

Our Sacred Commitment

Skálholt

8 October 2020

High-level faith leaders, faith communities, and academics – recognising the triple threats of poverty and inequity, climate change and biodiversity loss – engaged in a global dialogue anchored at the historic cathedral of Skálholt in Iceland to discuss a coalition of hope, commitment and action.

From all corners of the globe we came together to hear the cry of Mother Earth. Religious institutions and faith communities have a long history in fostering sustainable development. Faiths cultivate values of compassion, community, and care for the most vulnerable. We shared our love, compassion, and belief that the Earth is sacred, and we are called to be keeper of this sacred trust given into our care.

We came together in this global dialogue from diverse backgrounds and experience and were moved by a deep sense of global consciousness, concern for our planet and a commitment to demonstrate leadership. We emerged with a shared resolve to mobilize around the protection of nature and our common home, and to working through the proposed Faith for Earth Coalition to turn our commitment into action.

We do so recognizing that religious communities and faith-based organizations have a unique and vital contribution to make to global efforts on environmental protection and ecosystem restoration building on a growing track-record of interfaith action for nature. Faith and spiritual values drive individual behaviour and personal choices and shape cultural values, social inclusion, and political engagement.

Recognising that there have been times when science and religion have been at odds, we commit ourselves to communicate spiritual insights informed by best available science. Harmony and balance between scientific and religious inquiry is essential for the advancement of humankind at this critical juncture. Local, traditional, and indigenous knowledge, wisdom and spirituality will continue to be an indispensable source of guidance. Efforts need to be made to cultivate synergies and mutual understanding between indigenous, religious, and scientific inquiry.

We recognise with profound concern scientific evidence on environmental degradation, climate change and biodiversity loss and the limited time available to achieve the deep transformation needed. The world's faith-based organizations have an essential place in relaying this science and rallying religious communities to act in defence of nature and environmental justice.

We have one common home. Global challenges faced by humankind are deeply interlinked and have a significant spiritual dimension. Appreciation for the spiritual nature of our being leads to a deeper sense of connectedness both with the natural world, of which humans are an organic part, and within the single human family. Humans have the responsibility to protect Earth's live-supporting systems to ensure a sustainable human civilization on which both social and economic capital rest.

Current extremes of wealth and poverty need to give way to greater equity and justice. Justice in all its dimensions is a fundamental prerequisite for lasting unity. Investment needs to be redirected away from extractive economic activity towards green, inclusive, just, and regenerative economic development.

We need a movement with roots and wings. Insights and experiences from elders can reinforce the vision, passion, and creativity of the young. Faith communities draw their power from the interplay of generations, firm grounding in local realities and sense of belonging to a global community. Recognising the challenge of patriarchy and the vital role of women as leaders in the environmental movement, we commit ourselves to ensuring that women are given access and opportunity to exercise full leadership roles.

The core environmental crisis is an ethical and moral issue. Responsible dietary choices moving towards plant-based diets and attention to the footprint of our consumption of energy and materials are an integral part of ethical stewardship of nature. Nature-based solutions, which are a win for livelihoods, climate, and biodiversity through protecting and restoring forests and other ecosystems need to be developed and scaled up. They offer an essential, reliable, and cost-effective way to address climate change and halt biodiversity loss.

This is a time of lament and a time of hope. We recognise what has been irreparably lost and confess that we are living off the inheritance of the generations to come. At the same time, we recognise the key role of faith communities as bearers of hope at a time when the environmental movement suffers from despair, which may lead to apathy. We will demonstrate bold leadership and catalyse transformation at all levels. Through hope, faith, empathy, and reason we can build a better future.

The sudden emergence of COVID-19 changed the global outlook. The very health and future of humanity depends on our ability to act together not only with respect to pandemics but also in protecting the global ecosystems. We must seize the moment to build back better, protect and restore nature, reduce our exposure to deadly viruses, and the impacts of climate disruption.

People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership – these are woven together through the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals thus providing a framework for urgent action and a roadmap for faith communities to work together. We recognise that there is still much work remaining to translate that vision into in language accessible to people of faith in the local context.

Faith-based organizations around the world are committed to working across spiritual traditions and across sectors to take actions that protect and restore nature. We see it as a shared moral responsibility to contribute. The time has come for people of faith to work together for the planet given into our care.

The proposed Faith for Earth Coalition has a vision – in partnership with UNEP – to enable faith groups to promote action and influence policy choices at the local, national, regional and international levels. We encourage governments to come to an agreement at the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly in 2021 to turn that vision into reality. We stand ready to join hands with UNEP to turn this ground-breaking vision into a model for others to emulate.

We express our appreciation to the Government of Iceland, our Icelandic partners, Religions for Peace and the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (USA) for enabling this global exchange and resolve to disseminate our findings and channel our energy into focused and sustained action.

The Faith for Earth Conference was convened 5-8 October 2020 and used the historic Skálholt Cathedral in the South of Iceland as its global anchor from where high-level sessions were live-streamed. It achieved a global reach through online dialogues in five regions (Asia and Australia, Africa, Europe, North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean). The conference web site faithfornature.org provides a record of the proceedings, documentation, and conference outcomes.