



Eco Newsletter, February 2025, Issue 13

Interfaith and Climate Action

Editorial



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When I started serving at the UN in Geneva, representing the Brahma Kumaris in the arena of Human rights, I became acutely aware of the many violations and breaches of these rights there are in the world. To address these issues, we needed a group of strong, like-minded people and organisations to work together as allies. As the Brahma Kumaris are a spiritual organisation, we naturally turned to the oldest social structures within society, namely religions.

Consequently, the Geneva Interfaith Forum for Climate Change, Environment and Human Rights was formed. We started acting as a proactive group to move forward the topic of climate change and human rights, until we succeeded in obtaining a 'UN Special Mandate' and finally a 'Special Rapporteur', whose work it was to study climate change from a human rights angle.

At The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) there are many Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) who work very actively for the people affected by climate change at a humanitarian level, with innovative projects that help countries take the best possible course of action at the time of negotiations and so on. During the 2013 Conference of the Parties (COP) the Interfaith Liaison Committee (ILC) was established to support the informal gathering of faith-based organisations to facilitate dialogue and action. The ILC meets during the annual UN climate negotiations and regularly online, to collaborate on faith advocacy for climate ambition, embracing all the pillars of the UNFCCC and of the Paris Agreement. We also conduct webinars and draft statements to the COP delegates and presidency. For example, see the presentation of the COP29 Interfaith Call for Action at a press conference last November [here](#).

In this edition, the articles all bear testimony to the growing importance of the Interfaith contribution to the Climate Change movement. The Greenpeace article highlights that about 85% of the population on earth feel strongly that they belong to a religion or a faith. It is this ethical and moral voice that is most needed at the present time. Maureen Goodman, Programme Director of the Brahma Kumaris, UK, in her keynote address at the recent COP29 conference, stressed that faith provides a common ground for all members of the human family.

Certainly, after more than a decade of being involved in the Human Rights and Climate Change arenas at the UN, I have found that collaborating with different faiths and religions to advance important agendas like peace, climate change, development and the environment, has been hugely beneficial. Interfaith advocates protecting the earth, as our home, protecting our global family and the bringing of light and hope to the world. Sister Jayanti, Addtl Admin Head of the Brahma Kumaris, emphasised this objective in the panel discussion she took part in at the COP29 conference. Many of the panellists expressed how people of faith can nurture hope, and thereby encourage climate action within their communities.

It has been my experience through all of the work so far, that it is in working for a common agenda that we complement one another and gain in strength.



Valeriane Bernard,
Brahma Kumaris Representative to the UN, Geneva; Co-chair, Interfaith Liaison Committee

Meditation and Prayers for our Earth and COP Conferences



Four years ago, three unconnected people with different faith backgrounds and in different states of Australia were simultaneously thinking about creating a group of interested people to meditate/pray for the planet and its people. Then magically, they connected!

What arose from this connection was 'Meditations and Prayers for Our Earth and COP.' We meet online, via Zoom, once a week from the beginning of August to the beginning of each year's COP conference. During the conference itself the meditations and prayers happen daily.

Elaine Bowkett, Western Australian branch of Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC) is the organising force behind this initiative. This includes gathering and rostering guest speakers, following people up, networking for promotion, and sending out weekly reminders to participants. Bishop Philip Huggins, Board Member of ARRCC, Committee Member of Religions for Peace Australia and a member of the Interfaith Liaison Committee of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, has been the backbone of the project, with Rebecca Attwood from the Environment Group of The Brahma Kumaris, Australia also being a key supporter.

Each weekly session is 30 minutes long. A guest speaker from a faith group is welcomed and introduced. They then share their reflections, a meditation or prayer for our Earth and the COP conference. A gong signals the start and conclusion of 20 to 25 minutes of shared contemplative silence whereupon the host may reflect on the speaker's words and ask if others would like to share any thoughts. They then thank everyone for their attendance and

close the session.

This event has attracted more participation each year with 16 guest speakers from different faiths in Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia and Japan, and 8 to 20 participants attending each session over 16 weeks in 2024. Bishop Philip Huggins, in his closing remarks on our last day, thanked everyone for their commitment in attending the sessions and reminded us that “in the process of this we become friends”. It is a wonderful experience to see our circle of faith-based friends increasing each year and coming together as one to send power and support to our Earth and for meaningful outcomes of the COP conferences.

You can see recordings of all of the sessions [here](#).

Faith and Climate Change: A Powerful Connection



Have you ever considered the connection between faith and climate change? Is there even one? At COP29, held in November 2024 in Baku, Azerbaijan, the interconnection of these two important issues was up for discussion. In fact, this was the second year that there was a dedicated [Faith Pavilion](#), with a full daily program on offer throughout COP29.

What Do Faith Leaders Bring to the Climate Table?

So, what do faith leaders contribute to the climate negotiations? In her keynote address at the Faith Pavilion, Maureen Goodman, Programme Director for Brahma Kumaris, UK, spoke about how “The voice of faith is very relevant and important.” Faith communities can, and do, highlight the spiritual dimensions of climate change, advocate for climate justice, support compassionate and non-violent activism, and call for an awakening of conscience.

When we live from, and base our decisions on, our original core values we can create real and innovative solutions. Values, such as, generosity of spirit, harmony in diversity and a recognition of shared responsibility. The interconnectedness of all life calls for collective action, regardless of borders or beliefs.

One Human Family : One Planet Earth

Faith leaders remind us that we are one global family. They are the ones working on the ground with local communities. Also, all faith traditions teach us about right relationship and attitude towards Mother Earth.

One delegate [Margareta Koltai](#) shared: *"After the intense negotiations, returning to the interfaith circle gives me strength. In that space, we remember that we are one human family, connected not only to each other but to the life of Mother Earth."* These moments of reflection remind us of the strength found in unity, and the importance of supporting one another during this global crisis.

The Role of Faith in Daily Resilience

Another delegate shared that, *"Despair is not a strategy."* Being able to maintain our inner calm and hope is crucial in working toward solutions, without being overwhelmed by the chaos surrounding us. Faith plays an important role in this.

The daily programme at the Faith Pavillion began with a prayer or meditation. Reminding us, in the face of the growing number of natural disasters, of the importance of a daily practice to build up our inner resilience and adaptability. Prayer and meditation are powerful ways to do this, they help us to experience our inner resources of peace, love and wisdom.

Awakening Our Conscience: Moving From Fear to Love

Another way faith influences climate change decisions is by awakening consciences and reconnecting us to our true selves. We see an aligning of minds with hearts, a shift towards a more compassionate worldview, and a swing from fear-based decision making to love-based solutions. As our consciences awaken, so too does our capacity for change.

A New Energy for a Flourishing Earth

Now more than ever, the world needs an energy shift—one rooted in courage, clarity, and inner strength. Faith provides the tools to access these qualities, helping us to make decisions that are grounded in what is right. Together, we can create a flourishing Earth, guided by compassion, resilience, and unity.

Watch a recording of Maureen Goodman’s keynote address [here](#).

5 Reasons Why People of Faith are a Powerful Force in the Fight against Climate Change and Environmental Crises



A climate change march with interfaith participants in Vatican City in 2015. © Mat McDermott / GreenFaith / CC BY-NC-ND

Research has shown that over 5.8 billion people on our planet consider themselves to belong to a religious community. That means about 85% of the people on Earth identify with a religion.

Half of all schools and 40% of health facilities in some countries are owned or operated by faith groups, hence the importance of ensuring, as Ummah For Earth and many other groups are doing, that the training of faith leaders incorporates environmental issues and raises awareness of ecology in both theory and practice.

In addition, faith-related institutions own almost 8% of the total habitable land surface – and constitute the world’s third largest group of financial investors. The issue of finance is key: in the face of deregulated international finance driven by short-term profit, alternative models are gaining strength, like Islamic finance. Read [more](#).

Nurturing Transformative Hope Amongst Faith Communities



Left to Right: Dr Jim Stump, moderator, Dr Ben Richards, Rabbi Yonatan Neril, Sister Jayanti Kirpalani, Litara Ieremia-Allan.

At the COP29 conference last November, a panel of faith leaders came together to share how their beliefs equipped them to face the climate challenges ahead.

The first to speak was Rabbi Yonatan Neril, Founder and Director of The Interfaith Centre for Sustainable Development. He spoke of his belief in humanity's inherent capacity for sustainable living. However, to move from where we are now to where we need to be requires deep spiritual work, he stressed. Rabbi Yonatan urged faith communities to accelerate that spiritual evolution so that "the next generation inherits a thriving spiritually aware and sustainable planet."

Sister Jayanti Kirpalani, Additional Administrative Head of the Brahma Kumaris, followed by declaring that hope is based on the knowledge that we are in a time of transition from darkness into light and that each one needs to be the light by understanding our original goodness and enhancing that through our respective spiritual practices: "When I come into that awareness of action then hope is the

motivating factor that will allow me to rise above the boundaries that divide us and work together to do something good.”

Litara Ieremia-Allan, Pacific Educator who currently holds the title of Miss Samoa, emphasized the crucial role of collaboration within communities, particularly with youth. "In your climate action," she implored, "involve young people in every step – decision-making, planning, and dreaming. Their presence will infuse the journey with hope."

The last to speak was Dr Ben Richards from Youth with a Mission. He cautioned that true hope is not wishful thinking or petitioning God to do something but has to be grounded in a clear understanding of where we have gone wrong and having the courage to take corrective action. He stressed the vital role of community and of spiritual practices in sustaining hope, as through them. "...we can become more empowered to have the hope needed to get through extremely difficult times ahead."

As the panel session drew to a close, it became clear that hope, in the face of climate change, was not a passive acceptance of the future. It was an active, engaged response, rooted in faith, fueled by collaboration, and empowered by the wisdom of past, present, and future generations.

Click [here](#) to watch recording

Meditation



Relax and enjoy this [meditation](#) on Nature and Spirituality.