



FAITH AND ETHICAL BRIEFING OF COP23 AND PREPARATORY FOR COP24 Tuesday, 16 January 2018

Organised by:

- Geneva Interfaith Forum on Climate Change, Environment and Human Rights (GIF)
- Brahma Kumaris
- Franciscan International and World Council of Churches

Venue: Ecumenical Centre, Route des Morillons 1, 1218, Le GrandSaconnex, Geneva



First Part: Evaluation of COP23 from human rights and faith-based perspectives

Panellists:

- Mr. Isaiah Kipyegon Toroitich, ACT Alliance,
- Ms. Valériane Bernard, Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University,
- Mr. Benjamin Schachter, Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights,
- Mr. David Matthey-Doret, Indigenous Peoples' Centre for Documentation, research and information,
- Rev. Fletcher Harper, Green Faith (video message)
- Moderated by: Ms. Athena Peralta, World Council of Churches

Ms Peralta outlined the aims of the day:

- To share views on the contribution of faith-based organisations during COP23 and within the frame of implementation of the Paris Agreement;
- To discuss with the Fiji COP24 Presidency the contribution of faith-based organisations in the Talanoa Dialogue toward the effective implementation of the Paris Agreement;
- To coordinate faith-based organisations to prepare for the COP24 in Katowice, Poland in December 2018;
- To strengthen the link between climate negotiation in UNFCCC with the UN Human Rights mechanisms.

Mr. Isaiah Kipyegon Toroitich explained that Act Alliance is a large network of churches created in 2010 by the World Council of Churches and the Lutherans. The Alliance had high expectations of COP23, there had been many natural disasters in 2007 which might have concentrated minds. The Alliance wanted greater transparency in the implantation of the Paris decisions. The Alliance was very active in events and represented the voice of faith-based organisations. Their impressions were that Bonn was a missed opportunity regarding building the capacity of communities to thrive, and the concept of loss and damage not being accepted. On the positive side the Adaptation Fund formally linked to the Paris agreement was accepted, as was a 5-year work plan. Therefore, there were contradictions.

He said that, whilst interesting things were happening with civil society outside of the Bonn zone, it is clear we need to work on the failure of developed countries to honour their commitments. The role of faith-based organisations and leaders and the narrative they bring is still important, but our voices need to be louder to bring countries to their commitments.

Mr. Benjamin Schachter: Speaking as the focal point for Climate Change and Environmental issues at the OHCHR, Mr Schachter said that they had been disappointed by COP23 but in fact had not had high expectations. Maybe it is just human nature to procrastinate until a deadline approaches, and there is fear around Climate Change and Human Rights which needs to be dispelled. Still, the OHCHR held some effective events at COP23, civil events and high levels ones. They are pushing for human rights to be included in the Paris guidelines but only one reference to rights has been included. Other issues, like gender equality, are getting included but not human rights. Norway has been supportive and they hope to build on that. Civil society is playing an important role in climate legislation and litigation which pushes the work forwards. There is still much to do to include human rights into climate change measures. This is needed at COP24 and States need to prepare for that now.



Mr. David Matthey-Doret: The Indigenous Peoples' Centre provides technical support such as documentation and translation services and is not an advocacy organisation. Nevertheless, indigenous peoples' groups trust them and see them as a much-desired link to the UN. The framework has historically been hostile to indigenous people and they are still fearful that COP24 will not deliver but we all need to stand together to negotiate for them.

Rev. Fletcher Harper: Joining the meeting by video link, Rev. Harper said that, whilst advocacy is important, Green Faith is concentrating on behavioural change. They wish to have new behaviours scaled up and will concentrate on three household behaviours:

- 1) Home Energy
- 2) Diet, and moving to a plant-based diet
- 3) Transportation.

To make change sustainable they wish to:

- 1) Look for religious and spiritual leaders to commit to a sustainable lifestyle and demonstrate that publicly.
- 2) Provide /opportunities for religious communities to try out these behaviours, and have information on why it is important to make the changes e.g. cycling weekends, communal meals.
- 3) Provide narratives that religious communities can use to demonstrate their values
- 4) Find ways to upscale e.g. people mentoring others towards change.
- 5) High profile events at thousands of centres where leaders can demonstrate their commitment e.g. the Global Summit in California this year.



Ms. Valérie Bernard: Ms. Bernard noted the wide spectrum of people there representing faith-based organisations, all very active in different arenas. As faith-based organisations are not a 'constituency' they can keep changing shape and 'colours'. They can redefine and reinvent their roles in order to be as useful as possible.

She said that we are here today because we can gather together the vision and the voice that we want to push forward, that we need to get the UN to see and hear both in the climate change and the human rights arena especially in relation to the most vulnerable. There is also a need for a spiritual presence at COP as people get fearful and emotionally affected by hearing what is really happening in the world.



The Brahma Kumaris focus is on consciousness and awareness and as such they contribute through the events they organize in raising consciousness. Their view is that if we want to change action and activity and create a better world we really need to raise personal awareness. We can show people how even individuals can make a difference with the lifestyle they choose. By working on ethics and principles we can find common ground through our belief systems. On another level, the Brahma Kumaris work on

human rights and resilience. They also work to make people aware of the relationship we have with our inner and outer environment. They ask people what relationship they have and want to create between themselves and Mother Earth; in terms of energy and how they develop. Faith based organisations can provide a window to do this work. For this reason, the faith-based organisations have to continue to work together to achieve all of this.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Benjamin Schachter agreed with comments from the floor on the importance of our shared values being remembered and included in the negotiations, which is not happening enough at present. He has also seen how powerful it is when real people bring their experience and passion to the debate. On litigation, this is not a result of COP as it had started a while ago, but it is providing a useful hook on which to hang the link between human rights and climate change.

Isaiah Kipyegon Toroitich responded to questions from the floor by stressing the importance of equity. There is a need to recognise that we are not all equal in the sense that some countries bear a greater historical responsibility for climate damage and it is not charity to provide for the more vulnerable.

David Matthey-Doret also stressed the importance of spiritual values and explained how his organisation starts and ends sessions with a prayer. One also must demonstrate one's values – for example in the simple way of having a reusable water bottle not plastic to show people the link between values and action.

Valériane Bernard noted that faith organisations may not be specialists in technology or science, but they are so in terms of values. These traditional values are also the same values espoused in human rights language and are in fact human values. Religious groups cannot write their name on them, they belong to all humans. We need to engage with technology as have the Brahma Kumaris whose solar energy programme in India is world-leading. She felt that the word transition is a good one as it shows our desire to move forward – for which we need a vision of the future. And what future do we want? We don't want the least worst. We want the best, so how are we going to create that? This conversation is on our hands.

Second Part: Discussion on the expected role of faith-based organisations in the Talanoa dialogue toward the effective implementation of the Paris Agreement

Panellists:

- Mr. Yves Lador, Earthjustice and GeCCo,
- Ms. Chiarra Martinelli, CIDSE and
- Mr. Henri Grape, World Council of Churches.

The Permanent Mission of Fiji to the UN in Geneva was not able to come so they sent a memo.

It was Moderated by Mr. Budi Tjahjono, Franciscans International.

Mr Tjahjono: Mr Tjahjono welcomed everyone, introduced the panellists, then read out a message from the mission of Fiji, here is an extract:

“Religion and religious institutions play an integral and vital role in the lives of the majority of the world’s population. Religion often is a source for moral guidance among people who currently live in areas that are affected by climate change. Religious leaders can offer invaluable support and access to help mobilise responses. They work face-to-face, on a personal level in their local communities. And they are trusted and respected in areas where the local populations may not immediately cooperate with other groups. Interfaith cooperation is particularly important in Fiji, which is a multi-religious country where religious communities live side-by-side in the spirit of mutual respect and cooperation.”



Mr Lador felt that although agreement was made in Paris, the process is not delivering in several fields, neither locally, nationally nor in industry. We are all collectively speaking but not delivering. People say that business will provide solutions, but it is not true. 70% of companies do not have plans on sustainable development, never mind Climate Change planning, and much of the rest is greenwashing. We need

to follow the two tracks of food security and implementing the Paris agreement – getting the preamble into the implementation mechanism. And we need a lower target than 1.5 degrees as, at that level, many people will have their human rights denied. And if we cannot make 1.5 degrees some people will be sacrificed. How do we decide who will be sacrificed? Everyone is wondering how we can have the dialogue but it looks as if we won’t make it, though Fiji’s methodology coming from their indigenous culture is important here, as they are used to people coming to the table with a ‘hot potato’ subject.

Ms. Chiarra Martinelli: The Talanoa Dialogue is welcome symbolically and also because unlike other, more technical, talks it is inspired by people’s experience of trying to find common ground and compromise, and there should be no power games. The process reminds Ms Martinelli of the Pope’s inspiring call to creative dialogue in 2015. Her organisation would like to see the Talanoa Dialogue move us concretely towards achieving the goals, because she sees neither the sense of urgency nor the scale of the problem reflected around the table at the moment.

Afterwards we can build on the Talanoa Dialogue, she said. The role of the CIDSE is

- a) to denounce the big players who block progress and greenwash,
- b) continue to call for climate justice and be part of the voices calling for collective action towards a just transition, and
- c) bring the stories of those affected to all, including the public.

She said they need also to commit more to living by example, leading sustainable lifestyles, addressing overconsumption, and calling for social justice.

Mr. Henri Grape: Mr Grape preferred to enter into a discussion rather than speak at length, but noted that a major theme for him was the loss of trust and the need to rebuild it. He hoped Poland could be a part of that. We are all in this together after all.