

INTERFAITH RAINFOREST INITIATIVE

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE INAUGURAL MEETINGS

19-21 JUNE 2017, OSLO

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative was launched at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo, Norway, on 19 June 2017. The multi-faith initiative brings moral attention and spiritual commitment to ending tropical deforestation and protecting the planet's rainforests. In a first-of-its-kind summit, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu and Taoist religious leaders joined forces with indigenous peoples from Brazil, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Meso-America and Peru to make the protection of rainforests an ethical priority for the world's faith communities.

RAINFORESTS WORKSHOP

The summit began with a workshop by leading climate, rainforest and human rights experts on, among other things, the primary drivers of global deforestation, the importance of tropical rainforests to addressing climate change and achieving poverty reduction goals, the role that tropical rainforests play in regulating global rainfall patterns, the multi-sector coalition of governments, businesses, NGOs and intergovernmental organizations already working to protect rainforests, the leadership of indigenous peoples in protecting tropical rainforests, and the links between rights to communal lands, territories and natural resources and reduced rates of deforestation, climate change mitigation and sustainable livelihoods.

HIGH-LEVEL LAUNCH

The initiative was launched at the Nobel Peace Center in the presence of His Majesty King Harald V of Norway in an event hosted by His Excellency Vidar Helgesen, Norway's Minister of Climate and Environment and featuring high-level statements by religious and faith leaders on the ethical imperative of safeguarding rainforests. The launch featured an afternoon of panel discussions on creating an interfaith action agenda to protect rainforests, the critical role of indigenous peoples and forest communities in safeguarding rainforests, and faith-forest action in rainforest countries.

PLANNING MEETING AND JOINT STATEMENT

The launch was followed by a two-day planning meeting to establish priority actions, activities and milestones for the initiative. Workshop sessions focused on defining elements of a shared action agenda, mobilizing within individual faith communities, implementation in priority rainforest countries and building a high-impact interfaith alliance. Among the key outcomes of the meeting was a statement committing participants to the formation of an “international, multi-faith rainforest alliance” that will rally spiritual and religious communities to act for the protection of rainforests and the rights of the indigenous peoples who safeguard them.

KEY AREAS OF AGREEMENT

At the meeting, there was clear convergence on a number of key issues. Attendees agreed that ending deforestation is an environmental and social justice priority, and that people of faith have a moral, ethical and spiritual responsibility that compels them to advocate for the protection of rainforests and their inhabitants and guardians. It was acknowledged that each faith contains a spiritual basis that affirms a solidarity with life and creation, and that bringing these various worldviews into dialogue and around a shared action agenda was an achievable and potentially transformative step. Religious leaders also strongly embraced the urgent need to “protect the protectors”. A clear understanding was reached amongst religious and faith leaders that ensuring the rights, tenure security and overall safety of indigenous peoples and forest communities is a necessary prerequisite for the long-term protection of rainforests. Participants also acknowledged that a primary driver of rainforest destruction is the unsustainable consumption patterns and diets of western countries.

Consensus was reached that there is a need to bring the science on rainforests and climate change to faith networks – that bridging the gap between scientific and spiritual communities holds tremendous potential for grassroots mobilization, exerting policy influence and bringing about a change in consciousness about the multiple values of rainforests. Religious and faith leaders committed to working through their institutions, networks and communities to make the science on rainforests available to their followers in a way that is accessible. There was also agreement that science alone is not sufficient to ensure widespread religious action to protect rainforests. Faith and spiritual communities and their leaders need training, networking, leadership development, community organizing and campaign coordination to enable them to put their beliefs into action.

Attendees agreed that religious and faith communities can add substantial value to the existing coalition of indigenous peoples, NGOs, and forward-looking governments and businesses working on rainforest protection, both by articulating and embodying a moral voice within rainforest policy debates and by utilizing the considerable cultural influence and widespread institutional presence that these religious and spiritual communities have. Those present expressed a clear willingness to join that coalition – at local, national and global levels – to bring the moral and ethical argument for protecting rainforests to bear and to put pressure on governments, companies and industries that pursue policies that threaten rainforests and the people who live in them. Clear agreement was reached that the initiative had potential to be a high-impact platform for public engagement and communication, dialogue and learning, advocacy and policy influence, and on-the-ground action.

NEXT STEPS AND PARTNERSHIP

The initiative will proceed on both global and national tracks, with work plans and priority activities being developed over the coming weeks. Global work will focus on the high-level mobilization of religious and spiritual leaders, the development of a faith-forests communications campaign, strategic interventions in relevant policymaking forums and a series of events that is expected to culminate in a global interfaith rainforests summit, and strategic coordination of national-level work. National work planning will include development of interfaith and indigenous peoples' networks, leadership training and dialogue in priority rainforest countries, ensuring enhanced capacity among religious and faith communities to advocate for policies, regulations, and practices that protect rainforests and the rights of indigenous peoples and forest communities.

The inaugural meeting of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative was organized by Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI), Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, GreenFaith, Parliament of the World's Religions, Religions for Peace, REIL Network and the World Council of Churches. The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative originated from a meeting between NICFI, RFN and REIL Network in November 2016.

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is an open partnership that will welcome contributions and ownership by all organizations, institutions and individuals of good faith and conscience that are

committed to the protection, restoration and sustainable management of rainforests.

The launch of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative received coverage in 66 articles by media outlets in 16 countries. The webcast of the launch event was also livestreamed by viewers in 32 countries.

For more information on the initiative, please contact Maryka Paquette at maryka.paquette@undp.org.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

KEY DOCUMENTS

Press Release

Full Media Coverage

Programme of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative Launch Event

Communiqué from Participants in the Inaugural Meeting of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, Oslo

List of Participants

One-page Concept Note

VIDEOS

Video of the full Interfaith Rainforest Initiative Launch Event

Recorded Presentation: "Why Forests, Why Now?" by Frances Seymour, NICFI Offices, Oslo

Recorded Presentation: "The Future Climate of Amazonia" by Antonio Donato Nobre, NICFI Offices, Oslo

Recorded Presentation: "Indigenous Peoples and Rainforest Protection" by Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, NICFI Offices, Oslo



Norwegian Ministry
of Climate and Environment

