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On 12<sup>th</sup> of February 2016, The Geneva Interfaith Forum on Climate Change, Environment and Human Rights organized a panel on:

“Ethical and Faith Perspectives of a Post COP21 Agenda”

It was snowing very heavily in Geneva that afternoon finally bringing a wintery atmosphere to the city. Even so over 20 highly committed people made it to the round table discussion! Ms. Nahida Sobhan, from the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh who has been working very closely on human rights and climate change at the council, was going to represent her country’s position on the agreement. But unfortunately, being sick, she was not able to make it to the panel and sent her apologies.

Guillermo Kerber of the Geneva Interfaith Forum / World Council of Churches was the moderator and introduced the panel by saying: The political agreement of COP21 was very much welcomed by the international community and was considered as a unique agreement which responded to the position of the most vulnerable people. However, there is a need to reflect on whether this COP21 agreement responded adequately to the needs of the people. There is also a question of how much the agreement will really tackle the seriousness of Climate Change. The discussion will cover the human rights perspective of the agreement and how the faith based organizations (FBO’s) respond to the Paris Agreement.



Mr Yves Lador of Earth Justice focused on Human Rights in the Paris Agreement and how things happened in Paris from the perspective of civil society and human rights organizations.

The Paris agreement was far from responding to the real challenge of Climate Change. However, it should not be considered as a failure.

Since COP Copenhagen the parties have failed to come to a multilateral agreement, now with events in Paris the work can go on. Thus, it can be considered as a success, one which provides a framework to work with together. This is an achievement, despite the weak content. One of the measures is the adoption of Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC’s) in decreasing CO2 emissions. This has become a joint instrument – a common instrument to work on together. The agreement targets below or well below 2°C, but with the INDC’s as they currently are we cannot reach this target. There are several elements accommodating

different progressive views, such as on the wording “mother earth” and 1.5°C, which for some states has become a source of legitimacy for action on their climate activities.

On the review mechanism, all states have to report on the implementation on their INDC's, although the emphasis is more on the process instead of the target. It still helps to see who does what. It's a state mechanism, which will provide a certain degree of transparency.

Some interesting language in the Paris Agreement was as follows : In the preamble: reference on human rights and just transition, although there were efforts to put it in the operative paragraphs. And in the operative paragraph: gender equality, and indigenous people. Both can be used as referencing the work on human rights.

Ms Shyami Puvimanasinghe of the OHCHR, right to development section, gave her insights on the links between the post COP21, Human Rights and Sustainable Development agenda in relation to ethics and spirituality.

The role and involvement of civil society organizations in Paris should be recognized. In March 2016, during the HR Council, the president of Kiribati emphasized how Climate Change impacts on all human beings, especially those who live in a vulnerable situation, including those in the pacific regions, women, fishermen etc. Mary Robinson also emphasised that Climate Change, human rights and the right to development should be seen together, along with peace and conflict, such as in the conflict surrounding the topic of energy.

The right to development has clear international, national and individual dimensions. The right to development is challenged by Climate Change. Not all people have fulfilled their basic needs so there is still need for development. There is inequality among people which is exacerbated by Climate Change. Now, the adoption of the SDG's emphasises the need for a just transition. However, this should be done through concrete actions. The Addis Ababa meeting on finance for development, the SDG's and the Paris Agreement should be looked at together and implemented together with a holistic vision.

We have to remember some basic principles of sustainability i.e. polluters pay, precautionary principles, intra and intergenerational justice and equity. In the SDG's there are the numbers 11, 12 and 13 goals which address environment and Climate Change. Similarly, the Paris Agreement also has the principles of CBDR (Common But Differentiated Responsibility) and international cooperation which should also be considered.

As regards ethics and spirituality, we know that these have a strong influence on the establishment of human rights. Similarly, they are important to the actions taken in implementing the agreement. There is a strong need to address the moral gap, as also referred to by the UDHR. For example, in the Laudato Si as well as in the statement of the World Council of Churches there is a continuous call to use ethics and spirituality to address Climate Change.

Br Moy Hitchen of Edmund Rice International : The participants were given a worksheet on “How I do measure up to COP21?” There are values which can be found in the Paris Agreement. These will be adopted in 2016. We need to see how we or our organization see the values but also how to take actions such as mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, providing education, training and public awareness about climate change, etc. However, some other values which were left out in Paris are : A right based approach to mitigation and adaptation, compensation by state and corporation, alternative visions of development, de-growth, earth Right (ecosystem, species and soil).

There are concrete things which can be done by each organization, such as:

- Live sustainably, review vision and mission, select and implement a new goal, reflect the value of the Paris agreement in a plan, review the world undergoing Climate Change and develop an advocacy plan, imagine a sustainable future, rehearse future scenarios in conversation, reward and celebrate the courageous decisions people make and call upon your tradition for the courage and imagination we need.

Ms Valeriane Bernard of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University spoke about the role of FBOs at COP21, the ethical and spiritual assessment of the Paris Agreement, and the role of the Interfaith Liaison Committee (ILC).

The role of FBO's: Prior to COP21 faith based organizations created an amazing faith based framework. They all called for responsible and ethical decisions through many campaigns and important declarations e.g.: The Catholic religion through the Pope's Laudate Si, which is an amazing work of analysis and spiritual views on today's world. ACT alliance brought a petition with 1,800 signatures by Catholics, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. To raise awareness climate pilgrims walked in over 20 countries, fasting for the climate in all the continents. In the WCC's campaign on divesting from fossil fuel, over 3 billion dollars were divested. There was also a Buddhist statement and a Muslim declaration.

The role of the Interfaith Liaison Committee: it came into existence as a request of the secretariat of the UNFCCC. A member of Brahma Kumaris, of the world Council of Churches and of the Buddhist network have been serving on the ILC. Its role has been to improve information sharing between the different FBO's engaged at COP, to map the different faith actors working on climate advocacy and education, to establish constant communication between the UNFCCC Secretariat and the FBO's through the ILC, the accompaniment and support of the religious hosts of the COPs, getting ready for the next COP, and fostering interfaith communication.

When giving an ethical and spiritual assessment of the Paris Agreement it can be seen as a spiritual miracle. Managing to have a political agreement as well as the fact that the agreement is on something substantial was a real miracle. Although it was not as good as we hoped, it was better than what we expected at one point.

The fact that states came to an agreement, despite the past continuous denial from the climate skeptics, means that the agreement has come up with a common target. And what we can read into this decision is that the states have taken on an ethical responsibility through having an agreement where the rights of people are recognized in the preamble, and the document also acknowledges the differences as expressed in the principle of CBDR. FBOs could help in increasing the **spiritual capacity of people** to cultivate resilience.

In conclusion however, the big spiritual gap is the will to act. There is a need to raise awareness. As human beings we are sick of the lack of awareness. The principle of law of love should be implemented. It is a spiritual law expressed in most religions and in the Laudato Si. There is a need for a conversion from technocracy to respect of nature. We need to change our ways, and it takes courage to speak out and do it. We need to change behavior, attitude, and life style... not do business as usual.