenever necessary. Again we read in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#): "Recourse to a strike is morally legitimate when it cannot be avoided, or at least when it is necessary to obtain a proportionate benefit." If the Catechism approves a legitimate strike, why do many U.S. Catholic pastors and bishops accuse the labor leaders of being anti-Catholic? Again, that is wage theft.

Climate change. *Rerum Novarum* is fulfilled by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Catholic social teaching has been communicated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents.

The relationship between human work and care for the environment is wonderfully addressed in *Laudato Si'* inspired by the "Canticle of Creation" by St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology. This encyclical is primarily a message of hope and a call to action. In the first chapter, he alludes to the earth as "our common home" and that we need to take precious care of it. Like Pope Leo XIII 125 years ago, Pope Francis acknowledges that the "acceleration of changes" affecting humanity and the planet coupled with a "more intensified pace of life and work" are at odds with the "naturally slow pace" of biological evolution.

The world has changed dramatically in the 125 years since *Rerum Novarum*. But like his predecessor, Pope Francis warns "the goals of this rapid and constant change are not necessarily geared to the common good or to the integral and sustainable human development."

In the third chapter of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis also asserts the human roots of the ecological crisis. He maintains the need to protect employment and the conditions of working people. "Any approach to an integral ecology, which by definition does not exclude human beings, needs to take account of the value of labour ... because to stop investing in people, in order to gain greater short term financial gain, is bad business for society." The antecedent for this teaching is based in *Rerum Novarum*.

However, the issue of climate change is no longer a scientific debate. It is a political debate that Pope Francis acknowledged in his address to the United Nations in September 2015. He referred to worker justice and the rights of workers as a shared responsibility of all nations. The pope emphasized the common good in society and that everything in the world is connected. By being connected to our ecological and labor crises we can find viable solutions to take care of "our common home" together.

By proclaiming the dignity of work and defending the rights of workers, Pope Leo XIII focused on a theme that would recur in Catholic social teaching throughout the following 125 years. Changed conditions in society have precipitated continual development of this tradition to keep current this aspect of church teaching.

From *Rerum Novarum* until now, additional encyclicals have addressed the rights of workers and the dignity of every human person. We assert that the most important encyclical written since that seminal work, is Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* which is addressed not only to Catholics but to all of God's creatures everywhere. Pope Francis addressed not only the plight of workers but the plight of the world where we all live and our shared responsibility to take care of Mother Earth. Protecting the environment is the most certain way to protect the rights of workers both now and in the future.

[Denis M. Hughes is the former president of the New York State AFL-CIO and former chairman of the New York Federal Reserve Board. Franciscan Fr. Brian Jordan is a labor priest, chaplain at St. Francis College, Brooklyn, and chaplain to the New York City union construction workers.]

<http://www.ncronline.org/news/peace-justice/catholic-social-teachings-call-dignity-creation>

May 16, 2016

Indigenous tribe on Mt. Elgon suffers climate change impacts

By Gerald Tenywa
New Vision

He had never known anything known as malaria until he left the higher parts of Mt. Elgon where he was born 57 years ago.

When Batya Moya, an elder among the Benets got down at Amanang, which is at the edge of Mt. Elgon National Park, he was attacked by malaria. The malaria carrying mosquitoes breed in the lower parts of the mountains because they are warmer than the higher parts of the mountains.

“I had never experienced malaria attacks,” says Moya, adding that he lost a lot of money and time to recover from the disease which is becoming rampant along the slopes of Mt. Elgon.

This is not only restricted to Mt. Elgon, according to Salome Alweny who is the leader, for environment change, development and policy programme of Albertine Rift Conservation Society (ARCOS).

As climate change rises, the higher parts of the mountains which were previously unsuitable for the breeding of mosquitoes are becoming favourable for mosquitoes which are referred to as vectors of malaria.

Climate Change is caused by emissions such as carbon dioxide from production processes, which trap heat escaping to the atmosphere thereby causing global warming. The warming of the earth disrupts rainfall patterns and also melts the ice on mountain tops like the Rwenzori.

Alweny said climate change is one of the issues that will be discussed at the [3rd Mountain Forum](#) to be held at Mbale, from 18th to 20th October, 2016.

The theme of the forum is, “Mountains our future” and is being organised by ARCOS and the Ministry of Water and Environment with the support of the Swiss agency for development and cooperation.

Apart from climate change, the mountain is faced with a challenge of high population pressure as well as settling people such as the Benets, according to Fred Kiiza, the acting chief warden of Mt. Elgon National Park under the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA).

The Benets, an indigenous group of people were evicted from Mt. Elgon National Park in 1995. The Batwa in south western Uganda were also evicted in the early 1990s when Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and Mgahinga National Park were protected as national parks.

Bwindi and Mgahinga along with Mt. Elgon were elevated from forest reserves to national parks, which have a higher conservation status in Uganda.

http://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1424606/indigenous-tribe-mt-elgon-suffers-climate-change-impacts

May 17, 2016

Interfaith event focuses on the environment

By Jennifer Burke
Catholic Courier

More than 60 scholars from around the world will present research papers on the environmental perspectives of different religions during an upcoming conference at Nazareth College in Pittsford.

"Sacred Texts and Human Contexts: Nature and Environment in World Religions" will take place May 23-25 at the college and will feature panel presentations and keynote addresses about nature and the environment as seen through the lens of such religions as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The conference is being administered by Nazareth College and its Hickey Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue in collaboration with the Department of Religious Studies at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva.

Nazareth College has hosted similar conferences on sacred texts in previous years, but the theme of this year's conference was inspired in part by the May 2015 release of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical on ecology, according to Dr. Muhammad Shafiq, executive director of the Hickey Center and a professor of religion at Nazareth.

"The environment and climate is challenging, and especially after the pope's encyclical, we felt the need to have this conference in this year to create awareness in the light of what the pope has emphasized," Shafiq said. "This is (a) unique and significant conference. I believe we are pioneers in America to organize such an academic conference on climate change."

A number of local Catholics will be moderating panel discussions or presenting papers during the conference. Father William Graf, chair of the department of religious studies at St. John Fisher College, will moderate a May 24 panel on Pope Francis' encyclical and what it means for the environment. During that discussion Marvin Mich, director of advocacy and parish social ministry at Rochester's Catholic Family Center, will present a paper titled "Pope Francis, Care for Creation, and Popular Movements." Another panel discussion, titled "Interfaith Approaches to Scriptures and Environment," will be moderated by Dr. Nathan Kollar, cofounder of the Hickey Center and professor emeritus of religious studies at St. John Fisher College.

On May 24 Sister of St. Joseph Monica Weis, professor emeritus of English at Nazareth College, will present a paper on "Personal and Communal Conversion: Key to Environmental Integrity," and the next day Father George Heyman, president of St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry, will present a paper on "Ali al-Khawwas and Pope Francis: A Mystical Union with the Created World." A number of other panel discussions and papers also will address topics related to Pope Francis or Catholicism.

The conference will open May 23 with registration from 3 to 5 p.m., followed by dinner and a keynote address. Panel presentations and keynote addresses will take place May 24 and 25, and

there also will be an afternoon excursion to Niagara Falls on May 25. On May 26 conference participants will visit Hobart and William Smith Colleges as well as several other destinations in the Finger Lakes region, including a winery, the Women's Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls and the Book of Mormon Historic Publication Site in Palmyra.

The registration fee for the conference alone -- not including dinners or lunches -- is \$55 per person, or \$169 for the conference as well as all the associated meals.

For more information or to register, send an e-mail to interfaith@naz.edu.

<http://www.catholiccourier.com/news/local-news/interfaith-event-focuses-on-the-environment/>

May 17, 2016

Greening Group Planting Environmental Seeds

Religious school students get a sustainability crash course.

By Merri Rosenberg
The Jewish Week

It wasn't your everyday religious school experience.

When [Hazon](#), a Jewish environmental organization, showed up at the Community Synagogue of Rye last month with their Topsy-Turvy bus — powered by vegetable oil — religious school students had the chance to ride a bicycle to power a blender to make their own smoothies.

This was precisely the kind of experience that the Westchester Jewish Greening Group, a new coalition of congregations and members who want to enhance environmental awareness and action, wants to see around the county as a way to feature environmental education within their religious school programs.

“This is a way to revitalize Jewish education,” said Becca Linden, director of the Jewish Greening Fellowship at Hazon. “It’s a way Jewish values come to life, where students are Jewishly engaged. It’s a way to do something more creative. Jewish tradition has all this stuff to say; it’s a great entry to Jewish life. You can energize kids through environmental activities.”

At an early organizational meeting during the winter, the group discussed some of their individual programs, and ways in which they could be scaled or modeled elsewhere throughout the county. Participants belong to a wide range of congregations and organizations in Westchester including Bet Am Shalom, Westchester Reform Temple, Greenburgh Hebrew Center, Community Synagogue of Rye, Congregation Kol Ami, Temple Israel Center and the Hebrew Institute of White Plains.

Much of Hazon's work in this area is about breaking down the silos that have long separated nature from Jewish education, instead teaching and encouraging students and congregants to see the connection. As Elan Margulies, director of Teva, a Hazon program that works to provide experiential learning incorporating Judaism, ecology and food sustainability, said, "This movement is a great equalizer, and a lens into Judaism, moving into the larger world and about the impact we can have in the world."

Rooting the concepts in Torah—like the brit adamah, or covenant with the earth—educational activities can include other aspects of ritual, like growing herbs to use for Havdalah, making cheese for Shavuot or grinding their own wheat. At the April 13 session in Rye, participants planted micro-greens and discussed how to build a city, including how to get rid of garbage. A conversation about what kinds of plant species should be part of a garden included a list of the 10 species of Jewish life.

"We want to make children much more mindful," said Dale Oberlander, director of the early childhood center at Community Synagogue of Rye, where nursery school children participated in planting and tending a vegetable garden. There is also a composting program. "We're looking to 'green' the playground, to have more of an outdoor classroom and have more children involved with natural materials."

Other efforts at the Community Synagogue of Rye, according to Cantor Melanie Cooperman, include having bnei mitzvot families commit to having an environmentally-friendly event that reflects "Jewish values" and using a trail on the grounds, to "bring classes outside and studying outdoors in nature as a prayer space."

Congregation Kol Ami combines art appreciation with nature appreciation for their 4- and 5-year-olds, and will be adding a class for 3-year-olds next year. Temple Israel Center's Ellen Weininger shared that her community's focus is on composting and energy auditing. Nancy Sklar of Greenburgh Hebrew Center said their in-house catering committee is composting and working with the congregation.

The group met at Westchester Reform Temple in April for a presentation on that congregation's zero-waste program. "Anything held at our temple is reusable, recyclable and compostable," said Michelle Sterling, a member of Westchester Reform Temple and the Westchester Greening Group. "We're not throwing out food anymore." Caterers who work in the building are brought up to speed about this initiative. "We want to get all houses of worship to zero waste."

Although the projects may differ, Cooperman said that the Westchester Greening Group members are making progress. "The focus remains on education," she said.

<http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/westchester/greening-group-planting-environmental-seeds>

May 17, 2016

Taj Mahal Under Attack by Bugs and Their Green Slime

By Nida Najar and Suhasini Raj

New York Times

NEW DELHI — Over the centuries, the Taj Mahal has endured its share of attacks — plundered by the Jats of northern [India](#) and looted by British soldiers, among other indignities. In recent years, officials have worried that growing air pollution could permanently darken the tomb's brilliant white exterior.

But few people anticipated the latest affront — millions of mosquito-like insects, their numbers supercharged by nutritious algae blooming profusely along the banks of the polluted Yamuna River nearby. Like generations of romance-driven human couples before them, the bugs have swarmed the Taj Mahal on a mating flight, excreting a green substance on parts of its marble walls.

The Yamuna has suffered mightily in recent years from the dumping of solid waste in its waters, said an environmental activist in Agra, India, the site of the Taj Mahal.

“I have been constantly watching how the river pollution has gone from bad to worse,” said D.K. Joshi, who filed a petition over the insects in the National Green Tribunal, an environmental court last week. “The encroachments on and around the riverbed, the sewage going directly into the river” are choking it, he said.

On Monday, the National Green Tribunal [issued notices](#) to the central and local authorities, including the Ministry of Environment and Forests, telling them to respond to the petition this month.

With India's cities ranking among the most polluted in the world by the [World Health Organization](#), public concern over toxic air and water is mounting. The central government has pledged billions of rupees to cleaning the Ganges River. But the effect of pollution on India's cultural heritage, though less obvious than its health effects, is also worthy of attention, experts say.

Sohail Hashmi, a Delhi-based writer and expert on heritage monuments, told [Press Trust of India](#) in an interview that the recently revived white limestone doors of the historic Red Fort, a former residence the Mughal emperor that was completed in 1648, “have become yellow in about six years.” Like the Red Fort, the Taj Mahal was built on the orders of Shah Jahan, a Mughal emperor, as a mausoleum for his beloved wife, and it was also finished in 1648.

The green secretions on the back wall of the Taj Mahal, a residue of the chlorophyll the insects consume, are not themselves harmful to the monument beyond the discoloration, said Girish Maheshwari, the head of the department of entomology at St. John's College in Agra, who analyzed the problem for the Archaeological Survey of India.

But the explosive numbers of the insects — [called Goeldichironomus](#) — were an alarming indication of how polluted the river has become, he said, since their eggs thrive on phosphorus and sediment in the water. And he worried over the “highly synchronized” swarm of insects that descend on the monument in the evening.

“They can create problems for the visitors,” he said.

The walls have been cleaned with clay packs, said Manoj Bhatnagar, an official in the Agra office of the archaeological survey. The excretions could also be removed with water, but the day-to-day cleaning is “very challenging.”

The insects do not seem to have deterred tourists, as yet. Samir Uberoi, who runs a tour company based in Mumbai, visited the Taj Mahal with groups twice in the last two weeks and did not notice a change. When asked what would happen if there was a significant recurring greening on the most loved monument in the country, he said, “I’m only hoping to God they find a solution before that.”

Puneet Dan, a tour guide in Agra, said he noticed the discoloration on the boundary wall of the Taj Mahal and on the back of the monument. So did his tourists, who he said flew into “semipanic mode.”

He said all he could do was assure them that officials were not about to let one of the greatest monuments in the world turn green.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/18/world/asia/india-taj-mahal-pollution-yamuna-river.html>

May 19, 2016

From Independence to Interdependence

By Cassandra Farrin
Westar Institute

When you trek up a mountainside and pass over a ridge into a gorgeous vista of peaks bathed in the colors of sunset, and when later that night the stars spangle out over your tent and an alpine lake, reflecting back their own infinite mass, don't the words that come to mind feel strangely religious? Awe. Wonder. Beauty. Surely this, if nothing else, reassures us that the chasm between science and religion is not as wide as it all-too-often feels.

We welcomed with delight Mary Evelyn Tucker's comments on this subject as part of the Westar Institute's Spring 2016 national meeting in Santa Rosa, California. Tucker is in a good position to speak on the subject of religion, climate change, the value of nature, and all that goes with these deeply intertwined fields of interest: she is the co-director with her husband John Grim of the [Forum on Religion and Ecology](#) at Yale University, where she teaches in the School

of Forestry & Environmental Studies and the Divinity School. She opened her talk at Westar with an overview of current ecological efforts and the key values driving those efforts in her presentation, “The Emerging Alliance of Religion and Ecology,” followed by a screening of her Emmy Award-winning documentary [Journey of the Universe](#) (2011).

Nature in Secular and Spiritual Systems

Tucker encouraged us to see that nature is valued in both spiritual and secular systems. While for the most part the ecological movement has been driven by people who love nature and don’t necessarily identify as religious, nevertheless religious communities are emerging now as crucial actors in the ecological movement.

The late arrival of religion, especially Western religions, to the ecology question is the unfortunate result of issues like fundamentalism, intolerance, and antipathy to science—part and parcel with the challenging struggles presented by modernity. This struggle isn’t limited to Western traditions but in Western traditions it has taken the particular form of a response to the critical question: “How are we going to re-examine our truth claims?”

This should be an all-too-familiar question to anyone who has been following the work of the Jesus Seminar and subsequent Seminars sponsored by the Westar Institute: in some sense, it was the question that [got us started](#).

How do you cultivate yourself to be part of a larger society and contribute to society, not just for your own enlightenment but for the greater good?

Not all religious traditions have struggled with the inherent instability of truth, of course. When Tucker went to southern Japan to teach, she became fascinated with the values she found there, values that are rooted in non-exclusive religious systems. In taking up the study of Confucianism and Buddhism, she learned that these traditions, which are of immense textual complexity and still not well understood in the West, have a lot to offer us as we attempt to rethink our values in this ecological age. To cite just one example, the value for education in Japan (and across China and East Asia) derives largely from Confucianism: in Confucianism, education is a moral act. How do you cultivate yourself to be part of a larger society and contribute to society, not just for your own enlightenment but for the greater good?

That’s not to say these Asian and indigenous traditions ought to simply replace the great Western religious traditions. The transformation of *all* these traditions with good critical thought still needs to happen. *We can do that*—but where do we begin? Tucker suggested we might try re-examining the views of nature in the various religious traditions. What can we retrieve and reevaluate in the sacred texts, rituals, and practices of each tradition? She and her husband John Grim organized [ten conferences on each of the major world traditions](#) at Harvard from 1996-1998 to explore these types of questions. From this project, which resulted in 10 edited volumes from Harvard several common themes within world religions emerged, among them the following:

Daily and seasonal cycles

Agricultural rhythms

Biodiversity and bioregions

Cosmological connections

Through our religious language, we are weaving ourselves into the deeper patterns of nature and the cosmos. As poet Mary Oliver put it, “I’ve never missed a full moon.” We are part of these cycles. Mircea Eliade, the highly influential history of religions professor at the University of Chicago, also saw this. As he observed, rediscovering the depth of our religious symbols as derived from nature revives their power.

From Independence to Interdependence

It is important to understand that many of us in the West live according to Enlightenment era values that prioritize the individual: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—or rather, as one attendee reminded us, Locke’s [original trinity](#) was not in pursuit of happiness but property! Missing, however, is a much needed respect for the interconnectedness of life. This is the gift of the ecological movement and the sciences: interdependence, relationality, flourishing. Mary Evelyn Tucker encouraged us to go beyond “sustainability” language, which suggests we’re remaining static—instead, let’s embrace the notion of “flourishing”! This means:

Life is the interdependence of species.

Liberty is relationality.

Happiness is living in a flourishing Earth community.

In our present moment, communities are transitioning from a Declaration of Independence to a Declaration of **Inter**dependence. This can be seen in the [Earth Charter](#) (drafted from 1992–2000), the preamble of which reads as follows:

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe
Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life.

This lends itself well to an approach that can welcome religion into the ecology conversation rather than assuming religion as an antagonist or part of the problem. **Religious ecology**, Tucker suggests, is “the symbolic understanding of ecological interdependence.” Think of kosher laws, the Eucharist, and so on. What are we saying when we participate in such rituals? If we use polluted water and genetically modified grains to prepare the Eucharist, what does that mean? Our lives depend on our understanding that we have emerged from biological processes and patterns. We’re emerging out of a 14-billion year unfolding process, and we share a profound interconnection with other species in the whole world.

In such a context, what is empathy? What is love? What is compassion? As one attendee put it, “Most of us are on our way to somewhere else. People who are here with more awareness of

their body and their place, are more likely to care for both.” Tucker observed in response that one related problem, especially in Western traditions, is rooted in some religious communities’ focus on otherworldliness and the quest for salvation elsewhere.

Both ecologists and religious practitioners are discovering more comprehensive voices in relation to the value of the Earth – its ecosystems and its species. Ecology as a discipline began with a sense of holism and dynamism, and in this religion may find common ground. By valuing nature in a more aesthetic, spiritual and holistic way, we reach a crucial point of connection that can perhaps overcome the otherworldly focus that has so dominated religious discourse in the West. This brings together eco-justice concerns for both people and planet. As Thomas Berry said to liberation theologian Leonardo Boff and others many years ago, you can’t heal humans if you’re ignoring a diseased Earth.

The Catholic Pope and the Eastern Orthodox Patriarch have used a simple human connection—friendship!—to overcome thousands of years of unwillingness to work together on this. The Green Patriarch, Bartholomew, has spoken out about our destruction of the environment as “ecological sin” and “crimes against creation”. Other key people mentioned were Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori from the Episcopal Church, and Joel Hunter from the Evangelical community. As many of us already know, the Dalai Lama has been speaking on environmental issues for the past thirty years. Now there is also the Tibetan 17th Karmapa, who has the fifty-five monasteries under his influence working on climate change issues, training monks to help people with local issues. In China, an “ecological culture” is emerging, drawing upon Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, which is now built into the constitution and even appears in speeches of Chinese leaders. Among the values emerging from this new ecological culture drawing on Chinese religious traditions are:

Interdependence of cosmos, Earth, and human

Micro-macro relations of humans and nature

Seasonal and agricultural cycles

Harmonizing with nature

Cultivating nature

Part of the challenge here is that we depend fully on the Earth no matter *what* religious tradition we have inherited: “The scriptures of the Earth are looking to us for understanding,” Tucker explained. “How do we understand the ecosystems that keep us alive, and keep our children alive?” As she said to a group of Texas oil men, “Only consider what would drilling in the Arctic be like? It would be like tearing pages from the Bible!” These are scriptures of nature, scriptures of the human heart. Our creativity needs to pour itself out in response at this critical moment.

How can we recover mutually enhancing human-Earth relations? Clearly, the majority of people are involved in religious communities, and that is a force of enormous proportions that is *needed*

to make a difference. How can we collectively participate in this? Tucker recommended that we try thinking of a dynamic like this:

FIELD (Education) ↔ FORCE (Society)

On the one hand, we need knowledge to help us understand what we're up against and also to actually prepare ourselves to live in the future of human-Earth flourishing that we are hoping to create. On the other hand, we need to take concrete action to make changes. This comes about on a deeper level than we sometimes realize. Many problems in North Africa and the Middle East are about the survival of a people in the context of drought—not a matter of terrorism!—and the refugees from this largely ecological crisis are overflowing into Europe.

Impact of the Papal Encyclical

Have you read the papal encyclical on care of the Earth, the *Laudato Si'* or “care for our common home”? If you haven't yet, Tucker urged us all to read it and consider its significance ([HTML version](#) | [PDF version](#)). *Laudato Si'* has done something incredibly important for the issue of the environment: it has placed the moral heart of it on a world stage with such language as this:

This sister [Earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the Earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the Earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.

Nothing in this world is indifferent to us.

This is by no means the only religious response to the environment and climate change in recent years, but it is a highly public act by a very well respected pope that has already shown a ripple effect. That is because there are more than one billion Catholics and another billion Christians in the world. Among other watershed moments, the COP 21 Conference in Paris in December 2015 was deeply influenced by the moral call of the encyclical. In addition, the presence of indigenous peoples was powerfully felt in Paris and in the Climate March in New York in 2014. The involvement of indigenous peoples worldwide is driven by a simple and wonderful thing: they are seeing their cosmology reflected in the ecology movement. The values at the heart of many indigenous religious perspectives are deeply tied to ecology and resonant with it. In a way, as one attendee said, the West that once colonized the world now needs to allow its hearts and minds to be colonized by those it once oppressed. We need it for our own survival as a global human community.

Where can we go from here?

Religious communities can contribute resilience and inspiration like no other community can. Hope is what religious traditions have offered throughout history, and hope is what *we* can offer. As one attendee put it:

What are we to do as responsible people of faith and scholars and students? ... People place sites that are dangerous or toxic in the poorest parts of this country. Christians are often associated with pacifism—"we need to forgive"—but in reality we have a revolutionary concept, too, that needs to be brought out in a responsible manner. We're seeds and little pilgrims who go back to wherever we go and can become the leaders in those communities.

An important step taken by Tucker along with cosmologist Brian Thomas Swimme, with an outpouring of support from numerous friends and partners, was to narrate the story of the universe in a way that brought religion and science together. At the heart of the *Journey of the Universe* project is the belief that a "Great Story" (knowledge/inspiration) leads to "Great Work" (action/perspiration). As Thomas Berry noted epics have changed whole civilizations—and we need one now more than ever! His essay "The New Story" (1978) was an inspiration for the Journey film, book, and conversations. [*Journey of the Universe*](#)

This, of course, is the first attempt to tell the new evolutionary story in film form. There were other inspirations for this ten year project. Alexander von Humboldt (d. 1859) was one of the most famous scientists of his era, an inspiration to Darwin to travel and study, and he cared deeply about evolution. In his book *Kosmos*, he says, "I have the extravagant idea of describing in one and the same work the whole material world—all that we know today of celestial bodies and of life upon the Earth..." He wanted to tell a coherent story of the universe.

Other scientists have followed in his footsteps, people like Carl Sagan (*Cosmos*), E. O. Wilson (*Epic of Evolution*), Neil DeGrasse Tyson (*Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey*), Eric Chaisson (*Cosmic Evolution*), and the historian, David Christian (*Big History*). These are people who appreciate that the humanities are needed in order to help the human community recalibrate their priorities, and yet over and over again many such individuals have underestimated or oversimplified the role religion might play in this project. In spite of some genuine efforts at dialogue, other tellings of the universe often suffer from reductionistic thinking. Moreover, some scientists are instrumentalists, saying we *need* the religious communities to be involved because they are such big players in the world. Scientists who want to be taken seriously by other scientists tend to avoid religion. Reductionist science tends to trump everything in these attempts to retell the story.

The film that emerged in response, the *Journey of the Universe*, powerfully conveys that life and consciousness were the inevitable result of the ordering principles that were present at the Big Bang 14 billion years ago. This isn't an overly simplistic or idealistic portrait. Our awareness of deep time has led to...

awareness of evolution – beauty

awareness of extinction – destruction

This reality can be overwhelming for us. How do we hold these two dynamics together going forward? How do we avoid collapsing under the burden of the [“sixth extinction”](#)? Geologists have defined the current age as the “Anthropocene”: the age of human-induced planetary change. Yet even as we’re dealing with the direct fear of extinction not only for ourselves, but for all life on this planet, we’re also awakening to new intimacy with the universe and the Earth community, a transition to full awareness of what it means that “we are stardust.” What is true well-being, true fecundity, in such a world? Who are we sharing this Earth with?

Journey of the Universe attempts not to falsely step outside the religious part of the conversation. By broadening participation in the whole, we return to awe that evokes action. This is where religion and science meet. Tucker proposes we revise the role of humans to embrace this all-important orientation that we are:

Citizens of the universe

Members of the Earth community

Kin to all other species

In short, we *belong* here. This is our new and ancient realization, and it is what must guide us into the future at this critical juncture.

Thank you for reading this report on the Westar Institute Spring 2016 national meeting, which took place in Santa Rosa, California. To see all meeting-related reports, visit the Spring 2016 program page.

Cassandra Farrin joined Westar in 2010 and currently serves as the Marketing & Outreach Director. A US-UK Fulbright Scholar, she has an M.A. in Religious Studies from Lancaster University (England) and a B.A. in Religious Studies from Willamette University. She is passionate about books and projects that in some way address the intersection of ethics and early Christian history.

<https://www.westarinstitute.org/blog/from-independence-to-interdependence/>

May 21, 2016

Cultivating peace: Qur'anic and Abrahamic Botanic Gardens

UNESCO

From the first, the Qur'anic botanic gardens project aimed to enhance linkages between cultural

and biological diversity, by linking traditional Islamic respect for natural habitats, the cultures inspired by the Holy Books of Islam, with the protection of environment and biological diversity. They also provided an opportunity for education and environmental awareness, as exemplified by the recent excursion that brought together sixteen inspired students and young professionals from Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates to visit protected areas in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Fujairah and Sharjah, including the Islamic Botanic Garden in Sharjah, in April 2016.

The proposal to establish a series of Quranic Botanic Gardens emerged in 2006, as part of UNESCO's efforts to enhance linkages between cultural and biological diversity. It defined a vision of new gardens influenced by scientific and cultural concepts from the Islamic civilizations and from oral and written masterpieces of the Islamic cultures, particularly from the Holy Qur'an, that would be the physical embodiment of garden traditions and preserve the botanic diversity of the environment in the region.

The Ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah, His Highness Dr. Sheikh Sultan bin Mohamed al Qassimi was the first to embrace this idea, followed by the State of Qatar under the leadership of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser. International Advisory Committees were established, and UNESCO led the production of specific guidelines and master plans. After years of efforts, workshops and conferences to produce plant-species checklists and books, and comprehensive collections of plant-propagation materials of the indigenous flora of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, the first Quranic Botanic Garden was opened in 2014 within Sharjah's Desert Park, next to the Natural History Museum.

As the gardens slowly took shape in Sharjah and Qatar, an even more comprehensive idea arose in Ethiopia: to establish an Abrahamic Botanic Garden in Addis Ababa, functioning for biodiversity conservation and environmental best practices while contributing to the Rapprochement of Cultures. This garden aims to embrace the linkages between traditional Judaic, Christian, and Islamic respect for natural habitats, the cultures inspired by the Holy Books, for the protection of the environment and biological diversity.

This unique garden would undertake four core functions: education, recreation, research and conservation. Ethiopia is a melting pot for the Abrahamic faiths ' Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, together with other faiths and cultures. The garden would echo the principle symbolized by yellow colour of the Ethiopian national flag: mutual respect of different faiths including religious freedom. '

The establishment of Faith Gardens is not new. Biblical Gardens can be found in Europe and the United States of America; there is a Biblical Botanic Garden in within the Missouri Botanical Garden in St Louis, USA and a Biblical Landscape Reserve in Israel, as well as a number of Islamic Gardens. The establishment of such gardens requires a thorough investigation of the Holy Books, to identify the main biodiversity resources cited in the Holy Books, while also studying and conserving the Afro-montane flora. Since many of the plants used in the past are still used today; this is another way of reconnecting with our cultures and traditions. Ethiopia's botanical resources are particularly well documented. Once identified, the relevant resources could easily be brought together in the garden. UNESCO supports this idea and is exploring opportunities for further collaboration.

Contributors: Prof. Sebsebe Demissew (Keeper, National Herbarium, Professor of Plant Systematics and Biodiversity, Addis Ababa University); Benno B'er, Bernard Combes and L. Anatheia Brooks (UNESCO)

Sources: Quranic Botanic Gardens Project (UNESCO, 2006); Qur'anic botanic Garden in Sharjah, UAE (UNESCO, 2007)

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Excursion Ethiopia and United Arab Emirates for environmental education, a binational programme in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Ethiopia. The first took place in Ethiopia, where the same group learned about environmental management issues in the UNESCO Biosphere Reserves of Kafa and Lake Tana in November 2015.

<http://www.bignewsnetwork.com/news/244247445/cultivating-peace-quranic-and-abrahamic-botanic-gardens>

May 24, 2016

5 Huge Climate Success Stories 10 Years After the Release of Al Gore's 'An Inconvenient Truth'

The Climate Reality Project
EcoWatch

Here's something to smile about. Check out five of our favorite climate successes in the past decade.

Ten years ago, *An Inconvenient Truth* brought the issue of [climate change](#) out into the open and into mainstream culture like never before. People began asking tough questions about our climate and wanted to know what they could do to make our planet a safer, healthier place for us all. And 10 years later, we can see the results. Last week, we shared in [this blog post](#) what's changed for our climate, for better or for worse, over the past decade. But with so many climate successes to choose from, we felt they deserved their own story. So today on the 10th anniversary of *An Inconvenient Truth*, here are five of our favorite moments of progress the world has made in solving climate change.

1. China—the World's Largest Carbon Emitter—Stepped Up

You know how U.S. fossil fuel interests used to stall pro-climate policies saying, "Well what about China? It doesn't matter what we do if they don't do anything."

Today, they're scrambling for a new line. You see, China is ahead of the game when it comes to deploying [renewable energy](#) and working to solve climate change. Last summer, China made one of the strongest national commitments to climate action leading up to the [UN's COP 21 climate](#)

[conference](#), pledging to expand total energy consumption from non-fossil fuel sources to around 20 percent by 2030. It will require China to deploy roughly 800–1,000 gigawatts of non-fossil fuel power by 2030 or about the total current electricity generation capacity in the U.S. This commitment solidified the progress China has made in recent years in combatting its dangerous air pollution problem.

As the world's largest carbon emitter since 2006, China making a commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and using more and more clean energy is a major breakthrough. And if China can get serious about cutting emissions and embracing renewables, other nations are going to have to follow suit.

2. The Growth of Renewable Energy and Clean-Energy Jobs

Renewable energy has surged in the past decade, with the cost of clean energies like solar and wind falling each year. And as the price continues to fall, demand continues to increase, which means the industry needs to expand to meet it. The result? Thousands of new jobs added each year.

Let's look at the solar industry. There are already more than [705,000 jobs](#) in solar energy in the U.S., employing Americans in all 50 states. The industry added more than [35,000 jobs in 2015 alone](#) and is showing no sign of slowing any time soon with solar companies projected to add more than 30,000 new workers in 2016.

The wind industry isn't far behind. The U.S. Energy Department [predicts](#) there will be more than 600,000 wind-related jobs by 2050, according to its Wind Vision Report, with high growth expected in fields like manufacturing, transportation and offshore wind. By the end of 2014, the U.S. had more than [73,000 jobs in wind energy](#) and the state of Texas alone employed more than 17,000 people in wind-related jobs in 2014.

3. Pope Francis United People From All Faiths to Protect Our Planet

In 2015, [Pope Francis](#) made headlines when he released his landmark encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. In the letter—written not just for Catholics, but for people of all faiths—he stressed some of the most important issues facing the world today, including climate change, the environment, poverty and the world economy.

The pope followed up *Laudato Si'* with a historic visit to the U.S. where he met with top government officials. Here, he echoed themes of his encyclical in public statements and private conversations and made the case for growing our economies through clean energy and new technologies. Above all else, Pope Francis urged the world to come together to take immediate action to protect our planet and allow people from all walks of life to flourish.

4. World Leaders Came Together to Reach the Paris Agreement

In the years following *An Inconvenient Truth*, world leaders attempted to reach a consensus about how to solve climate change throughout various global summits, but never truly

succeeded. That is, until last December, when world leaders came together at the UN's COP 21 climate conference in Paris. The world watched as leaders from 195 countries negotiated for two weeks and finally reached a global agreement—known as the [Paris agreement](#)—to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the primary factor driving climate change.

World leaders formally signed the Paris agreement this Earth Day, marking a turning point in the movement for climate solutions by setting a long-term goal of keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius. This is the most ambitious target ever formalized at this level—and a really big deal.

5. A Global Movement for Solving Climate Change Began

An Inconvenient Truth sparked a new kind of movement—one where people all over the world wanted to know how they could get involved in helping solve climate change. People realized their everyday actions had an impact on our planet and that they could be part of the solution instead of contributing to the problem.

Part of this movement involved [a new group of activists called the Climate Reality Leadership Corps](#). These activists—called Climate Reality Leaders—are people from every level of society working to educate and inspire others in their communities about the climate crisis. Shortly after the film's release, former U.S. Vice President [Al Gore](#) trained the very first group of Climate Reality Leaders in Carthage, Tennessee in 2006. Since then, the Climate Reality Leadership Corps has trained thousands of citizens in 135 countries around the world.

If you want to learn more about becoming a Climate Reality Leader, [sign up for information here](#).

Let's Recommit to Climate Action

Yes, we've seen a lot of great progress like the examples above over the past 10 years. But there's still more to do to ensure we stay on the path to ending climate change and building a safe, healthy future for our planet. First and foremost, we need to ensure our leaders fulfill their commitments in the Paris agreement to cut greenhouse gases. Pledge now to [recommit to climate action](#) and help us make certain world leaders live up to the promises they made in Paris.

<https://ecowatch.com/2016/05/24/al-gore-inconvenient-truth/>

May 24, 2016

Laudato Si' turns one year old: Time for action

By Michael Sean Winters
National Catholic Reporter

One year ago today, Pope Francis signed [his encyclical *Laudato Si'*](#). We didn't know it at the time: [The encyclical was leaked on June 15](#) and published officially [on June 18](#). But, I hope this morning's reflection will be the first of many attempts to take stock of the issues raised in that encyclical.

There have been many, many academic conferences studying the text of *Laudato Si'*. Some have been better than others, as is always the case with academic conferences, but it seems to me that the really fruitful ones were multi-disciplinary, in which climate scientists engaged theologians, and political analysts encountered both, and all three tackled the economists. As Pope Francis made clear in the document itself, the problem posed by climate change is a Hydra, a many-headed set of interlocking challenges. At the same time, both the urgency and the enormity of the problem warrants an "all hands on deck" approach, so it is not only conducive to truthful analysis to bring many people to the discussion, it is necessary if we literally are going to save the planet.

It is a good sign that the opposition to the encyclical came and went pretty quickly. The Acton Institute complained that the document insufficiently valued the market economy and the role of fossil fuels in alleviating poverty. The devotees of laissez-faire railed against the encyclical's call for government regulations, indeed for international regulations, to help curb the toxicity of man's involvement with the planet. Those who deny climate change made a brief, nettlesome, but inconsequential effort to sidetrack the discussion the Holy Father accelerated. Indeed, it was the frank and thorough manner with which Francis set forth the scientific evidence that led to one of the happier developments this year: More and more commentators acknowledge that if the deniers were to be believed, we would have to accept that there has been some kind of conspiracy conducted by 95 percent of the world's scientists, all working in tandem, to foist the science of climate change on an unsuspecting world. Many of us who are scientifically illiterate are not in a position to examine the scientific data, but we know that such a conspiracy is impossible.

Public opinion has evidently been moved by the Holy Father's intervention. A [study conducted by the Yale University](#) Program on Climate Change Conversation indicated that within six months of the encyclical's release, 11 percent more Catholics in the U.S. said they were worried about global warming than had been before, and 8 percent more of the general population. The percentage of people who think global warming will harm people here in the U.S. and abroad also increased: 17 percent more Catholics thought global warming would harm people in developing countries and 13 percent more thought people in the U.S. would be harmed. This shows the effectiveness of groups like Catholic Relief Services, to say nothing of the reporting of outlets like NCR, in helping people to realize the dire consequences of global warming, especially for the poor.

There is still work to be done. At the [Africa Faith & Justice Network](#), they just posted several links to articles that detail the degree to which multinational corporations respond to regulations on toxic waste disposal in their own countries by turning sub-Saharan Africa into the world's toxic waste dump. This is outrageous, and those who think the market can resolve a problem like this misunderstand the power of the market. Only government action, prompted by popular outrage, will ameliorate these horrors being perpetrated on the poorest of the poor.

The U.S. Bishops did a good job with the rollout of the encyclical last summer. The President of the USCCB, Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, and Washington's Cardinal Donald Wuerl held a press conference at the National Press Club the morning the text was released. There were so many reporters, they had to commandeer an adjoining room for the overflow. Many bishops wrote columns about the encyclical. But, the bishops declined to re-draft their document on voting to better reflect the magisterium of Pope Francis last November and the Vice President of the conference, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, sneered at the one bishop who suggested they do so, San Diego's Bishop Robert McElroy. I would also point out that if the bishops had donated as much energy and attention this past year to embracing environmentally friendly technologies in the physical plants at our Catholic institutions as they had to making sure those institutions did not have to cover contraception in employee health insurance programs, we would be leading by example, showing the whole country that it is possible to take steps right now to help save the planet.

[The Catholic Climate Covenant](#) (CCC) has undertaken several programs in the past year. They have been busy training Creation Care teams, training clergy in how to educate their people on the themes of the encyclical, forming a group of Latino leaders who are focused on spreading the good news in that fast-growing community. And, in an email sent out the other day, the CCC said they were working to "implement a diocesan-wide pilot program to encourage the embrace of renewable energy and energy efficiencies for parishes, schools, and other Catholic facilities." This makes me hopeful. We have had a year to study the text and to ponder it and to pray over it. Now it is time to take action.

The Catholic Church in the United States has a large plant. We own a lot of properties from Catholic schools to cemeteries to rectories. We employ a lot of people. If we choose to set an example in caring for creation, we can. Indeed, many of the steps that can be taken now represent low-hanging fruit, such as switching to LED lighting or installing solar panels on our facilities. Down the road, if we do not pick the low-hanging fruit now, we will only face tougher and tougher choices. It is my hope, and it is a confident hope, that the leaders of the Church will take actions this year in the spirit of *Laudato Si'*. As Pope Francis said, "Reality is more important than ideas."

[Michael Sean Winters is a Visiting Fellow at Catholic University's Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies.]

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/laudato-si-turns-one-year-old-time-action>

May 27, 2016

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Revokes Sovereign Lands Construction Permit for Dakota Access Pipeline in Iowa

Indigenous Environmental Network

Des Moines, IA – The United States Fish and Wildlife Service has revoked its approval of a construction permit for the Dakota Access pipeline through the Big Sioux River Wildlife Management Area in Northeast Iowa. This permit is called the Sovereign Lands Construction Permit and was revoked because a significant Native American archaeological site was discovered along its proposed path. Due to the permit revocation, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources has ordered that Dakota Access LLC stop all construction work for its Bakken oil pipeline until a survey of the area is conducted and consultation with local agencies and tribes is completed.

The Dakota Access project is a 1,168-mile Bakken oil pipeline proposed to carry up to 450,000 barrels per day. The pipeline would cross the “Breadbasket of America” through the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa and Illinois.

Dallas Goldtooth, Keep It In the Ground Campaign Organizer for The Indigenous Environmental Network gives the following statement:

“This action by Fish & Wildlife Service sets a precedent we hope other local and federal agencies, like the Army Corps of Engineers, take notice of and follow. We must not allow Big Oil to trample Indigenous rights, landowner rights, and federal policies that aim to protect the land, water, and culturally significant sites. Dakota Access is against the ropes, now is the time to deliver the final blows and stop this pipeline.”

Press Contact:

Dallas Goldtooth, 708-515-6158, dallas@iearth.org

<http://www.iearth.org/u-s-fish-and-wildlife-service-revokes-permit/>

May 28, 2016

Contamination of Sacred Lake Underscores Environmental Racism in Guatemala

By Jeff Abbott
Truthout

Lake Atitlán, in the Guatemalan highlands, draws hundreds of thousands of tourists annually to the vast blue waters and towering cliffs of its scenic volcanic crater. But the lake is in crisis. In early March 2016, the lake's Indigenous Mayan communities and the National Indigenous Observatory, with support from a number of local organizations, filed an official complaint

against the 10 municipalities around the lake about the continued deterioration and contamination of the lake due to corruption and the mishandling of official funds.

Protesters across the department have united to demand that the government clean up the contamination. In July 2015, a movement called Atitlán Sano, or Clean Atitlán, began on social media. It quickly picked up speed, focusing primarily on drawing the attention of area businesses, local municipal governments and the Authority for the Sustainable Management of the Basin of Lake Atitlán, a government body formed in 1996.

"The situation in the lake is very critical," said Marvin Romero, from the Scientific Committee of the Atitlán Basin and one of the founders of Atitlán Sano. "Because the contamination is reaching dangerous levels. The municipalities have the legal responsibility [to protect the lake]. But they have done little to resolve the contamination. They have little interest in investing in the environment. And when residents have demanded that the municipality do something, the municipal mayors have claimed there is no money."

The systemic failure to resolve the rampant contamination reflects a larger problem within Guatemala: the historic racism against Indigenous communities. This racism has guaranteed that Indigenous communities are repeatedly left to bear the environmental costs of industry. As a result, these Indigenous communities are often at the forefront of resistance efforts against environmental contamination.

An Explosion of Cyanobacteria

Women from the southern town of San Juan La Laguna -- who regularly wash their clothing in the lake -- were the first to formally denounce the municipalities. They traveled to the Human Rights Ombudsmen office in the nearby municipality of Santiago Atitlán to raise their concerns after observing a massive bloom of cyanobacteria, a potentially toxic bluish-green algae. Residents have observed regular blooms since Hurricane Stan, a tropical cyclone that hit in 2005. The blooms jeopardize the lives of the thousands of residents who rely on the lake for drinking water.

"According to our grandparents, in the 1940s or 1950s, it was a lake that was incredibly clean; the lake was a place where you could drink the water straight from the lake, and not have any problem," Francisco Quiacaín, a Tzutuj'il Maya and member of the Community Committee for Development of San Pedro La Laguna, told Truthout. "But today you can get sick from drinking the water. This is because of the increase in population."

On the other hand, some tropical lake experts have suggested that the cyanobacteria blooms are the result of the lake healing itself after severe tropical storm damage.

"After a major storm there is a lot [of] organic material and soil entering the lake. The cyanobacteria is a process of healing [for] the lake," said Juan Skinner, an environmentalist, expert on tropical lakes and a member of the Japan-based International Lake Environment Committee. "It multiplies and consumes those excess of nutrients, then dies and sinks to the bottom."

Skinner also suggests that the cyanobacteria blooms occur more frequently than communities have realized. He has found scientific articles from the early 1900s that reference the blooms.

Some local fishermen have confirmed that they had seen the cyanobacteria in the lake before the hurricane. "The cyanobacteria has always been in the lake," Nicolas Tumax, a representative of the Association of Fishermen of San Pedro La Laguna, told Truthout. "We saw it every day in the lake, but we have never seen it explode like it has since 2009."

Failures and Corruption in Resolving the Contamination

Pollution of Lake Atitlán has increased significantly in the last 10 years, and was exacerbated by the destruction of the wastewater treatment plant in the lakeside city of Panajachel during Hurricane Stan in 2005.

"Prior to 2005, the treatment plant in Panajachel functioned very well," Romero told Truthout. "The plant had the capacity to capture 82 percent of wastewater. But when Hurricane Stan hit, the plant was destroyed." As a result, raw sewage was dumped into the lake.

After the storm, the municipality of Panajachel, with encouragement from the Inter-American Development Bank, opted to build a new plant, rather than repair the very minor damage to the existing plant. The new \$90 million plant had a monthly operating cost of 150,000 quetzal (roughly \$20,000). Due to these high costs, the new plant never operated beyond 38 percent efficiency, while the original processing plant -- built with assistance from the European Community -- was designed to be low cost and low maintenance, and had been operating at 82 percent efficiency before the hurricane to clean the pollution from wastewater. The \$90 million replacement was shut down by another hurricane a year after its completion.

Little can be done to save the lake until officials address the amount of wastewater entering the lake every day. But potential solutions are prohibitively expensive, or are themselves wrapped up in corruption and special interests, or both.

"Because of corruption, the more they construct, the more they can steal," Skinner told Truthout.

A Growing Problem

The population around the lake basin has grown significantly since the 1950s and is augmented exponentially by the Atitlán-based tourist industry. The Guatemalan Ministry of Tourism, INGUAT, reports that 2,142,398 people visited Guatemala in 2014 alone, a majority of who visited Lake Atitlán while in the country. Each one of these visitors contributed -- directly or indirectly -- to the lake's contamination.

"Tourism brings impacts," Romero told Truthout. "It brings with it garbage that isn't managed in a good manner, and it generates residual waters, and sadly due to the lack of infrastructure, these waters end up in the lake."

According to Romero, in 2004, there were 600,000 cubic meters of wastewater entering the lake. In just 10 years, due to a combination of hurricane damage to the treatment plants and the expanding tourist industry, that number had grown to 1.4 million cubic meters per year.

Special Interests and Companies Propose Solutions to Contamination

To address the pollution problem, members of Amigos del Lago, a private nongovernmental organization made up of wealthy recreational homeowners along the lake, have collaborated with professors from California and the Authority for the Sustainable Management of the Basin of Lake Atitlán to introduce the multibillion-dollar Integral Management Plan. The plan centers on the construction of a super-collector designed by experts from California State University, Chico, and University of California, Davis, based on the waste disposal system at Lake Tahoe in the United States. The system would include a pipe network that would connect to each community, and then would transport wastewater outside the basin to be used for farmland irrigation on the southern coast. It would also generate electricity.

The plan has been presented as the only option to save the lake, and is also supported by large landowners on Guatemala's southern coast, who see the construction of the pipe system as a means of cheap fertilizer and water for their vast fields of African oil palm and sugar cane.

But experts fear that this mega-project will only lead to new problems. "They got the private sector to support the plan," Skinner told Truthout. "The risk is that they always will want more water for agriculture. So to solve one problem, you're creating a larger threat."

The production of export agriculture, such as African oil palm and sugar cane on Guatemala's southern coast, has ravaged the region. Other than the loss of land for production of staple crops, big agriculture has monopolized the access of water for small farming communities across the region. Furthermore, the production of monocultures has led to the destruction of forests and biodiversity.

In addition to potentially worsening the environmental problems caused by large-scale monoculture, the proposed project could decrease water availability for campesinos and small farmers. For the last 15 years, campesinos in the Madre Vieja river basin -- which neighbors the Atitlán basin and is in the path of the proposed pipeline -- have struggled against the palm firm HAME. The company has regularly diverted rivers for its crops, cutting off the campesinos' water supply. HAME is among the groups that stand to benefit directly from the regional wastewater collector that is proposed as part of the Integral Management Plan.

Skinner also warns of the potential of a situation like that in Bolivia, where a national emergency was declared in 2016 when [Lake Poopó](#) evaporated due to climate change. According to Skinner, the lake was also undermined by the diversion of rivers for agriculture and mining.

"The overextraction of water from the lake is the greatest threat," Skinner told Truthout. "It is this that has killed the most lakes around the world."

"[The lake authorities] have presented this [mega-collector] as the only solution. They are fooling everyone. They need to know you don't solve a problem by lying to people," he added.

As authorities debate how to clean up the lake, local fishermen and residents have taken it upon themselves to remove garbage from the lake. For example, the Association of Fishermen of San Pedro La Laguna, who have been heavily impacted by the contamination of the lake and who have received little support from the municipal government, have set aside the last Saturday of every month to clean the garbage, parasitic plants and cyanobacteria from the lake.

Guatemala's Wider Movement for Water Rights

The Atitlán debate is unfolding in the context of a national conversation about water rights. On April 11, hundreds of campesinos left the northern border town of Tecun Uman for an 11-day, 260-kilometer march to Guatemala City to demand that the Guatemalan government respect their right to water. Along the way, they were joined by thousands more. The march was organized to draw attention to the problems rural communities across the country face when their water supplies are contaminated or diverted by monoculture farming, mines and hydroelectric projects.

"I am here defending my right to water," Esperanza B'atz, a Kaqchikel woman from San Juan Sacatepéquez, told Truthout during the march. "Our rivers have been contaminated by the transnational companies."

According to Guatemala's minister of the environment and natural resources, Sydney Samuels, the ministry has identified 50 rivers that have been devastated by agribusiness on the southern coast alone. "There are countless industries and countless farms that divert rivers," Samuels told the press. "We thought we would find a few, but all farms of the south coast who are handling cane, oil palm, banana and other products are diverting rivers at will."

Residents of the Atitlán basin joined the protest in Guatemala City to demand an end to the super-collector project, the water pollution and plans to divert water out of the lake basin.

Contamination and Environmental Racism

Indigenous communities across Guatemala are regularly blamed for the contamination and environmental destruction that companies and the wealthy create.

"Most of the powerful people always blame the poor and the Indigenous for destroying nature, when it is actually the opposite," Skinner told Truthout. "They always blame the victim."

The department of Sololá, where Lake Atitlán is located, is among the poorest departments in Guatemala, with one of the largest Indigenous populations. According to the 2002 census, 75 percent of households in Sololá have "dry" latrines that don't produce sewage.

"Poverty is directly related to low consumption and production of pollutants," Skinner told Truthout. "People in poverty barely have money to eat, much less to buy soap or a toilet."

The contamination has hit the Indigenous communities of the lake hard. "The lake is very important to us," Francisco Quiacain told Truthout. "From the point of view of the cosmovision of our grandparents, the lake is our mother that gives us life. The lake for our ancestors is something that is very sacred. From the perspective of our Mayan culture, everything from nature is sacred, especially the lake. The lake is the energy that is transmitted to us to purify us spiritually and physically, and it is a resource that we have that allows us to survive."

The contamination also impacts Indigenous communities' traditional economies, especially fishing. "When I began to fish in these waters, there were a lot of fish," Nicolas Tumax told Truthout. "Before, we could catch 50 pounds of fish daily. But sadly, this has all stopped due to the contamination, especially in Panajachel. I don't understand why the authorities don't care."

Fishermen like Tumax have worked on the lake their entire lives. But as their catches continue to decrease, they are forced to seek other opportunities, such as coffee production.

"It pains me to see the lake this way," Tumax said.

Effectively, much of the cleanup work has been left to the Indigenous communities who live around the lake. As a result, many people accuse both local and national authorities of environmental racism.

"When they have big blooms of cyanobacteria, [the local municipalities] get the local women to go out and scoop it up off the lake," Padma Guidi, a long-term resident of Panajachel, told Truthout. "It is disgusting. It is just another example of the racism [in Guatemala]."

Furthermore, local authorities and experts have blamed the communities themselves for the contamination. Experts have blamed contamination on the women who wash their clothes in the lake, on the misuse of fertilizers by campesinos around the basin and on the poor disposal of garbage. While these factors have in some part contributed to the contamination, the effects of industrialized tourism and agriculture have been far more damaging, and are largely ignored by the government.

"If this lake was in [the mainly white department of] Zacapa, we would have a lot of money, it would be privatized and the government would pay much more attention," Skinner told Truthout. "But because the lake basin is in an Indigenous stronghold, it suffers from the same exclusion that all Indigenous lands suffer from within the country."

Skinner added, "This is a tourist mecca, an incredible natural wonder, it is still abandoned and excluded because the majority is Indigenous. Because this is a racist country."

<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/36185-contamination-of-sacred-lake-underscores-environmental-racism-in-guatemala>

May 29, 2016

Women Deliver: Young Women Climate Warriors Speak

By Stella Paul

Women News Network

(WNN) Copenhagen, Denmark, EUROPE: Seven years have gone by since then, but Majandra Rodrigues Acha of Lima still cannot forget the day she saw the true face of a woman's vulnerability. It was June 2009 and television channels across Peru were broadcasting the news of a riot that erupted between the country's indigenous people and the police. In the riot, known as the "Devil's Curve Battle" 32 indigenous environmental activists had died defending their land rights.

A particular image on TV screen haunts her even today: "It was an old woman, pointing at the dead people on the street and trying to express her sorrows. But since she spoke no Spanish, nobody seemed to understand her. There was such an air of helplessness around her!" she recalls.

The battle at the Devil's Curve was a direct conflict between the state police force and a large group of indigenous people who were protesting a government policy that made it easy to grab local's land for large corporate. Although the protest was peaceful, it turned violent when the police began to crackdown on the protesters. Soon, shots were fired, 32 indigenous people and injuring over a hundred. Nine policemen were also killed in the riot.

Seven years later, it is such women victims of such environmental conflicts who drive Acha – now a known activist in Lima, campaigning for women's right to a world freed of pollution, disasters and climate change. This week, Acha was in Copenhagen, at the 4th global conference of Women Deliver – world's largest conference on women and girls' health and well being. Alongside several others of her fellow activists, Acha was at the conference, drawing the crucial link between climate change and the well being of women around the globe.

According to Acha, climate change affects women and girls disproportionately. From drought and water shortage, land degradation, falling fish stock to decline in farm yield, women and girls are the worst sufferers of every climate-induced crisis. And since girls and women who traditionally have the least access to resources, they also have the thinnest defense against such crisis. "Do you know 70 percent of the people who died in the (2004) Asian Tsunami were women? Majandra reminds.

Acha's thoughts resonates well with Betty Barkha, a 25 year old woman from the Pacific island of Fiji. In the [Women Deliver](#) conference Barkha was heard in a number of sessions stressing on the vulnerability of people in the Pacific islands and appealing for strong climate action. "Islands in the pacific are disappearing fast. We are fighting for our survival," says Barkha who works to empower fellow grassroots women on climate resilience in the Pacific.

According to the 5th Assessment report by the Inter Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) , since 1993, sea level has been rising at a rate of around 3 mm yr⁻¹, significantly higher than the average during the previous half century.

This has been posing a direct threat to most of the small island nation, including Fiji which have already begun to lose parts of the land to the rising sea. But, even as they fight for their survival, young people of Fiji are also ensuring that the government climate policies are brought in consultation with the youths. In Fiji, the government is now legally mandated to consult youths and women before bringing in any laws or policies. This is because we intensively fought for them,” Barkha proudly informs.

The Women Deliver conference that concluded on Thursday, saw nearly five hundred other young people participating from Africa, Asia and the Americas. Many of them have also witness women in their communities living in extreme environmental, economic and health vulnerability.

Alicia Moncada, project manager for Indigenous Women Organisation in Venezuela is one of them. The young firebrand woman has impressed hundreds of participants here with her fiery narration of on women’s rights to a safe environment. “Women are not just objectives and goals to achieve. They are human beings denied of their rights of equality in land, health, resources and dignity. They also lack full control over their own body and their voice,” Moncada was heard saying.

The young women have shared the space with renowned leaders from various spheres. One of these leaders is Marie Claude Bibeau – the young Canadian minister of international development and francophone who appears to be in full agreement with the young women. According to Bibeau, climate change is now an established scientific fact. For example, one in every 3 girls get married before they turn 18 and a majority of them in societies affected by poverty, environmental conflict and disasters.

“You need strong political leadership to act on the facts and empower women, so they can go from being the victims to a real power of change” she observes.

One of the most urgent actions, feels Acha, is to gather gender desegregated data. According to her, despite the common knowledge that women suffer more from climate change, there is no way to get a complete picture of that. “You have to go to 15 places and read 15 different reports because there is no gender-specific data. And without that data, you cannot create a policy framework. So, we need investments into collecting that data because that is the key to draw real policies that will address women’s issues in the climate change scenario, says the young activist who also trains young people in her country in climate change advocacy.

The power and the crucial role that it plays in development has been stressed upon by Melinda Gates – co-chair and trustee of the Bill& Melinda Gates Foundation who has pledged 80 million dollars to close gender data gaps and accelerate progress for women and girls. “We simply don’t know enough about the barriers holding women and girls back, nor do we have sufficient information to track progress against the promises made to women and girls. We are committed to changing that by investing in better data, policies and accountability,” said Gates at the conference.

However, Barkha cautions the world to not think of women activists or their communities as only people eyeing money. "We are not asking for charity or the money from the rich. What we are asking is those who are responsible for global warming, must take the responsibility."

<https://womennewsnetwork.net/2016/05/29/women-deliver-young-women-climate-warriors-speak/>

May 31, 2016

Priest promotes care for earth

By Jennifer Burke
Catholic Courier

Pope Francis' concern for the poor and his promotion of mercy are well-known worldwide. Thus, early in the spring of 2015, many Vatican watchers thought the first encyclical penned solely by Pope Francis would focus on either mercy or care for the poor, according to Father Emmanuel Katongole, associate professor of world religions and the church at the University of Notre Dame.

In May 2015 Pope Francis released the encyclical, titled, "*Laudato Si'*: On Care For Our Common Home," and through this encyclical on the environment, the pope actually highlighted the connection between mercy and care for the poor, Father Katongole said.

"Mercy and tenderness and the poor go hand in hand," Father Katongole said during an April 8 lecture at Nazareth College.

Father Katongole was one of four speakers who gave presentations on the Pittsford campus as part of the school's annual Shannon Lecture Series on religious issues. On April 7 Father Katongole, who is from Uganda, led a discussion on tenderness, which he said is another word for mercy. The next day he spoke about the relationship between mercy, the environment and the poor in his lecture "Planting Tenderness: *Laudato Si'* and the Bethany Land Institute in Uganda."

"We aren't facing two separate crises, one environmental crisis and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. The two are deeply connected," he said.

The environment is affected by a host of complex political, economic, social and cultural issues, Father Katongole said. Pope Francis has paid attention to all these different issues and states in his encyclical that a wound caused by sin lies at the heart of the current environmental crisis.

"What is the wound, what is the sin? It's that we have forgotten that we are sinners, dust of the earth," Father Katongole said. "We have forgotten what it means to be creatures. We have distanced ourselves from the story of creation in which we were made as creatures."

Many times in today's society, people look down upon those whose hands are soiled from working with the dirt of the earth, Father Katongole said. The second chapter of Genesis, however, recounts the story of God forming man out of the dust of the earth, so Father Katongole said he likes to imagine God as a farmer whose hands are dirty after working with soil. Dirt and the earth are not something to be looked at with disdain, he added.

"Man and the ground are deeply, deeply connected. Man is created out of the earth ... and then of course, man takes care of the earth, tills it, protects it," Father Katongole said. "Our own vocation is connected to the earth. So what Francis is saying is we have forgotten our connectedness, we have forgotten our vocation, our call to ... nurture the earth, so that the earth can nurture you."

Father Katongole and two of his fellow priests hope to rectify that sin of forgetfulness and disdain for the earth through the Bethany Land Institute, which they founded in 2013. The Bethany Land Institute consists of 72 acres of land outside of Kampala in Uganda and is an educational initiative designed to address three interrelated challenges currently facing Africa's people: food insecurity, deforestation and land depletion. The founders of the Bethany Land Institute responded to these challenges -- as well as a fourth challenge caused by Africa's lack of highway rest stops -- through the three facets of the land institute.

The first, called Mary's Farm, is a demonstration and teaching farm where Ugandans from rural areas will learn small-scale, sustainable farming practices. These students, called Bethany Caretakers, will live on the farm for a year and also will learn the business skills they'll need to run a small farm and after finishing the program will return home to set up their own model farms and hopefully be leaders in their communities, Father Katongole said.

The second component of the institute is Lazarus' Trees, a portion of the institute's land that will be replanted as a forest. Father Katongole hopes to have 1 million trees planted by 2050, and the forest also will be home to an educational center that will promote ecological literacy and reforestation.

The third and final component is Martha's Market, which will include a roadside market, a retreat center and rest stops complete with restaurants and bathrooms. This business arm of the institute also will train students in principles of business and entrepreneurship and organize farm tours and festivals.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For more information on the Bethany Land Institute, visit www.bethanylandinstitute.com.

<http://www.catholiccourier.com/regional-life/monroe/features/priest-promotes-care-for-earth/>

May 31, 2016

Environmental challenges – a forceful argument for global citizenship

UN News Centre

While global citizenship means many things to many people, discussions at the sixty-sixth [United Nations/Non-Governmental Organizations Conference](#) maintained that cultivating empathy, a scientific appreciation for the natural world and responsibility towards future generations must be at the core of education for global citizenship.

During a roundtable discussion entitled ‘Global Citizens as Stewards of the Planet: Energy, Environment and Climate Change,’ Alexander Leicht, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) section chief of Education for Sustainable Development, saw challenges posed against the environment as a strong argument for global citizenship.

“Political agreements, technological solutions or fiscal incentives are not enough. We need a change of mindsets and actions that only education can bring about,” he said from the dais.

In today's era of global pollution, natural resource depletion and threats to biodiversity, societies are reassessing the value placed on the natural environment and exploring how formal and informal education, training and grassroots advocacy can strengthen humankind's capacities to exist on the planet.

Mr. Leicht underscored the importance of understanding the scientific facts of climate change and the economic processes that bring it about. He urged all to "participate in societal and political processes that address climate change, and take steps in the local environment to mitigate it.”

While global education has, for years, been taught in schools under the social sciences, the voices and teachings of indigenous cultures are helping to identify the values and skill sets necessary for sustainable production and consumption to protect all life.

According to Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, Coordinator of the Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad, indigenous peoples can impart vital knowledge on protecting the environment. She considered [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 13](#), on taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, as the most important of the 17 [SDGs](#), because it serves as the basis for all the others.

“Indigenous peoples have used their knowledge to keep their communities healthy. They have been properly managing natural resources for centuries with ideologies that have been developed over generations,” Ms. Ibrahim pointed out.

She explained that the rules defined by indigenous populations can help. “People must respect Mother Nature first. They must respect the water, respect the trees, respect the animals.”

Indigenous teachings affirm reverence for all relations, the kinship of all life.

“Our elders and we have been observing changes in the planet for a long time – sadly of our own making. We noticed that the glaciers in the Andes were disappearing and that animals in the

north were moving to the south because of the changing weather,” said Leonzo Barreno, a Guatemalan Mayan, who moderated the discussion.

Mr. Barreno expressed gratitude that the UN is leading the combat against climate change.

“Now people around the world can see nature as part of themselves. When we indigenous used to say 'Mother Earth' or 'Father Sun' people would laugh, but for us it was real. This is why so many indigenous people around the world would defend the land with their lives. There was no disconnection between us and the earth, between us and the animals, between us and the lakes and the rivers.”

Youth Ambassador for Native Children's Survival Ta'Kaiya Blaney shared a similar perspective.

“Having a deep connection of belonging and a kinship with both each other and the land is a founding principle of indigenous ideology,” she said. “This concept is severely lacking in our current society and there are many untold indigenous stories that are crucial in changing the narrative, which can change the mainstream perspective of the truth of this world.”

Ms. Blaney also asserted that indigenous peoples had a valuable part to play in combating climate change, since the majority of corporate industrial operations – most likely to contribute to climate change – were on indigenous territory.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=54091#.V0-rLOT6WCQ>

Spring 2016

Creation Justice Ministries Newsletter

<http://www.creationjustice.org/capsules.html>

June 1, 2016

“The Importance of Indigenous Knowledge in Curbing the Loss of Language and Biodiversity”

By Benjamin T. Wilder, Carolyn O'Meara, Laurie Monti, and Gary Paul Nabhan

BioScience 66 (6): 499-509.

Biodiversity inventory, monitoring, and species-recovery efforts can be advanced by a dynamic collaboration of Western, citizen, and ethnoscience. Indigenous and local traditional knowledge of place-based biodiversity is perhaps the oldest scientific tradition on earth. We illustrate how an all taxa biodiversity inventory network of projects in collaboration with the Comcaac (Seri people) in northwestern Mexico is advancing not only biosystematics but also species recovery,

habitat restoration, language conservation and maintenance, and the maintenance of traditional livelihoods. We encourage scientists to establish collaborations with indigenous and other place-based communities to better understand the wealth of knowledge held in local categorization systems. It is essential to not merely seek out one-to-one correspondences between Western and indigenous knowledge but also to recognize and respect the creative tensions among these different knowledge systems, because this is where the most profound insights and fruitful collaborations emerge.

<http://bioscience.oxfordjournals.org/content/66/6/499.full>

June 1, 2016

Pope thanks Jains for commitment to care for environment

Independent Catholic News

Pope Francis today thanked the Jain community for its commitment to protect "our sister Earth." The Pope's words came as he received members of the Institute of Jainology in private audience in the Vatican before leading the weekly General Audience in St Peter's Square.

Expressing his joy for the encounter, Pope Francis welcomed the Jains saying that "this encounter nurtures our responsibility to care for creation", and calling creation a "gift that we have all received" he said "creation is God's mirror, the mirror of the Creator, the mirror of nature, and it is our mirror too."

"We all love mother Earth, because she is the one who has given us life and safeguards us; I would also call her sister Earth, who accompanies us during the journey of our existence. Our duty is to take care of her just as we would take care of a mother or of a sister, with responsibility, with tenderness and with peace" he said.

And he thanked the Jains for what they do to protect and care for the earth and said "we remain united within this ideal ... in the awareness that healing and caring for the Earth is healing and caring for the whole of humanity".

Jainism is an ancient religion that originated in India. The Institute of Jainology was established in 1983 and it was subsequently registered as a Charitable Trust. Compassion and non-violence towards all living beings are the fundamental principles of Jain philosophy. Its mission is to propagate Jainism and its values through art, culture and education.

<http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=30197>

June 2016

Carbon Rangers/Eozoic Times Newsletter

Vol. 9 No. 5

<http://us1.campaign-archive2.com/?u=5dd06f3cbb86536df56de4a9d&id=a08f9f9596&e=3747af2f7e>

June 2016

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute Newsletter

<http://us6.campaign-archive1.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=ea938c797f&e=a758405790>

June 2016

Eco-Congregation Scotland Newsletter

<http://us9.campaign-archive1.com/?u=a37b4ff760ffcc7fd1c3611b4&id=331908a7ea&e=709fe41ec4>

June 2016

Voices for Earth Justice Newsletter

<http://us11.campaign-archive2.com/?u=9eb850d03ad7bc11a3bb09576&id=c052086f58&e=ac77c0dfea>

June 2016

Field & Table Newsletter

Wake Forest University School of Divinity

<http://us10.campaign-archive2.com/?u=3127f74a14019a66fd2af07fe&id=642048a14a&e=d51638b6ea>

June 2, 2016

Saints oppose move to sell Ganga jal online

Warn Modi govt to roll back the decision or face agitation

The Tribune

Haridwar - The saint community has expressed resentment over the Union Government's move to sell holy Ganga jal through post office bookings. They have warned of resorting to intense agitation.

Many renowned saints have demanded that the government should roll back its decision, terming it an act that hurt religious sentiments of saints and millions of devotees who regard the holy Ganga jal as pious.

The governing body of the Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad has expressed displeasure over the government's move.

Spokesperson for the Akhada Parishad Baba Hatyogi said people worship the Ganga and its water was used in religious rituals. It was sacred, not a commodity to earn revenues or be put on sale. If Ganga jal was sold, it would have serious ramifications, he said.

Bhooma Peethadeeshwar Swami Achutyanand Maharaj termed the Ganga as the identity of the country and questioned the idea of selling the holy water.

“On the one hand, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Ganga Rejuvenation Minister Uma Bharati spoke highly of the Namami Gange scheme to clean the Ganga and its sub-tributaries, simultaneously, they are trying to sell the water of the pious river,” he said.

Jai Ram Ashram spiritual guru Brhamaswarup Brahmchari called the move another proof of using religion and related aspects to garner power. He said first the BJP ignited people's sentiments over the construction of Shri Ram Temple in Ayodhya, which it seemed to have put on hold to ensure that it remained in power. Now, it was trying to commercialise Ganga jal, which was no ordinary water but was regarded as having properties of nectar.

Warning the Union Government of the fallout of selling Ganga Jal, Hari Har Ashram head Mahamandaleshwar Swami Harichetnanad Maharaj said the holy Ganga was one of 'panchamrit', in which nectar fell during the war between deities and demon. Selling its pious water would only bring curse, he stated.

Radha Krishan Dham spiritual head and former Haridwar municipal chairperson Satpal Brahmchari said the Ganga is a national river but still the BJP-led Union Government was mulling selling its water.

The Ganga Sabha, which manages the affairs of the sanctum sanctorum of Brahma Kund, Har-ki-Pauri, has also opposed the move.

Terming it unethical, Ganga Sabha president Purushottam Sharma Gandhivadi said Ganga jal was worshipped as the water form of deity Ganga.

“People go to temples for worshipping, so is the case with the Ganga river, where devotees arrive to take a holy dip and fetch Ganga jal. Selling it through post offices or online does not augur well for the religious faith of the people. The Ganga is regarded as a living deity, how can we think of selling it or purchasing it,” Gandhivadi said.

Swami Hansdevacharya has also warned the Union Government that if it went forward with the online sale idea, saying that the saint community and religious organisations would not allow this to happen.

Congress Mahangar unit president Anshul Shrikunj has also opposed the Ganga jal sale scheme. It was a disrespect to Mother Ganga, who was regarded as a deity having immense spiritual, medicinal properties and a river providing salvation, he added.

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/uttarakhand/saints-oppose-move-to-sell-ganga-jal-online/245842.html>

June 3, 2016

Eco-halal becomes fashion trend

By Vestnik Kavkaza
Vestnik Kavkaza

*Today, Moscow hosted the opening of the 7th Moscow International Exhibition Halal Expo 2016. This year, the exhibition presented not only new platforms and new participants, but also new trends. One of them is eco-halal. The director of the Environmental Certification Center Green Standards, **Rashid Ismailov**, spoke about what there is it at the exhibition opening.*

"At the moment, the topic of environmental protection and environmental management is becoming extremely relevant and socially, economically and politically important both in Russia and around the world. Today, the issues of climate change, natural resources scarcity, primarily limitation of access to potable water, waste management, development of green technologies and green energy are on the agenda of the leaders of states not only in the Islamic world," Ismailov stated.

Speaking about the connection between ecology and Islam, Rashid Ismailov said that "considering their harmonious and natural interosculation, we can make a conclusion about the existence of common ideological approaches between ecology and Islam in the formation of the life values of a person and ensuring his vital activity. A 'green', environmentally motivated, environmentally responsible approach to life, which is also based on green standards, it is, in fact, a lifestyle by the laws of eco-halal. A clean house, clean surrounding area, thriftiness in

relation to the gifts of nature, food naturalness, naturalness and purity of thoughts – those are the rules of life of every Muslim."

Rashid Ismailov emphasized the social doctrine of Russian Muslims, published by the Council of Muftis of Russia: "It's chapter 'Care for nature and animal world' specifically highlights that 'man and nature are great and sacred creations of the Creator. Not only your own house must be clean, but also the house of Allah, which is any piece of land. We must not forget to thank the Almighty for the nature, which our Creator generously bestowed upon humanity.' Thus, Islam directly demands a caring and respectful attitude towards nature from every Muslim."

In addition, Ismailov said that, by presidential decree, 2017 will be the Year of the Environment in Russia: "With this in mind, we have prepared a number of proposals on the development of environmental direction in the activities of the Council of Muftis of Russia and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia. It includes issues of international cooperation in environmental protection, the environmental enlightenment of Muslims, especially the younger generation, for whom the concept of eco-halal should become a modern and fashionable trend."

However, Rashid Ismailov complained that right now an environmentally responsible approach in business has a huge, but underrated importance: "It includes increasing competitiveness, supporting the government, consumer choice in favor of environmentally friendly products, goods and services, which increases all over the world. The principle of eco-halal may manifest itself in various industries. In the energy sector it is the development of renewable natural energy sources; in construction it is safe housing; in agriculture it is land that is free from chemicals; in aquaculture it is thriftiness; in the meat industry it is ecologically natural products; in the medical industry it is adherence to ethical standards. This list can be endless. Even in the fashion industry the eco-approach is gaining momentum today. Naturalness in fabrics and production, refusal to use animal fur and chemicals are becoming fashionable and popular. Today, all of these industries have great potential for investments both in Russia and in other countries of the Middle East and Asia regions for so-called "green" financing, which can surely be described as eco-halal investments."

<http://vestnikkavkaza.net/articles/Eco-halal-becomes-fashion-trend.html>

June 5, 2016

Venezuelan Social Movements Converge on Supreme Court, Demand Injunction Against Mining Arc

By Lucas Koerner
Venezuela Analysis

Caracas – Activists from grassroots organizations protested outside the Venezuelan Supreme Court Tuesday to demand that the body put a halt to a controversial mega-mining project spearheaded by the Maduro government.

The demonstration was organized by the Platform for the Nullity of the Mining Arc, an alliance of diverse movements and leading public intellectuals that emerged in response to a law authorizing open-pit mining in 12 percent of the nation's territory.

In February, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro used emergency economic decree powers granted by the Supreme Court to declare nearly 112 square kilometers of the mineral-rich eastern Amazonian state of Bolivar a "strategic development zone", which will be opened to as many as 150 national and transnational firms for the extraction of [gold](#), iron, [diamonds](#), and [coltan](#).

The government has defended the initiative as a necessary step towards a post-oil productive economy amid a severe economic crisis triggered by the collapse of global crude prices, the principal source of Venezuela's foreign currency earnings.

Nonetheless, the project has sparked vocal opposition from prominent leftist academics and former high officials under late President Hugo Chávez, including ex-Environment Minister Ana Elisa Osorio, internationally-renowned sociologist Edgardo Lander, Major General Cliver Alcalá, former Minister of Education and Electricity Hector Navarro, Indigenous University of Tauca Rector Esteban Emilio Mosonyi, ex-Commerce Minister Gustavo Marquez, and former 1999 constitutional assembly member Freddy Gutierrez.

Also raising their voices in outrage over the decree are a plethora of indigenous, environmental, eco-feminist, and socialist collectives, who rallied together with the ex-officials outside the Supreme Court in Caracas in order to deliver a formal nullity plea to the body requesting an injunction against the mining project on constitutional grounds.

Constitutional violations

"The indigenous peoples of the region are the principal victims because they haven't been previously consulted and they are the ones who will see all of the miserable consequences of mining from the private security firms to the prostitution, human trafficking, drugs," explains Max Gomez, who is a researcher at the Venezuelan Institute of Scientific Investigation and member of the eco-feminist collective La Danta Las Canta.

Under Venezuela's 1999 Constitution, indigenous peoples exercise inalienable collective property rights over their ancestral lands and must be consulted prior to any plan to extract natural resources from their territory.

Last month, the indigenous Ye'kwana, Sanema, and Pemon peoples of the Orinoco River basin issued a public [statement](#) manifesting their unequivocal rejection of the Mining Arc, which they condemned as a "violation of our legitimate right to health, our own safeguarded territory and quality of life."

The Orinoco Mining Arc may also violate the Bolivarian Constitution's environmental protections, which mandate an ecological and sociocultural impact study before the approval of any development project, adds Gomez.

“And then there’s the water crisis, how is it possible that there are barrios in Caracas that don’t have steady access to water, yet these corporations are allowed to utilize massive quantities of water for mining?” he stated.

Facing the worst [drought](#) in 47 years, the Venezuelan government has implemented strict water and electricity [rationing](#) in order to avoid further decline in water levels at the El Guri hydroelectric dam, the source of 70% of the nation’s power supply.

According to experts, open-pit gold mining– which utilizes between 450 and 1060 liters of water per gram of gold extracted– will likely further exacerbate water and electricity scarcities across the country.

Others expressed concerns over threats to labor and civil rights.

“As a special economic zone– which by definition are designed to circumvent the legal framework of a country– the Orinoco Arc can ‘flexibilize’ labor protections under the Organic Work Law and even contains certain clauses that encroach on the right to protest,” said Andrea Pacheco of the Trotskyist organization Marea Socialista.

In particular, she pointed to article 25 of the law which states that “no particular interest of unions, guilds, or other associations will prevail over the general interest of the completion of the objective contained in the present decree” and authorizes security forces to take action against those engaged in “the total or partial obstruction of activities”.

An inflection point

For some at Tuesday’s rally, the Orinoco Mining Arc evidences a widening fissure between social movements and the socialist administration of President Nicolas Maduro.

“We believe that this [the Mining Arc] is an inflection point for the project of the current government, and we at Marea Socialista argue that neither the government nor the opposition have the solutions for the major problems facing the country,” asserts Pacheco.

Last year, [Marea Socialista](#) officially broke with the ruling United Socialist Party (PSUV) and launched their own candidates in December parliamentary elections, citing high level corruption.

Others, however, continue to back the leftist government while stressing the need to step up pressure from below.

“I’m not a revolutionary to say ‘yes’ to the government, I’m a revolutionary to be critical of what the government is doing wrong,” affirmed Intifada Genesis Blanco, 25, who is a student at Misión Sucre and member of the Hugo Chávez Patriotic Front.

Amid the increasingly tense standoff between the beleaguered Chavista administration and the right-wing opposition-controlled parliament, social movements have been under pressure to close ranks behind Maduro.

“Often they brand us counter-revolutionaries,” Blanco continued. “But it would be more counter-revolutionary to watch and remain silent as the government make errors, harms the people, loses its horizon.”

Indigenous struggles and international law

Indigenous anti-mining movements have, in particular, been stigmatized for their opposition to extractivist projects pushed by state governments and the national executive.

Indigenous rights and environmental activist Lusbi Portillo has been accused by PSUV Vice-President Diosdado Cabello of conspiring against the leftist government for his prominent role in the campaign to seek justice for the assassinated Yukpa indigenous leader [Sabino Romero](#).

“When we began this struggle in 1985, the governments of the Fourth Republic accused me of being part of Sendero Luminoso and when Chavismo came to power, I instantly stopped being considered a guerrilla to become an agent of the CIA,” the president of the environmentalist organization Homo Et Natura Society stated.

For Portillo, the only hope of stopping the Mining Arc is militant grassroots action. He says it's unlikely that the Supreme Court will strike down the executive decree.

“Given the pressure from the government and from the mining companies, the Supreme Court is going to rule in favor of the Mining Arc. Our only salvation is in the streets, occupying Miraflores [presidential palace], occupying the Vice-Presidency, the ministries of mines and indigenous affairs, the embassies, we have to exert political pressure.”

Last year, Homo et Natura and other Zulia and Caracas-based indigenous and environmental organizations took part in a [campaign](#) against a government decree expanding coal mining in the Perija Mountains, which was [successful](#) in negotiating a scaling down of the project.

In addition to street pressure, some Venezuelan indigenous activists have called for fighting the Mining Arc in international legal bodies such as the United Nations and the Organization of American States.

“It's not anti-nationalist to defend the rights of indigenous peoples in international institutions if White criollo law fails to deliver justice,” declared Juan Carlos de la Rosa of the Zulia-based indigenous Wayuu collective Wainjirawa, which translates to “the heart of what we do”.

For De la Rosa, there is, however, no contradiction between continuing to struggle for revolutionary change in Venezuela and appealing to international legal tribunals.

“We are leftists if nothing else, but we are people loyal to the struggle for the land that we sow and harvest.”

At the conclusion of the demonstration, former Environment Minister Ana Elisa Osorio announced that the delegation of ex-officials had successfully held a meeting with the President of the Supreme Court, who agreed to hear the case.

The high court will study the nullity request and present a ruling in the coming months.

<http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/12011>

June 5, 2016

Protecting those who work to defend the environment is a human rights issue

On World Environment Day, we urge governments to address the growing threat to activists and indigenous people by bringing those who harm them to justice

By John H Knox, Michel Forst and Victoria Tauli-Corpuz
The Guardian

The enjoyment of a vast range of human rights, including rights to life, health, food, water, and housing, depend on a healthy and sustainable environment. Today, on World Environment Day, let us remember that those who work to protect the environment are not only environmentalists – they are human rights defenders. And they are increasingly at risk.

As the international demand grows for the exploitation of natural resources in developing countries, so the threats to environmental defenders increase. Those who oppose development projects are often treated as enemies of the state and, all too often, they are targeted for assassination.

Recent cases include the assassinations of [Berta Cáceres](#), a [leader of the Lenca indigenous people in Honduras](#), and [Sikhosiphi “Bazooka” Rhadebe](#), a community leader in Xolobeni in South Africa. For years, both received death threats for opposing huge projects – dams in Honduras and a titanium mine in South Africa – that would displace their people.

Such murders happen all the time. The deaths of Cáceres and Rhadebe are unusual only in that they received international attention. Mostly when environmentalists are murdered, their deaths go unnoticed beyond their communities. For example, [a photographic exhibition in Geneva](#) drew attention last month to the murders of 60 environmentalists over the past two decades in just one country, Thailand. Most had received little or no attention in the international press.

The human rights organisation [Front Line Defenders reports](#) that, of the 156 human rights defenders killed in 2015, the largest single group, 45% of the total, were those defending environmental, land, or indigenous rights. Another organisation, [Global Witness](#), has found that an average of two environmental and land rights activists are being killed weekly – and the numbers are getting worse.

The situation is particularly grave in Latin America and south-east Asia, but it affects every region of the world. It is truly a global crisis.

Last year, the international community reached consensus on new [sustainable development goals](#) as a roadmap to a more sustainable, prosperous and equitable future. But these goals cannot be met if those on the frontline of sustainable development are not protected.

It is ironic that environmental rights defenders are often branded “anti-development” when, by working to make development truly sustainable, they are actually more pro-development than the corporations and governments that oppose them.

The brave women and men who risk their lives to protect the environment and rights of others should be lauded as heroes. Instead, the authorities typically fail to protect them, to investigate their deaths, or to punish those responsible.

This March, the UN human rights council adopted a landmark [resolution requiring states to ensure the rights and safety of human rights defenders](#) working towards the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights.

That was a good initial step, but governments must do far more. They have obligations under human rights law to protect environmentalists’ rights of expression and association by responding rapidly and effectively to threats, promptly investigating acts of harassment and violence from all parties including business and non-state actors, protecting the lives of those at risk, and bringing those responsible to justice.

Environmental rights defenders are often branded ‘anti-development’ but they're working to make development sustainable

States must also adopt and implement mechanisms that allow defenders to communicate their grievances, claim responsibilities, and obtain effective redress for violations, without fear of intimidation.

They must take additional steps to safeguard the rights of members of marginalised and vulnerable communities, especially indigenous peoples, whose cultures, identities and livelihoods often depend on the environment and whose lives are particularly susceptible to environmental harm, placing them on the frontline of conflict.

Moreover, international financial institutions should explicitly tie their continuing support for development projects to the implementation of safeguards for human rights, including rights of freedom of expression and association. Multinational businesses should make clear in actions as well as words that they will not undertake projects in countries where these basic protections are not accorded. If they fail to keep their commitments, they should be penalised in their home countries and in the marketplace.

Protecting environmental defenders is not just the right thing to do. It is also the only way to ensure sustainable development.

Two decades ago, [Ken Saro-Wiwa](#) was hanged for peaceful protests against oil pollution in his native Ogoniland, in Nigeria. The Niger delta has since become [one of the most polluted environments in the world](#). This week, the [Nigerian government and the UN announced](#) that clean-up of this blighted region will finally commence, at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars, and in a timeframe that may span a quarter of a century.

If we continue to fail to protect those fighting to protect the environment, what new disasters will we face in another 20 years?

• *John H Knox is the special rapporteur on human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Michel Forst is the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz is the special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples*

<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/jun/05/world-environment-day-protecting-activists-human-rights-issue>

June 6, 2016

Global citizenship and education key to achieve UN Sustainable Development Goals, sisters say

By Chris Herlinger
Global Sisters Report

Women religious who work at the United Nations and attended a recent United Nations conference in South Korea on education and global citizenship say the U.N.'s affirmation of human rights-based education is an important step in efforts to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development.

"Global citizenship is needed in so many ways," Sr. Eileen Reilly, director of the School Sisters of Notre Dame U.N. office, said following the U.N.'s 66th annual conference for non-governmental organizations, held May 30-June 1 in Gyeongju, South Korea.

"So much of the news of the news in the world today revolves around a sense of nationalism, of 'protecting my turf,' of 'my country' and 'my values,' Reilly told *GSR* upon returning to the U.S. from the Korean conference, which focused on the theme of "Education for Global Citizenship: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Together."

Achieving the [U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals](#) — 17 global goals agreed to by U.N. member states to reduce poverty and promote a sustainable environment through the year 2030 — will require more efforts to encourage global cooperation, Reilly said. "Education is crucial to the whole thing," she said.

The affirmation of education is exactly what participants at the event affirmed in an action plan at the end of the three-day conference. "Education is a human right, essential to well-being and

dignity, and is key to achieving Agenda 2030," participants said, citing the formal name of the U.N.'s goals through the year 2030.

To do this, an "ethos of global citizenship is required." Goal Number Four, ensuring "inclusive and equitable quality education" and promoting "lifelong opportunities for all" remains a guiding principle, they said.

The statement also affirmed that education for global citizenship "is an essential strategy to address global challenges as well as to promote gender equality, facilitate the eradication of poverty and hunger, build skills, eliminate corruption, and prevent violence, including violent extremism."

Such education can also promote efforts to promote "sustainable production and consumption" and mitigate "climate change and its effects."

In further explaining what global citizenship means, Reilly said "in any news cycle our attention is grabbed by items with which we have a connection. True global citizens have a connection with all of it. I share citizenship with the refugee who died fleeing Syria. I share citizenship with those whose land and homes are destroyed by fracking."

Sr. Winifred Doherty, the U.N. representative of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, told *GSR* that the conference's locale in South Korea had special significance, with a notable focus "on South Korea's progress of [rising from] poverty in the post-war era through the promotion of education. Korea wants to share this experience with other countries experiencing poverty," she said. "Education is the key."

Reilly said she was struck by the same emphasis, noting that U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, a Korean, spoke personally of his education following the Korean War. Reilly said Ban had been educated "under a tree by U.N. aid workers who came to Korea after the schools had been destroyed."

Without the education he received from the UNICEF, the U.N.'s education fund for children, Ban said he would never have become the global body's secretary general.

Another participant at the conference, Sr. Teresa Kotturan, the U.N. representative of the Sisters of Charity Foundation, said in an interview prior to the event that the importance of such conferences should not be underestimated. They become part of an ongoing dialogue about the role of education in promoting a more just and sustainable world, she said.

The idea of global citizenship, she added, is about communities and individuals affirming the idea that fighting poverty and promoting human rights, peace and a sustainable environmental future should be the concern of all.

That is a "tall order" and an ambitious agenda, Kotturan acknowledged. But she said the precepts are basic and understandable. Asked to describe the ethos of global education, Kotturan said it would be, "I care about the human rights of everyone, and ensure that no one is left behind."

"If I have to stand up for you, I have to have a feeling that you are my sister or brother," she said. "We can't be building walls anymore."

An awareness of human rights of others, even in other countries, has to be added "to civic learning."

In a presentation at the conference, Kotturan said that education was the undergirding foundation for all of the U.N.s Sustainable Development Goals. "Education for global citizenship will be the key to the future of sustainable development," she said.

To do that involves advancing a "social justice approach" that analyzes "how social, economic and political forces in society produce patterns of injustice, and to better understand and address the root causes and change structures.

Catholic sisters have a role to play in this, Kotturan said, both with their long tradition of teaching as a vocation and their strong commitment to social justice.

In a presentation she made for members of the Vincentian Family in Seoul, South Korea, about global citizenship and the work of the United Nations*, Kotturan cited Pope Francis' environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, in affirming the need for education that promotes global citizenship.

"Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life," the encyclical says, adding, "Our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature."

More than 2,000 attended the conference, and included representation from religious congregations who have non-governmental organization status with the U.N., educators, activists, business representatives, local officials, U.N. personnel and others.

<http://globalsistersreport.org/news/global-citizenship-and-education-key-achieve-un-sustainable-development-goals-sisters-say-40226>

June 6, 2016

International innovators to share green savvy at UNT rural sustainability conference

By Julie Ryan
Green Source DFW

North Texans seeking sustainable solutions for a growing demand for water and energy in the region can learn from world experts when the University of North Texas hosts an international conference unlike any seen hereabouts this week.

It's UNT's [first international conference on rural sustainability](#), hosted by the departments of Anthropology and Philosophy & Religion.

On June 10-11, sustainable agriculturists, ecopreneurs and community organizers from rural communities around the world will share their work on the front lines of agricultural innovation – amid climate disruption and globalization.

“In many parts of the world, villagers are departing from ecologically degraded rural environments for overcrowded urban centers,” says Prof. Pankaj Jain, conference co-organizer. “They leave rural ecosystems vulnerable to further exploitation and degradation.”

Local NGOs, he says, are addressing these conditions, enabling villagers to gain a sustainable income from rural ecosystems. Making rural areas more productive, the people are able to remain on their lands and maintain them, via development strategies that protect the local ecosystems.

Practitioners of just such restorative, sustainable development will take center stage at the conference.

Innovators, land stewards and community organizers from nine nations in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East will present current projects. Some of these apply traditional, sustainable agriculture technologies to save subsistence-farming villages that had been further impoverished by large-scale, Western-style development projects, such as hydro-electric dams and monoculture lumber plantations that destroy fragile forest ecosystems. Their efforts are remediating damaged land, growing food crops adapted to the locale, restoring ecosystems and establishing sustainable green economies.

What makes this conference relevant to North Texas city-dwellers?

“Oddly enough, some things they face are not so different from our challenges,” says Keith Brown, a research assistant in Philosophy & Religion working on the event. “Given the highly unsustainable nature of DFW, how can we bring sustainability into our lives? We want to see how we can apply the methods these people use... Their successes are inspiring people on the outskirts of the cities near them, with how they garden, how they get their water supply and develop wind power and other alternative energy sources.”

The UNT forum intends to foster community-based responses to major global, cultural and environmental pressures, in Dr. Jain's vision. One means will be to “focus on non-Western ways of thinking, doing and acting” in addressing the repercussions of globalization on rural regions.

Panels of speakers from Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mexico, Nigeria, Tunisia and elsewhere will address natural resources, eco-entrepreneurship, education, preservation and community engagement. Women's movements for sustainable communities are represented. A Guatemalan group working with Agronomists and Veterinarians without Borders will participate. (See links below for presenters.)

One of India's highest honorees keynotes Friday's events: Anil Prakash Joshi, founder and director of HESCO, the Himalayan Environmental Studies and Conservation Organization, whose mission is to develop sustainable agriculture technologies. HESCO reports it has provided villages with "water mills, composting pits, plant-based medication, herbal pesticides and rainwater harvesting techniques... helped more than 10,000 villages develop beekeeping and fruit... and grain processing as local enterprises," as well as use local, renewable resources to manufacture furniture and other products.

Dr. Joshi, a previous colleague of Dr. Jain and Philosophy & Religion professor Dr. George James, sparked the conference when he shared with Jain his desire for a symposium that would go beyond the prevalent focus on urban sustainability at United Nations-sponsored conferences. The two UNT scholars responded, successfully landing foundation grants "to bring people all over the world with similar experiences but different techniques in rural areas, to work with urban areas," recounts Brown. UNT agreed to host the event, and Dr. Alicia Re Cruz, a UNT anthropologist, joined the effort. (Dr. Jain is associate professor in both Anthropology and Philosophy & Religion.)

The conference is also a chance to meet "the first tree-huggers" of India, in the person of legendary Indian activist [Panduranga Hegde](#). Hegde brings the determined movement of Appiko (to hug) to Dallas. Appiko carries on a 25-plus year tradition begun in the Himalayan state of Uttarkhand, of village resistance to forest destruction by hugging trees to save them from being felled by the State. (Outlook India, 6 October 2012). The Appiko movement began to fight monoculture crop-growing in the Western Ghats mountains of South India, and is now known as the "first ever people's green movement in South India to save our natural resources... A model of sustainable development," according to Hegde. An Indian "tree-hugger" community recently exhibited at Earth Day Texas.

One hundred or more attendees are expected at the UNT conference. The general public is welcome, and admission is free.

It's worth noting that this event comes at a time when indigenous leaders around the world are in the news, questioning corporate-supported U.S. and European development projects in their communities. Their resistance has met with armed suppression in southern Mexico, Brazil, Honduras and elsewhere.

But who knows what positive synergy will spark, when eco-activists from around the world come together with North Texas beekeepers, urban gardeners and solar-power engineers?

[Rural Sustainability Workshop](#)

When: June 10-11, 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Where: University of North Texas, Environmental Education, Science and Technology Building, 1704 W. Mulberry St., Denton, TX 76201

Contact: Keith Brown at 940-206-9354 or Keith.Brown@unt.edu.

[Presenters](#)

[Register](#)

[More info](#)

<http://www.greensourcedfw.org/articles/international-innovators-share-green-savvy-unt-rural-sustainability-conference>

June 8, 2016

GreenFaith Newsletter

<https://www.z2systems.com/np/clients/greenfaith/viewOnlineEmail.jsp?emailId=54cbdf1e828f780747d288b2eedc68ee5m032054354c>

June 9, 2016

How Pope Francis inspired a Thailand parish to plant 800 trees

Inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical on caring for creation, and concerned by environmental threats around them, Catholic parishioners in Thailand are planting hundreds of new trees.

Herald Malaysia Online

BANGKOK: Inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical on caring for creation, and concerned by environmental threats around them, Catholic parishioners in Thailand are planting hundreds of new trees.

“Pope Francis has enlightened us and appealed to us in his encyclical ‘Laudato Si’ for collective action and bold cultural revolution to tackle environmental issues,” said Father Daniel Khuan Thinwan.

“As pastors it’s our responsibility to take these teachings to the peripheries so that the faithful can find their true meaning in practice,” he said.

The priest is from Mount Carmel Church in Paphanawan in the Diocese of Thare and Nonseng in the far northeastern region of Thailand. The parish community’s reforestation program planted 800 saplings to celebrate World Environment Day, held on June 5.

“Pope Francis has touched the key points of the environment, which has been a universal reality and especially in the local area a challenge,” Fr. Daniel said. “The question is: how to put these teachings into reality?”

The Thai priest said that environmental and climate change discussions had been mainly confined to scientists, activists, universities, and others engaged in politics and economics. Pope Francis has opened a new dimension on the issues and brought a broader perspective, engaging the question with the eyes of spirituality and faith, he added.

For the reforestation program, families helped grow plant saplings and brought them to the church. After Sunday Mass, young and old began digging and planting the saplings to help replenish the forest and bring greener plant life to the hills. The monsoon season is gradually picking up its pace, and the rains will naturally help the plants to grow.

The trees will help contain air pollution, prevent soil erosion and maintain soil fertility. They will also give new life to wild flora and shelter to animals and birds. The trees will help bring rain and maintain temperature and ground water level in the area.

Fr. Daniel said the effort is “a small step which will help to make an impact on climate change for a better world.”

“We need to tackle these issues and challenges before it too late to save our planet, our ‘common home’.”

The priest said that the parish catechesis on “Laudato Si” motivated the community. There are also environmental problems in the region, including acute water scarcity.

Thailand is suffering its worst drought in the last 20 years. The water level in the river basins, dams and reservoirs is very low, at 10 percent. This has adversely affected the farmers in many regions.

In addition to water scarcity and deforestation, the environmental issues facing the country include pollution and decline in wildlife population.

The government has adopted several measures to combat the drought-plagued areas. It has also forged a global alliance with other countries to reduce carbon emissions and energy consumption. Thailand has ranked in the top 30 carbon dioxide emitters in the world and is a significant carbon emitter in in the East Asia and Pacific region.--[CNA](#)

<http://www.heraldmalaysia.com/news/how-pope-francis-inspired-a-thailand-parish-to-plant-800-trees/29633/2>

June 9, 2016

Greening Ramadan

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute

June 10, 2016

Indigenous Climate Adaptation Tool May Soon Go Mobile

By **Ciro Calderon**
Ecosystem Marketplace

Brazil's SOMAI Alerta Indígena platform helps indigenous territories plan for climate change, but so far it's only been available in places with reliable internet. A new mobile app could spread the access and make it more responsive – but only if funding materializes. Thanks to Google, that may be about to happen.

The indigenous people of the Amazon have always worked in partnership with the forest – so much so that some of their traditional farming practices even [created, rather than depleted, topsoil at the rate of one centimeter per year](#).

Those practices faded with the arrival of more intense but less sustainable farming, yet climate change is bringing them back as more and more indigenous territories face droughts and floods.

To effectively adapt to climate change, however, indigenous farmers have to understand how climate change will impact their territories – and that's where an online platform called [SOMAI Alerta Indígena](#) comes in.

Launched in 2014 by the Amazon Environmental Research Institute's (IPAM) Indigenous Study Center, with funding from USAID through the Accelerating Inclusion and Mitigating Emissions (AIME) program, *SOMAI Alerta Indígena* is short for “System of Observing and Monitoring of the Indigenous Amazon”, and it provides the latest science-based projections through the year 2050 on a territory-by-territory basis. It works by blending 17 climate models from the IPCC (Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change) with historical data from 2000 to 2014, which helps understand the deforestation patterns and its climate impacts in the Amazon and the changes that might occur in the future.

Although much of the technical data is readily available, it wasn't presented in a way that could be accessed by indigenous territories. IPAM worked with indigenous leaders through federations like COIAB ([Coordination of Indigenous Organization of Brazilian Amazon](#)) to create a platform that indigenous people can relate to, and that lets users zoom in on their territory to see rainfall and temperature projections, as well as seasonal extremes.

Phase Two calls for the introduction of a mobile-phone app to provide constant feeds about droughts, rains, and temperatures while making it possible for indigenous groups to upload data collected in their territories into SOMAI's database, providing a feedback mechanism that can fine-tune projections.

That phase, however, has been on hold due to lack of funding – a hold that could end if SOMAI earns one of the top four slots in Google’s [Impact Challenge 2016](#), which would net it roughly USD \$430,000 (Brazilian Real \$1.5 million). The challenge identifies regional nonprofits that use innovation to improve a variety of global situations and then allows the public to vote on the projects they feel are delivering the most impact. SOMAI is one of ten finalists to be selected by this popular vote, which ends on June 13th. The winners will be announced the next day at an event in Sao Paulo.

“The Google recognition over the SOMAI project translates into having the support to decrease the gap between the information produced by researchers and the people that need that information to develop adaptation strategies – namely, the indigenous people of Amazon,” says Fernanda Bortolotto, a researcher in the Indigenous Study Center at IPAM.

[A Harvest of Information](#)

Researchers are currently updating SOMAI with 2015 data gathered through Google and official images banks such as [PRODES](#) – Brazil’s deforestation monitoring database – which is available online. These databases were used for mapping deforestation, precipitation, drought and biodiversity with a primary focus on indigenous territories.

While the current scope is the Brazilian Amazon, Bortolotto says it’s entirely possible for SOMAI to include all Amazonia countries and every climate in Brazil once data is available for these regions.

Currently, climate projections have a long term scope, forecasting to 2070. However IPAM is working with indigenous people in the field to monitor changes that are already happening in their territories, and then cross this data with predicted changes to prioritize needs and inform decision-making.

To facilitate the understanding of the platform, the site also contains videos with indigenous testimony and presentations about climate change impacts.

[User Feedback](#)

During 2015, IPAM held three workshops to obtain feedback: one with indigenous peoples, one with Brazil’s National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) and one with students from the Indigenous Studies Master of the [Federal University of Goias](#).

“After these workshops, we realized that besides having a technical component, we also have an educational side where discussions can occur,” says Bortolotto.

Since the platform depends on official data, updates are made once a year, but thanks to climate impact projects in the territories, participants want to achieve more frequent updating and generate weather alerts for indigenous people.

Enhancing the platform's accessibility, so it's not just for those with a reliable Internet connection, is another goal. Translating the information into suitable languages for indigenous people is one such way to do that.

Monitoring and Control

Ideally, the SOMAI will be linked to some sort of government program, so if the satellites monitoring deforestation detect irregular activity in an ecologically significant area, the authorities can investigate these actions and hold the right people accountable.

This tool is constantly evolving as researchers continue to improve on it and this regulatory component is something they have planned for down the road. However, late last year IPAM, along with Brazil's Ministry of Environment, presented SOMAI to the Secretary of Climate Change, allowing the secretary to include the platform in a special chapter of adaptation, currently in development, and perhaps sealing the tool's fate as a climate adaptation tool. Brazil's national adaptation plan was in public consultation last year and the new version is about to be launched.

For now though, the satellite focuses on demonstrating how ongoing deforestation is connected with climate change. On some maps it is evident that in the most deforested regions, there are more droughts.

"A control platform is an informative tool. With this data, correlations and mitigation plans are made mainly for the insulated territories with high rates of deforestation," says Bortolotto.

Moving on Up?

SOMAI was chosen by the Ministry of Environment to be part of the [Nairobi Work Plan](#), established by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as a mechanism to facilitate knowledge sharing on climate adaptation across sectors. Bortolotto says what the platform needs most now is direction, instructions on how to proceed.

"We have the government approval, we need the development," she said. That may take time, so during the wait Bortolotto said they will work on deepening collaboration with organizations to prove the platform's functionality and creating synergies with the government's existing work.

IPAM is a part of the Forest-Based Livelihoods (FBL) Consortium, a partnership of nine environmental and indigenous organizations led by Ecosystem Marketplace's publisher Forest Trends. FBL initiated AIME, a five-year program with the support of USAID to empower forest-dependent communities in Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Central America and Mexico to more fully contribute to and directly benefit from climate change mitigation and forest conservation efforts.

Ciro Calderon is a Program Associate at Ecosystem Marketplace. He can be reached at ccalderon@valorandonaturaleza.org.

June 14, 2016

Laudato Si' Week renews awareness ahead of encyclical anniversary

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

Prayer services, social media campaigns, workshops and webinars are set to celebrate the one-year anniversary of Pope Francis' social encyclical on the environment, "*Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home.*"

A year ago on Saturday, June 18, the Vatican published *Laudato Si'*. Since that time, Catholics communities, as well as secular groups, have used the text as a rallying point to engage environmental issues and take steps toward transforming its teachings into actions.

The days leading up to Saturday's anniversary will highlight the steps already taken as well as revisit some of the text's major teachings.

To that effect, the Global Catholic Climate Movement has marked this week as *Laudato Si'* Week. Through its 500-member *Laudato Si'* animator program, it has [at least 300 events](#) scheduled across six continents. The activities range from prayer services and special petitions during Masses, to training workshops, film screenings and art exhibits.

Both the Global Catholic Climate Movement and U.S.-based Catholic Climate Covenant, itself celebrating this month its 10-year anniversary, have produced parish guides to help communities shrink carbon footprints and waste while growing awareness and advocacy efforts related to environmental degradation and the people put in danger as a result.

During a teleconference Monday, Dan Misleh, Catholic Climate Covenant executive director, said he was "enormously proud" of the church's efforts so far in responding to Francis' moral call in *Laudato Si'* for all of humanity to act in the face of global environmental degradation and climate change.

"Pope Francis affirms the clear link between the importance of caring for God's creation and the dire consequences for the poor from a climate-threatened world," he said.

Misleh said it's difficult to keep up with all activities that have stemmed from the encyclical, such as parishes reducing [energy use](#) and [waste](#), religious orders [divesting their portfolios](#) from fossil fuels, [academic institutes hosting multi-disciplinary conferences](#), and others engaging [in advocacy for policies reflecting its teachings](#).

At the beginning of June, the Covenant launched a social media campaign aimed at sharing how people have been inspired by *Laudato Si'* so far. Users can share their thoughts by downloading a campaign card from the covenant website and sharing it on social media using the hashtag #CreationCare. A similar campaign from Global Catholic Climate Movement asks people to post a selfie on Twitter or Instagram with the hashtag #LiveLaudatoSi to share how they are doing just that.

While the first year showed signs of noticeable progress, leaders on promoting the encyclical recognize the long path still ahead.

A May poll [released Monday](#) from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University found 32 percent of U.S. Catholics (28 percent of Americans) had heard or read about *Laudato Si'*, while 56 percent (61 percent of Americans overall) had not heard of it. CARA pointed out that, in general, there is generally low awareness of papal documents.

At the same time, six-in-10 Catholics in the CARA poll agree that global warming is occurring and is largely a result of human activity -- a percentage roughly on par with U.S. adults overall but trailing believers in non-Christian faiths (79 percent) and the religiously unaffiliated (70 percent).

The survey's overall results, Misleh said, make it "clear our collective efforts [in the past year] have made a difference," pointing to findings that a wide majority of Catholics, whether aware of the encyclical or not, support societal climate action.

As part of an effort to reintroduce and re-engage the actual text, the Global Catholic Climate Movement has scheduled a [series of five webinars](#) dissecting and discussing the encyclical's six chapters from the perspectives of a diverse field of religious and secular experts.

Among the speakers are: Cardinal Peter Turkson; Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, chancellor of the Pontifical Academies of Sciences and Social Sciences; Michel Roy, secretary general of Caritas Internationalis; Carolyn Woo, president of Catholic Relief Services; Franciscan Fr. Michael Perry, minister general of the Order of Friars Minor; Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-director of the Yale University Forum on Religion and Ecology; eco-theologian Columban Fr. Sean McDonagh; Marcia McNutt, editor of Science magazine; and Jeffrey Sachs, director of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

The webinar and *Laudato Si'* Week are an extension of awareness-raising around the encyclical, said Tomas Insua, co-founder of the Global Catholic Climate Movement. That's been an important component, given that many in the wider church are new to the issue, especially compared to other faiths.

"There has been a lot of awareness raising, and it will continue to be a priority," he told *NCR*.

Overall, Insua pointed to the Philippines and Brazilian churches as taking a lead on implementing the messages of the encyclical, with both well-engaged in environmental issues pre-*Laudato Si'*. In the U.S., Bishop Oscar Cantú, chair of the U.S. Conference of Catholic

Bishops Committee on International Justice and Peace, said during the Monday teleconference that the conference has integrated care for creation into its long-term priorities planning, and that it will introduce a “multi-faceted implementation plan” during their annual fall meeting.

In addition, Cantú said the conference is dedicating additional staff resources to its environmental justice program so to better analyze and form official positions on national and state legislation related to the encyclical’s themes. In the past year, the bishop estimated conference staff met with and briefed “well over” 100 members of Congress and their staffs and White House officials on issues related to creation care and climate change.

Maria Vorel, senior vice president for disaster operations for Catholic Charities USA, said the encyclical provided an opening for collaboration at the federal level, with the Obama administration inviting them to identify natural disaster preparedness measures, with particular focus toward vulnerable populations.

“*Laudato Si*’ crystallizes the reality of disasters in the U.S.,” she said, adding it calls not just for compassionate care to those impacted, but an assessment of environmental and land-use policies toward addressing the needs of those at risk.

Cantú added that beginning in the fall, the conference, in partnership with Catholic Climate Covenant, a pastoral education program on the encyclical, with an aim of reaching at least 30 dioceses and 500 priests in the next three years.

“In our own nation, the bishops of the United States are doing our part to foster this critically important dialogue about our common home,” he said.

Misleh told *NCR* that increasing pastoral engagement is a priority, as he senses a lot of people are still trying to absorb the encyclical and all its teachings.

“But I also feel like people are rising to the call of *Laudato Si*’, as well, and saying, yeah, this is going to take a while to study it, this is going to take a while to absorb it, but there are things that we can do right away to reduce our energy use,” Misleh said.

One thing that has struck him from the talks and presentations he has given in the past year is that Francis has been able to “really put the moral argument front and center.”

The CARA poll found 68 percent of Catholics (63 percent of U.S. adults) recognizing a personal moral responsibility to address climate change. However, the same percentage said papal statements did not strengthen that belief. Thirty-two percent of Catholics acknowledged some level of papal influence, but that percentage dropped with each of the lower-ranking clergy and parish leaders.

The impact of recognizing the moral dimension to environmental issues, Misleh said, is that people begin to develop a more personal connection to the environmental disruptions they see in the news, such as flooding in Texas or the drought in California, and with those who suffer as a result.

“People who stop and reflect on these things really begin to have a deep empathy for what’s happening, and I think maybe make the connection between these awful weather events and climate change, and then hopefully between that and their own behaviors,” he said.

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/laudato-si-week-renews-awareness-energy-ahead-encyclical-anniversary>

June 16, 2016

Year-old Laudato Si' has stirred up action for Earth

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

Last year's arrival of Pope Francis' encyclical "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home" marked a significant moment as the Catholic church substantially entered the realm of environmental concern at a time when global attention toward the Earth's degradation, in particular by climate change, was nearing a peak.

Since then, signs of the encyclical's impact have already appeared. Many [parishes, schools and communities](#) have studied, reflected and discussed the text, often through multidisciplinary conferences and much as Francis requested in its introduction: "I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home."

More ambitious corners began taking first-step actions at institutional levels by forming green teams, improving energy efficiency and reducing wasteful consumption. For those long engaged in environmental issues, the encyclical proved a valuable rallying tool, one that opened doors, spurred mobilization and generated not-seen-before excitement within Catholic circles.

"I cannot wish for anything better," said Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice, which oversaw the first draft of the encyclical. Since its publication last June 18, Turkson has served as its chief promoter, traveling across the globe to [deliver countless talks](#) on *Laudato Si'*.

"I think it has proven to be really transformative," said Tomás Insua, co-founder of the Global Catholic Climate Movement. "But there's definitely a long way to go to really get this encyclical to really sync in our Catholic identity and really drive transformational change."

Out of the gate

While few anticipated the encyclical would yield immediate, far-reaching changes, it produced some out-of-the-gate impacts. For one, Francis placed environmental concern [on the Catholic calendar](#) by designating Sept. 1 as the annual World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation.

Within nations, Turkson pointed to several African countries that have organized around the encyclical to move away from fossil fuels and forests as energy sources and adopt solar echnology.

The Philippines church -- residing in one of the most climate vulnerable regions and long active in environmental issues -- organized rallies, petition drives and prayer services [around the encyclical](#). As part of global "Break Free from Fossil Fuels" events in May, Lipa Archbishop Ramon Arguelles [led a 10,000-person march](#) against new coal-fired power plants.

Last year, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences established a climate desk. In Brazil, bishops are planning a "*Laudato Si'* road show" for later this summer.

As positive efforts proceeded, so too did the realization of the degradation Francis described, said Joan Rosenhauer, executive vice president of U.S. operations for Catholic Relief Services. Recent trips that Rosenhauer took to the Philippines, where storms have worsened in the central islands, and Nicaragua, where warmer temperatures have disrupted growing seasons, showed how people are dealing with already-present effects of climate change.

"They're going to have to live their lives differently," she said.

In the U.S., numerous dioceses have undertaken their own encyclical implementation efforts. In [Atlanta](#) and [San Francisco](#), they've formed preparatory plans. More concrete steps are underway in Chicago, where the archdiocese is pushing energy efficiency [in its buildings](#), and San Diego, which has encouraged all parishes to install solar-power systems.

"Things are just popping up all over the place," said Dan Misleh, executive director of the Catholic Climate Covenant.

A [Yale/George Mason survey](#) at the encyclical's six-month mark found one in three Catholics acknowledging a papal influence on their views of global warming. A quarter of them were aware of *Laudato Si'*, and there were increases of 11 percentage points and 20 percentages points in becoming worried about global warming (64 percent) and believing it will harm the poor (62 percent), respectively.

A survey [released Monday](#) from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University also found a third of Catholics having heard of or read the encyclical -- a percentage that has roughly held steady since July 2015. On the flipside, the CARA survey found 56 percent of those polled were not aware of the document. Still, six-in-10 Catholics agreed that climate change was occurring and largely a result of human activity. Additionally, 68 percent of Catholics (63 percent of U.S. adults) recognized a personal moral responsibility to address climate change, with 32 percent of Catholics saying the pope strengthened that belief; 68 percent reported no papal influence on their moral views regarding the climate.

On the international scene, maybe the encyclical's greatest impact came at the [Paris climate negotiations](#) in December. There, *Laudato Si'* "played a key role," said Turkson, a member of the Vatican delegation at COP 21, the United Nations climate change conference. The Vatican

received credit, along with other faith groups and island nations, for its endorsement of the Paris Agreement attaching a 1.5 degrees Celsius target to its central 2-degree (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) commitment to limit average global temperature rise.

Mobilizing Catholics

Beyond Holy See intervention, the encyclical helped mobilize 900,000 Catholics [to sign the Catholic Climate Petition](#) (which included the 1.5 degrees target) and 40,000 Catholics to join [Global Climate March rallies](#) ahead of the Paris summit. Amid both those efforts was the Global Catholic Climate Movement, itself an anticipatory response to *Laudato Si'* [in its formation](#) ahead of Francis' January 2015 visit to the Philippines.

The network, which began with 19 member organizations and now counts 300-plus, organized and delivered the Catholic Climate Petition to key leaders at the Paris climate talks.

The COP 21 mobilization "would have been absolutely impossible without the encyclical," Insua said.

The type of cooperation demonstrated in the Global Climate March, with religious and secular groups joining as a single force, can be attributed in some part to the encyclical, said Lorna Gold, head of policy and advocacy for Trócaire, the Irish Catholic development agency.

Gold, who has 14 years in policy advocacy, said the encyclical has given "a real boost" to the climate movement both within and outside the church, especially in uniting fronts along shared interests.

"You can see a convergence between the more secular actors and the faith-based actors on a number of big issues in the encyclical," she said.

That convergence marks a stark change from past interactions, where Gold described Catholic agencies more left "out in the cold" on broader discussions of human rights and environmental issues. The encyclical has changed that, she said, with Catholic groups experiencing a "sea change" in the role they play in civil society, where they now act as quasi-gatekeepers for Francis, viewed as one of the most influential leaders on global environmental issues.

While the agenda of a more sustainable global society has existed for years, it's becoming clear, Gold said, that the necessary transformative changes in policy, lifestyle and consciousness cannot happen without greater collaboration among individual initiatives.

"What *Laudato Si'* has done has made us look at, well, first the urgency and the depth of the challenge that we're facing, but also to think that we won't be able to do this unless we do it together," she said.

Gold added that the pope "has really thrown open the agenda. ... It's almost like he said the unsayable," and broadened the accessible public policy discussion for Catholic agencies.

One door he's opened wider is the issue of fossil fuel divestment. A favorite citation of activists has been Paragraph 165, where Francis states the need to move away from "highly polluting fossil fuels ... without delay."

Those types of divestment ideas weren't being discussed much in the mainstream pre-encyclical, Gold said. Trócaire has committed to divesting their stock pension plans from fossil fuels in the next two years and is engaging Irish dioceses and universities in the divestment conversation.

On Thursday, four Pacific-area religious orders announced they will divest from coal, oil and gas companies. According to Global Catholic Climate Movement, the decision was the first-ever joint Catholic divestment announcement. The divesting orders are the Marist Sisters Australia, Presentation Congregation Queensland, Presentation Sisters Wagga Wagga, and the Passionists of the Holy Spirit Province Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Zealand and Vietnam.

"This is a key part of the way we engage in God's mission, especially at a time when the challenge to address global warming is so urgent," said Presentation Sr. Marlette Black, congregation leader of the Queensland Presentation sisters, in a statement.

The joint divestment announcement was a result of a working group recently formed by Global Catholic Climate Movement. Insua said as that group develops and organizes, he anticipates more Catholic orders and institutes will follow suit in divesting in the next two years, beginning with another expected joint pledge in October near the Feast of St. Francis (Oct. 4).

Turkson told *NCR* he has heard the conversations around divestment pick up among religious orders, but so far, those haven't developed similarly in the Holy See.

"There's not yet been any policy from the Vatican against any such investment," he said.

While Francis urges a shift from fossil fuels, Turkson recognized the message comes off as corrosive [in regions highly reliant on coal mining](#), such as Poznan, Poland, which he visited in November. The pope's intent, Turkson said, is "a gradual weaning" as alternatives develop, and not one that leaves masses of people instantly without wages or work.

The people lead

Despite noticeable progress, those engaged in environmental issues say there's still much to do in terms of bringing the encyclical to life. While many bishops wrote or spoke about the encyclical in the days and weeks after its release (Catholic Climate Covenant counted nearly 100 in the U.S. in the first month), Insua said only a few bishops' conferences have really raised the environment to central issue status.

That means not only writing statements, he said, but engaging in advocacy, specifically "for bold climate action." He predicted that step would only come if the people lead their prelates toward it.

"I think that the bishops of many countries will follow when they see that the Catholic grassroots are taking action by themselves," Insua said.

Gold senses "a nervousness" among the Irish hierarchy and clergy, who may feel out of their element on environmental issues. She and others have suggested [a synodal process on the environment](#) as one channel to more immerse *Laudato Si'* into the heart of the church, or including those discussions as part of the rumored synod on peace.

Misleh of Catholic Climate Covenant said he was pleased by the work he saw at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, which produced prayer and study guide resources for the encyclical, in addition to continued advocacy on Capitol Hill for full U.S. [funding of the Green Climate Fund](#) and national carbon standards on coal-fired power plants [via the Clean Power Plan](#).

"Nobody can say that their resources haven't expanded exponentially in this area," he said.

At the same time, Misleh also acknowledged one of the biggest challenges is developing a greater comfort with the encyclical among clergy and lay leaders.

To that end, the Catholic Climate Covenant is developing a pastoral training program to help pastors become more comfortable discussing the encyclical and the theology behind caring for creation and addressing environmental issues. A similar effort is underway between Trócaire and the Irish bishops' conference.

In addition, the Global Catholic Climate Movement plans to expand its *Laudato Si'* animator program from the 500 people in 60 countries it's trained to mobilize local advocacy efforts. Likewise, Catholic Climate Covenant hopes to grow its ambassador network of encyclical speakers and is working on separate programs reaching out to Latino communities and church facilities managers.

As far as the long-term impact, Turkson placed *Laudato Si'* into the larger compendium of social encyclicals, describing them together "like a big river," with new tributaries forming as it flows forward. Like past encyclicals, such as *Rerum Novarum*, it too will stimulate future teachings and ideas, he said.

"But it is forever going to inspire the church's teaching on ecology and integral ecology."

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/encyclical-boost-year-old-laudato-si-has-stirred-action-earth>

June 16, 2016

Laudato Si': Putting faith on the frontline of the climate justice fight

By Jennifer Butler and Aaron Mair
National Catholic Reporter

Last year, Pope Francis challenged the Catholic church and the world to be more proactive in combatting climate change and preserving the environment in a historic document titled "[Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home](#)." As we mark the one-year anniversary of this momentous spiritual document, the need for action couldn't be more urgent.

Communities of faith across the globe should heed Pope Francis' words. The Bible says that the highest heavens belong to God, but the earth he has given to humanity. As believers, we have a moral obligation to protect our planet and the life-sustaining resources that it provides.

Environmental degradation is a social justice issue that cannot be ignored. Too many Americans are robbed of life's most basic necessities: clean air and clean water, because they stand on the lowest rungs of our nation's economic ladder. We have what Pope Francis calls "a grave social debt towards the poor" and we need "a global ecological conversion."

We know that communities of color are far more likely to live adjacent to a landfill, incinerator or coal-fired power plant than white Americans. They are also disproportionately impacted by polluting emissions that damage the earth and contaminate our bodies, causing asthma, lung cancer and other respiratory illnesses. As Pope Francis reminded us, the relationship between the environment and justice for the poor is inseparable.

In Louisiana, there is an 85-mile stretch between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, known as "cancer alley." It's home to more than 150 oil refineries, and scores of poor residents with inexplicable illnesses.

It's no coincidence that Louisiana has the highest concentration of oil, natural gas and petrochemical facilities in the Western Hemisphere, and is also the third-poorest state in the U.S. This is just one example of many where our nation's poorest residents are the most at risk.

At its core, environmental justice is about preserving life, and faith leaders have a unique responsibility to promote sustainable development and to encourage a thriving culture of life that protects human dignity.

The toxic pollution released from coal-fired plants and the chemicals spewing into rivers and oceans present especially grave risks for life in the womb, young children and the elderly. The costs of delay and politics as usual are unacceptable.

As Pope Francis reminded us one year ago, "A healthy politics is sorely needed." Therefore, we are urging elected officials across the country as well as the presumptive presidential nominees of both parties to reflect on the pope's climate challenge in *Laudato Si'* and to take action.

Every community and every person deserves clean air and clean water. The absence of either is unconscionable.

[Rev. Jennifer Butler is CEO of Faith in Public Life. Aaron Mair is president of the Sierra Club.]

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/laudato-si-putting-faith-frontline-climate-justice-fight>

June 17, 2016

Green Church Newsletter

<http://us13.campaign-archive2.com/?u=d9e8a3947f2f12635e017888f&id=54e3bd52ef&e=f5c5dd627a>

June 19, 2016

Violent 2015 sees three environmental activists killed each week

By Anastasia Moloney
Reuters

BOGOTA (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Three environmental activists were killed per week last year, murdered defending land rights and the environment from mining, dam projects and logging, a campaign group said on Monday.

In 16 countries surveyed in a report by Global Witness, 185 activists were killed, making 2015 the deadliest year for environment and land campaigners since 2002.

"The environment is emerging as a new battleground for human rights," the report said.

The reported killings rose nearly 60 percent from 2014. Brazil fared worst with 50 activists murdered, followed by the Philippines with 33 deaths, and 26 in Colombia, the report said.

"A major reason behind the big jump in killings is impunity, people know they can get away with these crimes," Billy Kyte, campaigner at Global Witness, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"Increasingly, communities that take a stand are finding themselves in the firing line of companies' private security, state forces and a thriving market for contract killers," Kyte said.

"For every killing we document, many others go unreported."

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has also raised the alarm about growing violence and intimidation against land and environmental activists in rural Brazil.

In April, the IACHR, the body that monitors human rights across the Americas said at least six land activists were killed in Brazil during the first two months of this year.

Brazil's environment ministry did not respond to requests for comment on the rise of killings against environmentalists.

According to Global Witness, conflicts over mining projects led to more deaths of activists than any other sector.

Large-scale agricultural plantations, cattle ranching, hydroelectric dams, and logging were also to blame for the growing violence against campaigners, the report said.

Worst hit by violence were indigenous people, accounting for 40 percent of the activists killed in 2015, the report found.

Indigenous groups campaigning to protect their lands and livelihoods in Brazil's Amazon rainforest from illegal loggers were particularly hard hit, as were the Lumad indigenous tribe in the Philippines in the Mindanao region, rich in coal, nickel and gold, protesting against mining projects, the report said.

The failure by governments and companies to recognize the rights of indigenous people to decide about happens on their lands is a key driver of violence, the report said.

"Indigenous people come into conflict with companies, often with state backing, looking to develop their ancestral land without their consent," the report said.

The murder of Berta Caceres, a prominent Honduran environmental campaigner shot by gunmen in her home in March, drew international condemnation and brought attention to abuses of indigenous people.

(Reporting by Anastasia Moloney, Additional reporting from Chris Arsenault in Rio de Janeiro editing by Billy Perrigo.; Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, that covers humanitarian news, women's rights, trafficking, corruption and climate change. Visit news.trust.org)

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-global-landrights-violence-idUSKCN0Z601U>

June 20, 2016

Sisters' school stands out in Guatemalan dump town

By J. Malcolm Garcia
Global Sisters Report

Global Sisters Report is publishing a special series about how trash is managed in the world and how sisters are helping people affected by landfills. We start this project to mark the one-year anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical, Laudato Si', about climate change, pollution and waste,

which warns that: "The Earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth."

The sisters who teach at the Francisco Coll School know all too well the difficulties their students confront daily.

The students live in a barrio near a massive garbage dump not far from the school and less than a half-hour drive from the posh tourist attractions of downtown. The children suffer from malnutrition, they suffer at the hands of drug-addicted parents and gangs, they suffer from toxic pollutants released into the air from the dump. And sometimes, the very thing they lean on for survival — the 40-acre dump and its mounds of plastic, glass and cardboard that can be sold to recycling centers — threatens them, too.

On April 28, at least four people died after a mountain of trash collapsed on men, women and children — known as "guajeros" (garbage pickers) — who had been scavenging for recyclable material to sell. About 10 people were taken for medical treatment after the collapse. A garbage truck was also buried. Twenty-six people are still listed as missing and presumed dead.

The Guatemala City garbage dump is the largest landfill in Central America. More than a third of the country's trash goes there. The scavengers take out and recycle a million pounds a day. In the process they expose themselves to toxic fumes and hazardous materials.

The most senior scavengers rush garbage trucks to attempt to take over the newest items before anyone else. Tragic tales abound about people in their haste getting crushed by the trucks. Recyclable items include glass and aluminum among other material. Scavengers with the most experience know what different trucks carry; trash from supermarkets and restaurants is valuable, and people collect that to eat or sell later. The trash piles can reach several stories and collapse like one did in April.

"I was home when I heard the news about the collapse," recalled Sr. Gloria Xol, 42, a day after the collapse. She stood in the courtyard of the school surrounded by unusually subdued children. Three children said their grandparents were among the missing.

"We had a special prayer," Xol said. "We had candles and prayed for those affected."

Xol is one of three nuns with the the Dominican Sisters of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin teaching first through sixth grade. The school, established in 1995 and named after Saint Francisco Coll, stands in a barrio dubbed by locals as simply "el basurero," the dump. Students who graduate become eligible for a middle school next door run by International Samaritan.

The families of the barrio live in a network of trash-choked alleyways and hovels cobbled together from corrugated metal, cardboard and wood. Old mattresses buttress thin walls. Families and their animals share beds. Split sacks of recyclables take up the corners of the one or two rooms the shacks have been divided into. More trash fills the alleys. The homes of the

scavengers totter on land that had once been part of the basurero above thin layers of sand and rotting garbage that often becomes unstable when it rains. Foul-smelling smoke of garbage fires hover above the barrio like fog.

"I have stopped expecting to work in tidy places," Xol said. "It is part of my work to be in dangerous areas. I am happy to be here. I have a calling and a mission to be here. We believe the Gospel should be taught in everyday life no matter the circumstances."

Most of the adults living in the barrio and working in the dump have little to no formal education. Some fled gang violence in El Salvador and Honduras only to run out of money and stop here. A majority of families are illegally squatting on the land they live on. The Francisco Coll School uses as its address Aguilar One, one of the settlements or squats.

Amidst this blight, the sisters offer what little hope their students have of receiving an education and escaping the life of poverty led by their parents, most of whom scavenge 12 hours a day in the dump, earning just U.S. \$1 to \$5 a day, seven days a week.

"Many are orphaned," said school principal Sr. Gloria Marlen Guadron, 38.

"They don't get proper nourishment. Another thing, they face gang violence. Thank God I've never had a problem with gang members. As a sister, I'm respected in the community."

But that respect goes only so far inside the classroom when students exposed to violence on a daily basis.

"The thing is the children bring the reality of their lives into the classroom," Xol said. "They are violent. If I start to correct them, they will talk back to me. 'Hey, you don't know who I am. I know gang members.' If I respond with threats, it will only get worse. I calm them down, try to get them through the episode. I don't criticize. I try to understand their situation."

In one instance, for example, Xol learned that a boy who often started fights was being physically abused by his mother. She would beat him with wires.

"He started crying," Xol recalled. "He told us about the situation at home. He was only 9. I told him the way he felt when his mother beat him was the way the other students felt when he fought with them. I'd like to get into his heart and remove his pain because he hasn't changed."

The pain hasn't stopped for Fernanda Mayen, 12. Both her parents were murdered.

"People say my parents got mugged," Mayen said. "My father, I don't remember when he died. My mom, I was in the second grade three years ago; she died near our home. A friend found her."

Mayen now lives with her maternal uncle in a shack that floods when it rains.

"Mud gets everywhere, and we cannot walk freely because everything gets dirty," she said. "A rug absorbs all the water, so the furniture doesn't get wet but the rug smells."

The financial meltdown and world-wide recession in 2008 made life even more difficult for families here who had little to nothing to start with. Construction jobs that poor people had traditionally depended on vanished. Remittances from friends and relatives abroad have dropped.

"In this area, 25 percent of the whole population is living in extreme poverty," said psychologist Marcelo Colussi, who meets with children from the Francisco Coll School once a week. "The problem is that the broader society equates poverty with criminality and ostracizes this area. That creates an aura that life has no value. People get used to that kind of thinking. They look at it as normal."

About 300 students attend classes from 7:30 a.m. to noon. Many drop out to earn money for their families. An after-school tutoring program focused on math and language skills meets from 2 to 5 p.m. three times a week to offer additional instruction and to keep students off the street after school lets out. About 40 students show up. One, Francisco Ixcoy Socorec, 11, uses the after-school sessions to practice handwriting and multiplication and division.

"I'd like more police so we wouldn't get mugged and jumped in the street," Socorec said. "Sundays it is common to hear shouting and drive-by shootings."

As a result of deep budget cuts, some classes have ballooned to as many as 50 students, said fourth grade teacher Jessica Gomez, 27. She grew up in the barrio and attended school here. Her mother, who works as a janitor at the school, moved into the area when she fled the violence of El Salvador in the 1980s.

"I feel reflected in the children," Gomez said. "I was extroverted and I know how the environment affects the kids. When I was studying to be a teacher, I felt it would be great to come back and give back."

Gomez's late father was an alcoholic. Her mother, Altagracia Arevalo, raised Gomez and six siblings by herself in part by working in the landfill for 12 years, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., seven days a week.

"It was very difficult," said Arevalo, 52. "I had to learn how to pick up food that was still edible for us. I feel sad for the children who don't have support from their parents. Of course, I'd have preferred not to have had to work and support my children but that was my life."

That type of perseverance inspires Guadron, the principal. She joined the order in her native El Salvador after she read a biography of Francisco Coll and began attending prayer groups. She took her vows last year. The shocking conditions of the barrio and the recent deaths in the landfill, she admitted, at times test her faith.

"I think sometimes, 'How can I help my students so they don't become the next victim?'" Guadron said. "I don't know sometimes if we're really helping. I wonder how many of these

children will pull through and have a chance in life. How many will fail? Every day when I pray, I put this school and these children in God's hands. It is all I can do."

[J. Malcolm Garcia is a freelance writer and author of [The Khaarijee: A Chronicle of Friendship and War in Kabul](#), [What Wars Leave Behind: The Faceless and the Forgotten](#). He is a recipient of the Studs Terkel Prize for writing about the working classes and the Sigma Delta Chi Award for excellence in journalism.]

View photos:

<http://globalsistersreport.org/news/ministry/sisters-school-stands-out-guatemalan-dump-town-40431>

June 24, 2016

One year later, how a Pope's message on climate has resonated

Catholics worldwide are showing a new zeal for combatting climate change since Pope Francis highlighted the issue in 2015, experts say.

By Cristina Maza
Christian Science Monitor

For Catholics around the world, climate change is a heightened priority – and many are taking action in the wake of efforts by Pope Francis to focus on environmental stewardship.

It's a story that runs counter to popular perception, which holds that religious people do not believe in climate change – or believe that it falls outside the realm of human control.

In truth, people of faith have played important roles in environmental causes for generations. Yet, at the same time, polls find that devout Americans are generally less [likely](#) to be concerned about global warming than their nonreligious peers.

But among Catholics this may be starting to change. In the year since Pope Francis released his [encyclical, Laudato Si](#), imploring his followers and fellow believers to care for the earth and its creatures, observers say more and more Roman Catholics are beginning to view climate change as a moral issue in which caring for the earth and caring for the poor intersect.

Environmentalism among Catholics wasn't absent before, but now it's running higher than in years.

“What helped to connect the dots between the Catholic faith and the environment was, of course, the encyclical of Pope Francis, Laudato Si,” says Tomás Insua, the Boston-based co-founder and coordinator of an international network of over 300 Catholic organizations engaged in protecting

the environment and fighting climate change. “That was the big moment that really galvanized a lot of momentum in the Catholic community.”

Action from Brazil to India

The group, the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM) was founded in 2015 just a few months before the encyclical’s release. Since then it has organized about 40,000 Catholics from around the world to participate in a march demanding that world leaders take action during the Paris climate negotiations.

They also mobilized almost 1 million Catholics to sign [a petition](#) asking world leaders to keep global warming under 1.5 degrees C below pre-industrial levels. Then in May 2016, around 30 Catholic organizations [joined an amicus brief](#) in support of President Obama’s clean power plan.

These collective efforts are echoed by initiatives that local organizations are pursuing in many nations.

In Brazil, Catholic groups have been instrumental in [fighting logging and deforestation](#). In India, too, churches and parishes across the country launched projects in the spirit of Laudato Si. To mark Earth Day in April, the Catholic non-profit organization Caritas initiated [a tree planting campaign](#) in the Karachi region, planting thousands of trees to help beat the region’s extreme heat. Church organizations also run campaigns to cut down on waste, promote organic farming, and start transitioning towards the adoption of solar power.

Likewise, GCCM released its own [eco-parish guide](#), which it distributes to Catholic churches around the world that are aiming to reduce their carbon footprint. The guide provides instructions on how Catholic churches can reduce emissions by adopting a low carbon lifestyle, advocate for climate justice, and care for populations harmed by climate change.

“The actions were totally unprecedented because Catholics pretty much were overwhelmingly passive on the climate issue before,” says Mr. Insua in a telephone interview. “Mobilizing nearly 1 million Catholics for climate justice last year, that would have been absolutely impossible without the encyclical, there was no way we could have achieved anything nearly as close to that.”

A shift in opinion

In 2015, on the eve of the release of Pope Francis’s encyclical, [research showed](#) that Catholics in the United States were divided over global warming. Their differences mirrored the partisan divide found among much of the population, with around 80 percent of Catholic Democrats claiming there is solid evidence that the Earth is warming, and only half of Catholic Republicans claiming the same. Meanwhile, around 60 percent of Catholic Democrats said that global warming is a serious, man-made problem, while just a quarter of Catholic Republicans agreed.

But over the past year, perceptions began to shift. Just 6 months after the release of Laudato Si, the percentage of American Catholics who thought climate change is a moral issue jumped from

34 percent to 42 percent, according to a study conducted by [the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication](#). Meanwhile, a study released by the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies at the Catholic University of America found that Catholic Republicans who read Laudato Si were 10 percent more likely to agree that human activities are responsible for climate change.

Lonnie Ellis, associate director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, a US-based climate advocacy group that formed in 2006, agrees that things have changed over the past year.

“We were doing this before Pope Francis made it cool, and it’s been a great 10 years. But in the last year Pope Francis just elevated our work immensely and we’ve been able to do some really big things,” says Mr. Ellis.

The group now has around 205 “creation care teams”, or groups that meet to promote environmental education and discuss a faith-based approach to caring for the earth, working around the country.

It’s not that concern about climate change is absent among people of other faiths. For example, although Evangelical Christians show up as among the least concerned about climate change, in one recent poll fully 59 percent say that human actions are behind the rise in greenhouse gases versus 67 of the US public overall.

And like other religious and nonreligious groups, Evangelicals are far more likely to call climate change a “very” or “somewhat” important issue than to say it’s only “a little” or “not” important, according to the [recent study](#) by Georgetown University’s Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

The poll found, however, that Catholics are more likely to be concerned about climate change than any other US Christian group.

A deep-rooted tradition

The name of the encyclical, Laudato Si (“praise be”), is taken from a line in St. Francis of Assisi’s Canticle of Creatures, a religious text that extolled the virtues of nature. Born in 1182, St. Francis of Assisi is considered the Catholic Church’s foremost ecologist.

But some historians point to 1971 as the year when the environmental tenets of Catholicism began to make a comeback. That was when Pope Paul VI published a letter called Octogesima Adveniens, or “a call to action.”

“Man is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he risks destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation,” [he wrote](#).

Not long after, Pope John Paul II, elected to the papacy in 1978, told the United Nations that, “the Church’s commitment to the conservation and improvement of our environment is linked to

a command of God.” He also called for moral solidarity on the environment between industrialized and developing nations.

These calls for environmental justice were then absorbed by other parts of the Catholic leadership, including the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). All this gave added legitimacy to local church leaders who wanted environmental conservation to count among the Catholic church’s central teachings.

Bolivia speech

Despite this rich history, including Pope Benedict XVI ordering solar panels for the Vatican’s roof, experts say no Catholic leader has placed been so urgent and radical on the issue of ecology as Pope Francis.

During [a speech](#) last year at the World Meeting of Popular Movements in Bolivia, the Pope called for an immediate change to the way the world economy is run.

“Today, the scientific community realizes what the poor have long told us: harm, perhaps irreversible harm, is being done to the ecosystem,” he said.

“Let us not be afraid to say it: we want change, real change, structural change.”

While many Catholics were unaware of the church’s stance on the environment prior to the current Pope’s vocal advocacy, experts say that changed dramatically over the last year.

Distrust of 'liberal agenda'

Bill Patenaude, an engineer with the state of Rhode Island’s Department of Environmental Management and a member of the Global Catholic Climate Movement, said the idea of ecological protection is now sinking in among people who were traditionally climate-change skeptics.

“Environmental issues and climate change have been spearheaded by the political left for a long time, and there is a lot of distrust,” says Mr Patenaude, adding that the issues supported by the political left are often in conflict with the positions of American Catholics. “I think some climate skeptics are reacting to the liberal agenda, not so much to what the science is showing and what people are experiencing. But I think there is a trend of people putting that aside.”

In developing countries with a large Catholic population, the faith-based connection between social justice and environmentalism was already evident to many, experts say. That’s because people see the effects that extreme weather conditions and natural disasters linked to climate change have on the poor.

But in much of the industrialized world, the connections weren’t as apparent. The effort by Pope Francis has opened up new conversations, says Mr. Ellis of the Catholic Climate Covenant in the US.

“Even in corners that you wouldn’t expect, like in the Rust Belt, people are talking about it,” Ellis says. “It’s been phenomenal in the last year, we have to turn down a lot of talks being planned around the country on Laudato Si.”

'A hopeful vision'

“The poor and vulnerable are disproportionately impacted by disaster,” adds Maria Vorel, Catholic Charities USA’s senior vice president for disaster operations, during a conference call with reporters to mark the one-year anniversary of the encyclical. “Laudato Si crystallizes the realities of disasters in the US. Pope Francis called on all to look at our impact on the environment and the interaction of the environment on people, especially the vulnerable.”

Meanwhile, a plethora of [small Catholic groups](#) are working around the country to assist vulnerable populations in poor regions such as the Appalachian Mountains as they grapple with the effects of climate change and environmental degradation.

Ultimately, many Catholics say that the Pope’s message has resonated so widely because of its emphasis on unity and its contrast with the often gloomy narrative surrounding climate change.

“There is a hopeful vision,” says Ellis. “The advocacy, not only does it change the system as a whole, but it helps pull us all in to meet this challenge together.”

<http://www.csmonitor.com/Environment/2016/0624/One-year-later-how-a-Pope-s-message-on-climate-has-resonated>

June 25, 2016

Global Indigenous youth taking the planet in their hands

By Lucy Cormack
Sydney Morning Herald

Amelia Telford remembers the moment huge slabs of her country were swallowed by the sea.

It was 2009 and a severe storm had battered Kingscliff, her home on the east coast of Australia. Several metres of beach and dune disappeared, while cranes were needed to shift whole buildings back to save them from the water's edge.

The Kingscliff coastline was "barely recognisable".

"The swells picked up, we had high tides. It was washing away the banks and the sand dunes ... the erosion was incredible."

Ms Telford, a young Indigenous Australian from Bunjalan country, said it was the first time she realised she had a lifelong responsibility as an Aboriginal woman.

"We are the ones that have looked after the land sustainably for generations, over 60,000 years and we know best how to manage our land," she said.

"So I feel a real sense of responsibility, as so many of our young people do, to stand up and protect what we fought for, for so long."

Ms Telford is a member of the Australian Youth Climate Coalition and was the 2015 Australian Geographic Society Young Conservationist of the Year.

The 22-year-old is the founder and director of Seed, a "young, black and powerful" network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people fighting for "a just and sustainable future ... powered by renewable energy."

"We look at climate change with a focus on energy," Ms Telford said, "looking at coal and gas, how we need to transition our energy systems and our economies from a reliance on fossil fuels to systems that can be powered by the sun and the rain."

Seed has connected Indigenous youth from around Australia, working to campaign against coal seam gas, mining, and calling on the Australian government to phase out fossil fuel subsidies.

"For myself in Australia, I often look to different stories from overseas, particularly around the US and Canada where indigenous communities are sick of waiting around, sick of promises made by governments and are standing up and building solutions themselves."

It was Ms Telford's interest in First Nations people around the world that led her to Joseph White-Eyes of South Dakota, more than 13,500 kilometres from her home of Kingscliff.

At only 20, Joseph White-Eyes has already been campaigning on behalf of his own indigenous community, the Lakota people, for six years.

He was among indigenous representatives to set up teepees in front of the White House in Washington DC in 2014, to protest the Keystone XL Pipeline, an oil pipeline system that runs from Canada to the United States.

"When you have the indigenous and the youth as a whole or as one, it really opens it up to new ideas about keeping your land and your culture," Mr White-Eyes said.

On his most recent visit to Australia Mr White-Eyes was part of a one-day blockade which stopped any coal from going in or out of the world's largest coal port in Newcastle, on the north coast of New South Wales, Australia.

"I do travel a lot and when I do, I visit the indigenous communities. With the indigenous people I don't feel like I'm in a whole other culture," Mr White-Eyes said.

"The Aboriginal people of Australia and the indigenous of North America, we've been exchanging different perspectives about how to save the environment as well as preserving our culture."

Culture is central to Mr White-Eyes' work with the Indigenous Environmental Network, an alliance of grassroots Indigenous groups in the US, working to address environmental and economic justice issues.

He said he only had to look back at his "culture and coming of age ceremonies" to understand his responsibility in the fight for climate justice.

"We have a war chief back home, his name is Crazy Horse. Before he died, in the 1800s, he created a prophecy. He called it the seventh generation. Me, I'm part of that seventh generation."

The prophecy pointed to a change at the arrival of the seventh generation, when cultural and environmental revitalisation would restore the earth.

"I've shared this with the First Nations people from Australia and I've noticed the same exact thing. The youth are leading this and we are bringing back our identity, our culture and restoring balance within the environment."

While it is the cultural messages and traditions that connect First Peoples around the world, Ms Telford believes it is also the systemic struggles that communities have faced that bring them together.

"The impacts of colonial destruction of our land, genocide and the ongoing impacts of colonisation, we share a lot. We are the ones being hit first and worst by climate change," she said.

"Sometimes I have to remind myself that we live in a world where there isn't much value placed on Indigenous people, or people of colour, I guess maybe the tables would be turned if other communities were facing the direct impacts of climate change."

While she has, so far, committed her life to conservation, Ms Telford said she would never wear the label "conservationist".

"I just don't identify with the term conservationist. I identify as a young Aboriginal woman and to me, just the fact that I'm Aboriginal [drives] my cultural responsibility to look after the land. So whether you call that a conservationist, or environmentalist, well, it's different for everyone."

<http://www.smh.com.au/world/impact-journalism-day-global-indigenous-youth-taking-the-planet-it-its-hands-20160513-goulb3.html>

June 26, 2016

Baltimore archbishop: Addressing climate change is a 'moral imperative'

By William E. Lori
The Baltimore Sun

One year ago this spring, [Pope Francis](#) released his landmark encyclical letter on ecology, [Laudato Sí](#), which called upon all of us to serve as diligent stewards of creation. Pope Francis delivered this message with great urgency — and with good reason. Climate change is already having severe impacts around the world that prevent some people, especially the poor and vulnerable, from enjoying the goods of creation, which God intends for everyone. If we fail to take action, we ignore our moral obligation to protect human life, prevent suffering, care for the poor and leave behind a safe world for future generations.

One year after *Laudato Sí*, issued on May 24, 2015, I am concerned that our country has yet to fully reckon with this powerful message. While covering a host of ecological issues, Pope Francis points to the deepest cause of our societal problems: our disconnection from one another. We see this disconnection clearly in the issue of climate change: While the seas rise and diseases spread in a warming climate, we must remember that we share a common home and our lives are intertwined. Drought, water scarcity and violent conflict — whether here or abroad — affect people everywhere. In the words of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., "Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." Pope Francis gives us the moral and spiritual framework to realize our interconnectedness and to do right by our sisters and brothers around the world and for future generations.

Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment echoes a long Christian tradition concerned with protecting creation, making him the latest such moral leader to point out that care for creation is deeply connected to the protection of human life. Precious lives are being lost already. Climate change is not a problem for the distant future — the World Health Organization estimates that climate change already causes more than 150,000 deaths annually through greater heat stress, malnutrition and spread of diseases.

My hope is that a year after the Pope's encyclical, we may hear Pope Francis' message anew and take inspiration from the individual and local actions that Catholics and other people of faith are already taking.

Here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, we have taken new strides to responsibly care for our common home. In December, we entered into a power purchase agreement that will supply 20 percent of the archdiocese's energy needs with solar power. This energy will come from over 17,000 solar photovoltaic panels in Harford County. The new solar panel system will allow our archdiocese to manage our energy costs and devote more funding to ministries. Just as importantly, it will also reduce our environmental impact and put into practice the values of *Laudato Sí*. Catholic schools throughout the archdiocese teach sustainability and conservation in their curricula and nearly two dozen have received the "Green School" designation from the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education. And many Catholic parishes

are engaged in practices from community gardens and management of stormwater runoff to energy conserving initiatives and use of "green" eco-friendly materials in building projects.

We Catholics still have more work to do, but the shift toward more environmentally conscious initiatives is well underway. I have seen firsthand how a tangible action, like a parish going solar, has a compounding effect: The solar panels are a wonderful conversation-starter and an invitation to greater reflection for each of us to discern how to better care for the gifts and resources we have received from God.

Our individual and local actions are critically important, but also ultimately insufficient given the immense urgency of climate change. We need to come together as a country to do the big things that we cannot do as individuals. For many years, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has urged our national leaders to address climate change. Riding the wave of *Laudato Si'*, we bishops became even more vocal this past year. Leading bishops called for strong national standards on carbon pollution from power plants, such as through the Clean Power Plan. Our leading bishops also urged Congress to allocate money through the Green Climate Fund to assist poor countries struggling to adapt to climate disruptions like water scarcity and crop failure.

Climate change is not an issue that is decades away; it is affecting us right now. And addressing climate change is a moral imperative for all of us. How well we uphold our obligation affects our brothers and sisters across the globe and will have enormous consequences for the health and safety of our children and grandchildren. With immense impacts facing our country and the world, climate change deserves a more prominent place in our national conversation.

[William E. Lori](mailto:communications@archbalt.org) is Archbishop of Baltimore. He can be reached at communications@archbalt.org.

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/oped/bs-ed-encyclical-anniversary-20160625-story.html>

June 27, 2016

Sisters change lives for waste pickers of central India

By Saji Thomas
Global Sisters Report

*Global Sisters Report is publishing a special series about how trash is managed in the world and how sisters are helping people affected by landfills. We start this project to mark the one-year anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, about climate change, pollution and waste, which warns that: "The Earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth."*

Sarika Dhamke was only 10 when the onus of looking after her seven-member family fell on her shoulders.

Her mother, the family's only breadwinner, had fallen ill, and Dhamke, being the eldest of three girls and two boys, had to take up the challenge.

The only apparent option for the illiterate, untrained girl was to join hordes of slum children who scavenged in the streets and landfills of Indore, a central Indian city of 1.5 million.

That was 12 years ago. Now Dhamke owns a three-room house in the same slum where she grew up in a tiny hut. A year ago, she married a truck driver; one of her younger sisters also was married, and the youngest siblings now attend school.

"What I am today is because of the sisters. They helped me save money and get a proper price for the waste materials I collected. They also trained me to lead a better life," Dhamke told *Global Sisters Report* as she squatted with her siblings in the front room of her 350-square-foot house.

Dhamke is among some 2,000 women in the Indore slum who credit Catholic nuns for the drastic changes in their lives.

The nuns work in the Jan Vikas (People's Development) Society, a church social service center in the commercial capital of Madhya Pradesh state. Dhamke recalls that, after her mother fell ill, she was forced to do something to feed the family. "My father was an alcoholic who never bothered about us," she says.

She had seen her mother collecting discarded items — plastics, metals, wires, glass bottles, paper — from roadsides, dumping grounds and other places. "Since waste collection does not require any skill and training, I started to do it," she says.

Unlike other waste pickers who wear tattered and soiled clothes, Dhamke dresses in clean, colorful saris with a matching blouse whenever she is off work. "The nuns also taught me the value of cleanliness and hygiene," explains the woman, who works independently.

The Jan Vikas Society labors among 10,000 people living in 35 of the 559 officially recognized shantytowns of Indore. It was started by Divine Word Fr. George Payattikattu in 2001 as part of his order's decision to serve the people living poorly in urban areas. Before that, the Divine Word priests had mostly worked in rural areas.

Payattikattu says their field studies convinced them that waste pickers in the city were mostly women who were exploited in various ways. "Even though they are doing a great service to society by clearing waste, they are treated as outcasts or untouchables," the priest laments.

Because priests had limitations in working with women in India's conservative society, Payattikattu approached Augustinian Sr. Julia Thundathil, a social worker, to help him in the

mission. The nun began to interact with the waste pickers soon after she joined the church center in May 2002.

"When I first met them, they were very hesitant to even talk as they suspected we were there for converting them," recalls Thundathil.

Madhya Pradesh is one of the Indian states that consider religious conversion a criminal offense.

As her traditional approach to influence the waste pickers failed, she decided to become one of them. For over a year she worked as a scavenger, going to the waste pile and "doing everything that they did," Thundathil told *GSR*. She learned that waste pickers leave home around 4 a.m., collect garbage until noon and then go sell it in a scrap shop.

"I also followed their schedule, just like one of them," she says. Asked how she coped with the stench and filth of landfills, she says, "When you work for Christ, no difficulty can stop you from achieving your target," adding, "I became a rag picker for Christ and help his people."

She says street dogs and pigs often attack the women while they are working. The workers also suffer needle pricks and other dangers because people do not separate wastes before dumping them into garbage bins.

Thundathil says her experience as a scrap collector helped her gain "immense insight" into the women's lives.

Their main problem is their alcoholic husbands, who physically assault them, she says. "The husbands do not do any work and cling to their wives like leeches," the nun says, and adds, "It was really disgusting and painful to listen to their stories."

When Thundathil started working among waste pickers, they earned an average 30 to 50 rupees a day (U.S. 65 cents to \$1.10). The husbands commonly snatched up half the money for drinks, and any resistance met with a thrashing.

Moreover, the scrap dealers underpaid the women, who were illiterate.

Payattikattu said Thundathil took the initiative to start a financial self-help group and a cooperative society for the women in 2004. The members included waste pickers and domestic workers who lived in the slums.

"We wanted to bring value to their life, bringing qualitative changes in their lives," the priest says.

With the help of the nuns, the center educated the women about separating the garbage according to its commercial value. This practice helped improve their earnings.

"There are 16 varieties of plastics, and their prices vary from 2 rupees to 20 rupees a kilogram," the priest explains.

Enterprising women such as Dhamke now earn more than 300 rupees (about \$4.50) a day. Thundathil says the women found the cooperative society to be a big boon for them as they began to save up to 5 rupees from each day's income. This helped them avoid moneylenders, who charged exorbitant interest for loans. The society charged only 1 percent interest for money the women borrowed whenever they were in need.

All this allayed the slum dwellers' misgivings about the Catholic priests and nuns. "They started believing that we were there for their welfare and not conversion," Thundathil says.

Dhamke says she managed to build her house with a loan from the cooperative society and other savings.

To circumvent swindling by dealers, the church center opened two garbage shops for the women. But it had to close them after scrap dealers complained, Payattikattu recalls. However, the initiative to train the women to sort better prompted the scrap dealers to pay them three or four times more than before.

The center has pressed civic authorities to issue identification cards to waste pickers to protect them from unwanted harassment from police and local people. Divine Word Fr. Roy Thomas, director of Jan Vikas, says the police first suspect the slum dwellers whenever a theft takes place in the city.

After ensuring economic stability for the women waste pickers, the center began training them in health and hygiene and conducted awareness classes on HIV/AIDS.

For young people, the center offers English language classes, introduction to computer use, tailoring and embroidery, and several other courses.

In 2015, the center turned its attention to those working in landfill areas in the city. Thomas says women working in landfills do not come in direct contact with the waste pickers who work on demarcated roads. The work is the same, but it's easier not to have to roam the city streets looking for waste and risking unwanted attention, he says.

More than 590,000 people live in 114,000 slum households in Indore, according to the 2011 national census. Every day the city generates about 700 tons of waste, which is transported by trucks and dumped at the landfill at the city's outskirts.

Sr. Sushila Toppo, an Our Lady of the Garden sister, began working among women in landfill areas a year ago. "They are more comfortable than those on the roadside, in terms of work and earning," the 38-year-old nun told *GSR*. Toppo and Thomas estimate the landfill covers about 500 acres of land in Indore.

One of the women working in the landfill area is Pinki Goswami, a widow. "I opted for this work after my husband's death three years ago," says the 25-year-old mother of three.

She is happy now because she can earn more and without reporting to a boss. She had first worked as a domestic. "I had struggled to support my family as I could hardly earn even 2,000 rupees a month," she recalls. Now, she takes home an average 500 rupees a day (\$7.45).

Toppo also organizes occasional medical check-ups camps for Goswami and other women, taking care not to disturb their work.

Another worker, Maya Prajapati, says scavenging in landfills is safe for widows like her. "We get paid for the work we do. We are accountable to ourselves. We have work all the time in all the seasons," says the 30-year-old mother who wants to send her two children to school.

Toppo says Prajapati is an exception. "Most rag pickers don't send their children to school as most of them are illiterate." The prime objective of most women is to eke out a living for their family. "They are not bothered about anything else," she says.

However, the nuns want the women and their children to join skill development and awareness programs to better their lives.

Toppo's efforts seem to have succeeded. Kiran Gadwal, a waster picker at the landfill, said the nun visits them often and treats them with compassion.

"The landfill is a place where nobody likes to come. It is dirty and stinking. But the sister keeps visiting us and is very warm and friendly," says the 30-year-old mother of five children. She says people always looked down on them.

Kaushalya Bakawala, another landfill worker, says before joining Jan Vikas they had led a primitive life with no knowledge about the world outside the garbage cans. "But now things have changed," she says.

The 46-year-old mother of five says their association with the church center has emboldened them to oppose those trying to oppress them.

"I was very shy before coming into contact with the nuns, but now I do not fear to go to the police station or meet local leaders," she says.

<http://globalsistersreport.org/news/ministry/sisters-change-lives-waste-pickers-central-india-40576>

June 27, 2016

F&ES Faculty Receives Award in Iran Recognizing Work in Religion and Ecology

By Timothy Brown
Yale School Forestry & Environmental Studies

American media often portrays Iran, a nation of roughly 78 million, as a dangerous threat not only to the region, but also to the United States and other western countries.

But according to **Mary Evelyn Tucker**, a senior lecturer and research scholar at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies (F&ES) and the Yale Divinity School (YDS) many Iranians are more concerned about their deteriorating environment than terrorism. And with the lifting of sanctions, Iran is reaching out to join the international community, she observes.

In late April, Tucker and her husband **John Grim**, also a senior lecturer and research scholar at F&ES, travelled to Tehran for the “Second International Seminar on Religion, Culture, and Environment: Promoting Intercultural Dialogue for Sustainable Development”. The two-day conference – the third that Tucker and Grim have attended at the invitation of the Iranian government – featured discussions by international scholars, environmentalists, religious leaders, and public officials on the roles of religion and culture to help achieve sustainable development goals.

Tucker, who co-directs the [Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale](#) with Grim, was also presented with a special award from the Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, recognizing her “efforts and achievements in preserving the essence of life and the global environment.”

During a recent interview, Tucker discussed the historic conference, her impressions of Iran, and the role of religion in promoting social and environmental change.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Q: Tell me about the origins of this conference.

MARY EVELYN TUCKER: John and I went to Iran in June 2001 and May 2005 at the invitation of the Iranian government – the Islamic Republic of Iran – whose [then] President Mohammad Khatami recognized that religion, culture, and values can make a huge difference for environmental attitudes, behavior, change, and solutions. The first two conferences involved the Iranian Environmental Protection Organization and UNEP [United Nations Environment Programme], while this one also included UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization]. Earlier, President Khatami called for a Dialogue of Civilizations (that was endorsed by the United Nations) as a means of achieving a peaceful and sustainable future. At the heart of these conferences was this spirit of cultural dialogue for a flourishing of the planet and a recognition that we cannot achieve this without developing a sense of a shared future.

There’s also a real personal element here – namely the efforts of Dr. Masoumeh Ebtekar, Iran’s Vice President and Director of the Environmental Protection Organization under Khatami and Rouhani. She’s been a great inspiration for these conferences because she brings both scientific understanding and ethical valuing of nature. She and many others in this Islamic culture have a deep appreciation for the beauty and complexity of ecosystems and biodiversity.

Q: Our media often portrays Iran as defiant and dangerous, but you're suggesting that Iran is reaching out and wants to be a part of the world community. In what ways did this conference illuminate this other side of Iran?

TUCKER: All of these conferences are a great education for us and that's why we go. The biggest learning for us was seeing the reaching out of the Iranian government, which is why cross-cultural exchange is one of the most important things for grounding a sustainable future. We have to ground it in respect for different cultures and difference, and yet find our common ground. And that's the promise of dialogue among the various world religions. We're not trying to deny that religions have their problems. But we have also seen their ability to affect social and environmental change. The promise with a conference like this is that we can integrate the future of humans and the planet in new and fresh ways through the lens of culture.

Q: How do you respond to critics of religion who say we simply need more and better science to create a sustainable society?

TUCKER: The empirical method of science is to be celebrated. This is how we have become aware of environmental problems. But when it becomes the only way we view nature, it has limitations. There are other ways of knowing, namely the humanities - the arts, literature, history, philosophy, and religion - where people over the centuries have been inspired about non-quantifiable aspects of life and what sustains us. It's why we need to affirm multiple ways of knowing nature. This is the promise of environmental humanities, for example.

Scientists in the Ecological Society of America [ESA], and in many other such groups, realize we need the humanities component. We can't afford to separate sciences and humanities. We have to honor this diversity of knowledge. Just as we value biodiversity so should we appreciate cultural diversity, which is essential to our shared future.

Q: Let's talk about the award you received at the conference. Did you know you about this recognition ahead of time?

TUCKER: No. They had already given this same high-level government award to Achim Steiner, the UNEP director, the day before, and they also gave it to an Iranian scholar of Islam and ecology. And then I heard my name being called from the stage. I was really stunned. Flabbergasted. But I think, again, it's this reaching out of Ebtekar and her colleagues to say, "You and John have created a body of work on world religions and ecology that we value, too."

Q: The thing that strikes me about the wording in this award is that it's so sincere. It's easy to intellectualize these issues, but this award really speaks directly from the heart, from the human experience.

TUCKER: Yes, that is exactly how I felt. It's heart to heart. It is saying, "How do we speak about the spiritual impact of nature, without being rhetorically religious, or pietistic, or provincial?" Every culture, every religion, has some recognition of that. And so one of the striking things about this award is that they composed it through the lens of their cultural and

religious sensibilities. It strikes a chord that's not provincial, but has a more universal appeal. It rises above a particular tradition into this realization: we're part of the Earth - something vast, complex, and truly awe inspiring.

Q: The award describes our shared morality to preserve and protect all life. Not exactly the language one would expect in an award signed by the Iranian president.

TUCKER: Yes, this call for all humans to protect the Earth community is part of the Islamic tradition. Yet we misunderstand Islam. I taught world religions for 15 years at Bucknell University before coming to F&ES. Every time I got to Islam - and these were packed classes - I would say, "Okay, what are your conventional ideas? Your stereotypes?" and we would fill the blackboard.

The misapprehensions about this tradition are massive. I don't want to minimize the tremendous problems of the distortion of a religion into violence and fundamentalism. But we need to open the doors and see what's also compelling for Muslims who are drawing on their tradition with genuine concern for the future of the planet.

Q: When you first told me you were going to Iran, I wondered, "Aren't you scared to go?" which shows how I, too, have bought into this message of fear that all Iranians hate and want to harm Americans.

TUCKER: That's many people's reaction - my family, friends, colleagues. It's very widespread. This is why we have to keep coming back to a dialogue of civilizations, not a clash; getting beyond stereotypes to a deeper understanding; being realistic and pragmatic with awareness of the promise and problems of religion and culture. All of these go together. And that's the nature of change; we're living amidst many creative and destructive forces. We need to find the positive forces for change within the world religions. That is what the Papal Encyclical is doing, for example. And that is what I spoke about at the conference - the Pope's call for an "integral ecology".

Q: You were there almost a year after the nuclear agreement was signed. What's your sense of the opportunities that it's going to bring the Iranian people?

TUCKER: Half the population of Iran is 35 and younger. They're yearning for a chance to make a living, have a family and provide education for their children - just what most people around the world want. The promise of change and new opportunities is enormous for these young people, even with the naysayers about the nuclear agreement in both the US and Iran.

The question is how can we open doors for their creativity - toward new energy solutions and technologies along with new environmental values and artistic expressions. The release of this creativity will ground these changes in something deeper for the human. All of this is on the horizon in exciting ways. And the Iranian people are eager to make their contribution to a sustainable future. Let's hope we can partner with them in this goal!

View photos here:

<http://environment.yale.edu/news/article/iran-award-religion-and-ecology/>

June 28, 2016

Religious scholars recommend ways to combat climate change

Contemporary environmental malpractices are religiously prohibited, say the scholars

By Menan Khater
Daily News Egypt

In the 41st round of the Cairo Climate Talks, religious scholars from different backgrounds tried to connect the dots between Islam, Christianity, and taking care of the environment in Egypt, in light of global climate change movements.

The panel discussion brought together professor of English literature at Azhar University Salah El-Nefeily, pastor of the cavern church in old Cairo Angelos Guirguis, and pastor of the evangelical community in Cairo Stephan El-Karsheh.

The discussion aimed to bring a new perspective to climate change talks by trying to link human environmental behaviour to religious references. However, the panellists mainly highlighted the fact that preaching alone can never be enough to develop more environmentally friendly behaviour and hence, avoid climate change effects. They stated that there needs to be a more integrated strategy which involves legislative efforts, mechanisms to enforce it, in addition to education, and political changes.

According to El-Nefeily, the emerging crime of illegal trade of wildlife, which has been widely criticised especially in Africa, is already prohibited in Islam. "It is not allowed to kill animals just for the fun of it. Only for the need of food," he said, citing a prophet saying.

In 2015, United Nations member states adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, which include specific targets to end poaching. The General Assembly also unanimously adopted a resolution to tackle illicit trafficking in wildlife.

UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon said on World Wildlife Day in March that human activities pose the main threat to wildlife.

There are several other behaviours towards nature that were recommended by Prophet Muhammad that people need to be reminded of, according to El-Nefeily. These include taking initiative to remove harm from the street, and generally consider the environment in daily activities.

However, he said the government should apply laws and fines, and put them into effect. “If we do not have applicable laws, then it does not mean anything,” he said.

On the other hand, Guirguis identified obstacles that make it harder to incentivise individuals to adopt those environmental measures.

“Individuals only take care of their belongings, cleaning their gardens, and their homes, but they do not care if they have clean streets or not,” he said. This is not an act against religious manners in Christianity, according to Guirguis, but a result of alienation that emerged over the past years from individuals towards society.

“People simply do not feel that the country is theirs anymore. It is not only a religious problem, but also a political one,” he said.

He recommended to outline more solid strategies when it comes to protecting the environment in Egypt. “Our main issue in Egypt is that we always have a broad view of things,” he said.

“We acknowledge the need to clean the streets, for example, but we never mention how exactly and where the waste shall go and how this process shall be monitored. All initiatives in this direction are simply doomed without clear strategies, no matter how much we preach about it,” he concluded.

Meanwhile, El-Karsheh highlighted a connection between the ecological movement and poverty movements. On the local level, he suggested that poverty is a big issue when it comes to taking care of the environment in Egypt. He claims that poor people are more constrained to take certain environmental measures, which was criticised by other panellists who disagreed.

However, Al-Karsheh noted that randomly building houses on agricultural land is an example to his suggestion that some people cannot give up their houses in order to preserve the environment. Other panellists disagreed, saying that this is linked to education, not poverty, referring to people at higher standards who are often seen littering garbage from their cars.

In 2015, Pope Francis published an encyclical on the environment. This was the first Papal encyclical of its kind to tackle this issue. In it, Francis highlighted significant ecological problems in the natural environment, and in the human sphere.

He also recommended that the Church needs to increase its efforts in this regard and to engage people in this cause.

2015 was the warmest year in history, with a global rise in temperature of 1 C, according to a report released by the United Nations World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) in March. This change was attributed to human industrial and environmental malpractices.

<http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2016/06/28/religious-scholars-recommend-ways-combat-climate-change/>
