

INTERFAITH RAINFOREST INITIATIVE

Tropical rainforests are unique and iconic elements of creation. They house one-half of the earth's species, provide indispensable services to humanity and bestow spiritual and emotional gifts, beauty and wonder. These forests are of exceptional cultural, practical and spiritual value, both for their traditional inhabitants and for the world community. They store billions of tons of carbon and provide food, water and livelihoods to more than 1.6 billion people around the world, making them crucial for achieving the Paris climate agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. But tropical rainforests are being decimated across the planet, deeply undermining global efforts on climate change, poverty eradication, food security, peace and human rights. There is still time to save the glorious rainforest, but urgent action is needed.

FAITH COMMUNITIES CAN HELP TURN THE TIDE

Tropical rainforests have become a powerful symbol of the exuberance of life on earth. They occupy a sacred place in many faiths, religions and spiritual traditions, including among indigenous peoples and residents of the world's tropical rainforests. There is a common thread binding religious traditions that recognizes that what we do to rainforests we do to ourselves. The world's faith communities, indigenous peoples and spiritual leaders may, by joining forces, have the potential to turn the tide on tropical deforestation. Together, they can leverage moral and spiritual authority, convey messages about the value of the rainforest as a unique part of creation, reach out to local people, civil society actors and authorities at all levels, and mobilize broad support for rainforest protection. Spiritual leaders and faith communities of the world have a great deal to offer – and much to learn from each other – in coming together to inspire action in defense of rainforests. It is time to bring the spiritual resources, moral authority and unparalleled influence of faith communities to bear in a unified way on rainforest protection.

AN INTERFAITH ALLIANCE FOR ACTION ON RAINFORESTS

Since its launch in 2007, the Government of Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI) has cooperated with international partners, governments in forest and donor countries and a broad range of non-governmental organizations to reduce tropical deforestation and forest degradation. Seeing the need to bring the religious, spiritual and ethical dimension more strongly into this work, NICFI and Rainforest Foundation Norway are working with a coalition of partners on an interfaith alliance to protect the world's tropical rainforests. In cooperation with the Parliament of the World's Religions, Religions for Peace, the REIL Network, and the World Council of Churches, and with implementation support by the United Nations Development Programme, the initiative is being designed to mobilize leaders from all religions, faiths and spiritual traditions – including indigenous peoples and forest communities – to forge a united action plan to protect, restore and sustainably manage tropical rainforests across the planet.

LAUNCH AND ROUNDTABLE

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative will be launched in Oslo on June 19th, 2017, followed by a two-day roundtable to jointly develop the initiative's concrete goals, action plans and milestones. This process is expected to lead to a global interfaith rainforest summit to be convened in Brazil in the second half of 2018. For more information on the initiative, please contact Maryka Paquette at maryka.paquette@undp.org