LEAVES, A Newsletter of the
INTERNATIONAL
ENVIRONMENT FORUM
Volume 17, Number 1 15 January 2015

From the Editor, Request for information for upcoming newsletters
This newsletter is an opportunity for IEF members to share their experiences, activities, and initiatives that are taking place at the community level on environment, climate change and sustainability. All members are welcome to contribute information about related activities, upcoming conferences, news from like-minded organizations, recommended websites, book reviews, etc. Please send information to newsletter@iefworld.org.

Please share the Leaves newsletter and IEF membership information with family, friends, and associates and encourage interested persons to consider becoming a member of the IEF.

BREAKING NEWS: IEF 19th Annual Conference
Reduced conference fee of 50 euros for IEF members!

The 19th Annual Conference of the International Environment Forum will be held in association with the international conference of the Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living (PERL) at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, France, on 10-11 March 2015. For IEF members, the registration fee will be 50 euros instead of 450 euros. Registration before the date limit of 25 January is through the PERL website: http://eng.hihm.no/responsible-living or directly at https://www.deltager.no/perl_2015_international_conference.

NASA, NOAA Find 2014 Warmest Year in Modern Record

The year 2014 ranks as Earth's warmest since 1880, according to two separate analyses by NASA and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) scientists. The 10 warmest years in the instrumental record, with the exception of 1998, have now occurred since 2000. This trend continues a long-term warming of the planet, according to an analysis of surface temperature measurements by scientists at NASA's Goddard Institute of Space Studies.

http://www.nasa.gov/
CALL TO ACTION: U.S. National Preach-In on Climate Change

Interfaith Power & Light are organizing a Preach-In on Climate Change in the United States on Valentine’s Day weekend – 13-15 February 2015. This year, the focus of the Preach-In is on protecting the vitally important new rules instituted by the Environmental Protection Agency to reduce carbon pollution from power plants. The Preach-In Kit will include “Love Creation” valentines that your members can sign and send to their federal representatives, urging them to support the EPA’s Carbon Pollution Standards. If you are in the U.S.A., register for the free Global Warming Preach-In Kit, which will include sample sermons, bulletin inserts, and fact sheets on climate change, at http://salsa4.salsalabs.com/o/50836/p/salsa/web/common/public/signup?signup_page_KEY=7913.

CALL TO ACTION: Faithful Call to Address Climate Change


Sign the Faithful Call to address Climate Change – a petition to President Obama and members of Congress calling for a strong commitment to address climate change.

With more than 10,000 signatures so far, organizers are seeking to reach a total of 20,000 before a new climate treaty is finalized in December 2015. Just click on the link and add your name to the list of supporters.

To President Obama and Members of Congress:

As people of faith, we are called to protect and serve God’s Creation and seek justice for all people and future generations. The gravity of climate change requires us to act with urgency.

From rising sea levels and severe weather events to shifting growing seasons and increased exposure to disease, the world is already feeling the impacts of climate change. Its worst consequences fall on vulnerable communities who have contributed the least to climate change but will suffer the most.

Yet, even as we faithfully commit to doing our part, we recognize that these actions alone are not sufficient—this crisis requires a global response.

To create a future with clean air, a healthy environment, good jobs, and resilience in the face of a changing climate for our children and God’s Earth, countries around the world must commit to an ambitious, equitable and binding global framework to address climate change.

As we approach the UN negotiations for 2015, we prayerfully ask that the US government lead, with a commitment to:

• Legally binding solutions that reduce national greenhouse gas emissions to levels consistent with scientific recommendations that prevent the worst impacts of human induced climate change.
• Provide poor and vulnerable communities here and abroad meaningful support to build low carbon and climate-resilient societies.

We pray for your leadership in securing a just and sustainable future for God’s creation.

Sincerely,
CALL TO ACTION: Our Voices

Our voices and prayers will inspire world’s governments to be bold and generous, to prevent devastating climate change and protect our futures.

But there’s one more thing you can do to help: please ask all your friends and family to add their voices too.

Every voice makes us stronger. Every voice make us harder to ignore.

We’re a people-powered movement, so we have to spread the word ourselves.

Please share this message with people at your church, mosque, community forum, workplace, on the street, bus, train, plane...

Click here to spread the word on Facebook Click here to spread the word on Twitter

Remember:
1. To date, the world’s governments have failed each year to reach meaningful agreement.
2. The Climate Summit in Paris 2015 is the date agreed by world leaders to sign a meaningful agreement - let’s make sure they stick to it
3. 97% of all climate scientists agree we only have a very small window of opportunity left to prevent devastating change.

ourvoices.net is the only petition or campaign that brings together people of all faiths and beliefs to express their concern - so the potential to be heard is absolutely huge. But only if people like you act.

In hope, The OurVoices team

“The latest science urges us to act decisively and speedily to avert the worst impacts of climate change. It is a window of opportunity we cannot afford to ignore.”
Christiana Figueres, in support of ourvoices.net.
Christiana is Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Webinar: Sustainable Development
On Sunday, February 1st at 2:00pm — Paul Hanley, author of the insightful new book, Eleven, will be featured in a free webinar lecture hosted by the U.S. Bahá’í Office of Public Affairs. Drawing on the material in his book, Mr. Hanley will discuss how humanity and the world will adjust to support 11 billion people by the end of this century and how we can and are beginning to cure the social and environmental ills currently plaguing humanity and nature. As part of his talk, Mr. Hanley will emphasize a solution rooted in local education and capacity-building processes practiced in the Bahá’í community. Attend in person or tune in individually or as a community and ask questions following the presentation.

Location: 100 Maryland Ave NE, Washington, D.C. USA
For more information: Contact Jamie Konopacky jkonopacky@usbnc.org; 202-833-8990
Webinar access: https://franciscanaction.adobeconnect.com/r27subzfqjj/
According to medium U.N. projections, by the end of this century, 11 billion people will populate the planet. Increasing the population by 50% will greatly exacerbate current social and environmental problems facing humanity and force everyone to change everything (or accept a halting and retreat, rather than a further advance of civilization). Paul Hanley’s book, “11,” discusses the need for a major shift in approach to agriculture, a move away from our materialistic culture, and a transformation in individual and collective mindset. Specifically, he addresses the need for an alternative to traditional resource intensive agriculture, the culture of consumerism, and the individualist competitive mindset. As alternatives, Hanley proposes involvement in service and spiritual activities in one’s local community, grassroots re-greening projects, and an ethically enlightened mindset centered on the virtues of unity, justice, equity, and service.

To successfully transition from our current culture, agriculture, and mindsets to sustainable alternatives, Hanley proposes a process-based ethical education model that can be simultaneously implemented at the levels of the individual, community and institution. He discusses one such model, the Ruhi model, which is currently being used in over 10,000 communities around the world. According to Hanley, using a process-based approach means that we do not have to agree on reality or an ideal reality to move forward. Instead, we can consult as communities: assess our local realities, envision alternatives, act to achieve the alternatives, reflect on the results, and repeat.

Hanley argues that by using a process-based approach to continuously search for truth and systematically act to improve our social and spiritual conditions, we will seed a new culture and realize eventually an ever-advancing civilization. However, given the urgent and global nature of our current social and environmental crises, Hanley also asserts that change at the individual and community level will not be enough. Institutions will need to assemble local learning at the regional, national, and international levels and reflect effective approaches back to the local level to catalyze transformation.

Paul Hanley has published 1500 articles on the environment, sustainable development, agriculture, and other topics. He is editor and co-author of *Earthcare: Ecological Agriculture in Saskatchewan* (Earthcare 1980) and *The Spirit of Agriculture* (George Ronald 2005). Paul is a recipient of the Canadian Environment Award and the Meewasin Conservation Award. He has been environment columnist with the Saskatoon StarPhoenix since 1989. Paul lives in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in Canada, with his wife and the youngest of three sons—plus two dogs. For more information, blogs posts and events go to www.elevenbillionpeople.com. See our review of the book “11” at http://iefworld.org/node/708.

**Climate Change Adaptation and Small Island Developing States**

A five week free internet course, *Pathways to climate change adaptation: the case of Small Island Developing States*, on Coursera running from 26 January to 28 February 2015 includes IEF President Arthur Lyon Dahl as one of the faculty. The course was prepared by the University of Geneva in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme. Details about the course are available at https://www.coursera.org/course/sids, together with an introductory video. Arthur prepared the second week’s module of eight lectures on the special problems of Small Island Developing States, one of his long-time specialties.
Climate Change course offered Sunday, March 1 through Sunday, April 26

FACULTY: Christine Muller, Gary Colliver, Arthur Lyon Dahl, Carole Flood (see the "Faculty" tab for bios)

The Climate Change course explores the basic science of climate change and provides an understanding of how climate disruption impacts us today and will continue to affect us in the future. We will explore ethical questions related to climate change and address them in the context of the spiritual teachings of the world’s religions, especially those of the Baha’i Faith. Some readings will help us make enlightened decisions for our personal and community lives that are consistent with our spiritual and ethical values. Finally, we will learn to participate in public discourse by being empowered to present, from a Baha’i and interfaith perspective, spiritual responses to the climate crisis. For those interested in a more thorough study of climate change and its spiritual dimensions or who are interested in specific aspects of it, the course offers numerous optional resources. This course does not provide a forum for debate about whether climate change is real because there is overwhelming scientific evidence of human caused global warming.

Gainesville, Florida, Interfaith Climate Group: An Update on a Project Inspired by a Wilmette Institute Course

by Sue Blythe (IEF member)

Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements. —Bahá’u’lláh

Bahá’u’lláh exhorts humankind a number of times to be “anxiously concerned” with the needs of our age and to center its “deliberations” on its urgencies and requirements. One of those urgent requirements is the disruption of our climate that threatens peace and security at every level. What we do in the next few years may determine the future of life on Earth.

In 2013, five Baha’is in Gainesville, Florida, took the Wilmette Institute’s course on Climate Change, meeting weekly to discuss what they were learning in the course. It was a wake-up call for our group. We came to see the need for community building among people of faith in our community as a way of facing the challenges presented by climate change, and we wanted to know who, in the faith community, was working on climate change.

The five of us created the Gainesville Interfaith Climate Group to engage people of various religious traditions in education, inspiration, and action for a sustainable world. Our actions over the last two years and our plans for 2015 can be summarized as follows:
2013:
Held monthly meetings to learn about climate issues and what various faiths say in both scripture and climate statements.

2014:
Hosted four workshops in the series Building Community in a Changing Climate.
Encouraged people to make short-term and long-term commitments for a sustainable world.
Hosted a monthly devotional gathering.
Participated in the Fourteenth Anniversary of the World Peace Charter.
Supported a march for the UN International Day of Peace.
Had a summary of the Interfaith Climate Group’s activities published on the website of Earth Charter International (http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/articles/1074/1/Interfaith-Climate-Group-celebrated-the-14th-Anniversary-of-the-Earth-Charter/Page1.html).

2015:
Will repeat the quarterly workshops and monthly devotionals.
Will reach out to a more diverse portion of the local faith community.
Will participate in the several activities marking the Fifteenth Anniversary of the World Peace Charter.
Will be included in an online game called FutureFlash! Climate Challenge, 2050, being developed by one of the five Bahá’ís who took the Climate Change course.

As its guide, the Interfaith Climate Group uses the Earth Charter, a universal expression to foster sustainable develop (http://www.earthcharterinaction.org). Its sixteen principles include the oneness of humanity, the elimination of prejudice, the equality of women and men, and consultative problem solving. It acknowledges the role of religion as a moral force without promoting any one religious group.

In June 2014 the Climate Group celebrated the Fourteenth Anniversary of the Earth Charter at the Quaker Meetinghouse in Gainesville. A highlight of the meeting was the young people’s presentation about the history of the Earth Charter from Maurice Strong’s first proposal to a 1968 UN conference to the present, when the Earth Charter Initiative reaches around the globe. The youth invited participants to write the rest of the story, imagining how they will help to bring the vision of the Earth Charter closer to reality by the year 2050. The Climate Group adapts activities from FutureFlash! Climate Challenge, an online game with real-world activities for a cleaner, greener future (http://www.futureflashproject.org). It empowers young people—and those who care about their future—to make the changes they want to see in the world. Adults and youth groups are working together to develop The FutureFlash! Project.

In September 2014 the Interfaith Climate Group supported the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship/Gainesville and Veterans for Peace in a march for the UN International Day of Peace. More than fifty people marched for peace for people and planet. After the march, we joined the live feed from the Peoples Climate March in New York City, connecting our small community action in Gainesville to the global climate movement.

As 2015 begins to unfold, the Gainesville Interfaith Climate Group is working with the Florida Coalition for Peace and Justice (FCPJ) on a statewide Earth Charter initiative. The FCPJ is in the process of registering as an affiliate of Earth Charter International at the University for Peace in Costa Rica.

The Climate Change Group will participate in the celebration in 2015 of the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Earth Charter, which will be a global event with contests, events, courses, and webinars throughout the year.

We five Bahá’ís who took the Wilmette Institute’s Climate Change course in 2013 continue to be amazed at how much we have learned and how our effort to start a Climate Change Group in Gainesville, Florida, has enabled us to participate in one of the prevalent discourses of our time. At the present time, three of those five Bahá’ís, plus three who have participated in the interfaith programs, are taking the Wilmette Institute course on Preparing for Interfaith Dialogue to hone our skills in collaborating with those in other faith traditions. The group is planning to meet with the Bahá’í Association at the University of Florida about participating in The President’s Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge (see http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ofbnp/interfaithservice).
For more information, contact Sue Blythe sue@interfaithclimategroup.org.


**PERL has a new web site**

The Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living (PERL) has a new web site at http://eng.hihm.no/responsible-living. This is the site to use for information on the next IEF/PERL Conference in Paris in March. Information is still being transferred from the old site at http://www.perlprojects.org to the new site, so if you do not find what you are looking for on one, try the other. IEF is a partner in PERL and will continue to work on responsible living with its successor UNITWIN network.

**Climate change course in DR Congo**

IEF member Kadima Mpoyi Long'sha of Kananga in the Democratic Republic of Congo, coordinator of the Baha’i-inspired non-governmental organization APRE and member of RLCC (Réseau pour la Lutte contre le Changement Climatique), organized a training course on Sustainable Development and Climate Change over three weekends in late December and early January based on IEF materials from the web site. There were 23 participants at the start and 33 by the second weekend. He said that this shows the advantages of belonging to IEF.

**The Road to Dignity by 2030:**

*Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet*

In the December Leaves, we described briefly the Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Agenda "The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet" which had been released on 4 December. It is worth looking at this report in more detail, since it aims to provide the vision, one might even say the ethical foundation, for the community of nations for the next 15 years to 2030.

One remarkable statement at the beginning, that corresponds also to the recent direction in the Baha’i community, is that "young people will be the torch bearers" in the coming years, with the "first truly globalized, interconnected, and highly mobilized civil society, ready and able to serve as a participant, joint steward, and powerful engine of change and transformation." The report refers to "the power of the new agenda to inspire and mobilize essential actors, new partnerships, key constituencies, and the broader global citizenry," requiring an agenda that resonates with the experiences and needs of people, that can be understood, and embraced. Volunteers are needed "to localize the new agenda by providing new spaces of interaction between governments and people for concrete and scalable actions." It concludes that the new agenda must be embraced by people everywhere. The United Nations thus acknowledges the need to reach far beyond governments to solve our problems.

The report concurs with many other observers that a fundamental transformation is needed in society and the economy, and lays out the broad lines of a participatory, responsive and transformational
course of action. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) define a paradigm shift for people and planet, with a sustainable development that is inclusive and people-centred, leaving no one behind. The Secretary-General emphasizes the need to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions in a spirit of solidarity, cooperation, mutual accountability, and the participation of governments and all stakeholders. He refers to the trust deficit between governments, institutions and the people, and calls for rebuilding institutions at the country level, and the transformation of the world economy. The report calls for transformative partnerships built upon principles and values, a shared vision, and shared goals, with the participation of all relevant stakeholders, and mutual accountability at the center.

The report also calls for unity in diversity. "We must also mobilize the power of culture in the transformative change we seek. Our world is a remarkable mosaic of diverse cultures, informing our evolving understanding of sustainable development. We still have much to learn from cultures as we build the world we want. If we are to succeed, the new agenda cannot remain the exclusive domain of institutions and governments. It must be embraced by people. Culture, in different aspects, will thus be an important force in supporting the new agenda."

The heart of the report is the six essential elements that underlie and regroup the Sustainable Development Goals. It is worth quoting that part of the report in its entirety.

"Dignity: to end poverty and fight inequalities"

"Eradicating poverty by 2030 is the overarching objective of the sustainable development agenda. We live in a world of plenty, and in a moment of enormous scientific promise. And yet, for hundreds and hundreds of millions across the globe, this is also an age of gnawing deprivation. The defining challenge of our time is to close the gap between our determination to ensure a life of dignity for all on the one hand, and the reality of persisting poverty and deepening inequality on the other."

"While we have made important progress in recent years, addressing gender inequality and realizing women's rights remains a key challenge in all regions of the world. It should by now be recognized that no society can reach its full potential if whole segments of that society, especially young people, are excluded from participating in, contributing to, and benefiting from development. Other dimensions of inequality continue to persist, and in some cases have worsened. Income inequality specifically is one of the most visible aspects of a broader and more complex issue, one that entails inequality of opportunity. This is a universal challenge that the whole world must address. The agenda must accommodate the voices of women, youth and minorities, seek the prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples, remove obstacles to full participation by persons with disabilities, older persons, adolescents and youth, and empower the poor. It must not exclude migrants, refugees, displaced persons, or persons affected by conflict and occupation."

People: to ensure healthy lives, knowledge, and the inclusion of women and children

"Millions of people, especially women and children, have been left behind in the unfinished work of the MDGs. We must ensure women, youth and children have access to the full range of health services. We must ensure zero tolerance of violence against or exploitation of women and girls. Women and girls must have equal access to financial services, and the right to own land and other assets. All children and adolescents have a right to education and must have a safe environment in which to learn. Human development is also the respect of human rights."

"The agenda must address universal health-care coverage, access and affordability; end preventable maternal, new-born and child deaths and malnutrition; ensure the availability of essential medicines; realize women's reproductive health and rights; ensure immunization coverage; eradicate malaria and realize the vision of a future free of AIDS and tuberculosis; reduce the burden of non-communicable diseases, including mental illness, nervous system injuries and road accidents; and promote healthy behaviours, including those related to water, sanitation and hygiene."

"Today, more than ever, the realities of 1.8 billion youth and adolescents represent a dynamic, informed, and globally connected engine for change. Integrating their needs, rights to choice and their voices in the new agenda, will be a key factor for success. It is essential that young people receive relevant skills and high-quality education and life-long learning, from early childhood
development to post-primary schooling, including life skills and vocational education and training, as well as science, sports and culture. Teachers must be given the means to deliver learning and knowledge in response to a safe global workplace, driven by technology.

**Prosperity: to grow a strong, inclusive, and transformative economy**

"Economic growth should lead to shared prosperity. As such, the strength of an economy must be measured by the degree to which it meets the needs of people, and on how sustainably and equitably it does so. We need inclusive growth, built on decent jobs, livelihoods and rising real incomes for all and measured in ways that go beyond GDP and account for human well-being, sustainability and equity. Ensuring that all people, including women, persons with disabilities, youth, aged, and migrants have decent employment, social protection, and access to financial services, will be a hallmark of our economic success.

"Innovation and investments in sustainable and resilient infrastructure, settlement, industrialization, small and medium enterprises, energy and technology can both generate employment, and remedy negative environmental trends. An enabled, properly regulated, responsible and profitable private sector is critical for employment, living wages, growth, and revenues for public programmes. Transforming business models for creating shared value is vital for growing inclusive and sustainable economies.

"The world’s richness of natural resources also provides a formidable economic opportunity, if it is translated not only into GDP growth but into shared prosperity. Sustainable approaches to landscape management (including agriculture and forests), industrialization (including manufacturing and productive capacities), access to energy and water and sanitation, are key drivers of sustainable production and consumption, job creation, as well as sustainable and equitable growth. They drive sustainable management of natural resources and tackle climate change.

**Planet: to protect our ecosystems for all societies and our children**

"To respect our planetary boundaries we need to equitably address climate change, halt biodiversity loss, and address desertification and unsustainable land use. We must protect wildlife, safeguard forests and mountains, and reduce disaster risk and build resiliencies. We must protect our oceans, seas, rivers and atmosphere as our global heritage, and achieve climate justice. We must promote sustainable agriculture, fisheries and food systems; foster sustainable management of water resources, and of waste and chemicals; foster renewable and more efficient energy; decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, advance sustainable industrialisation and resilient infrastructure; ensure sustainable consumption and production; and achieve sustainable management of marine and terrestrial ecosystems and land use.

"Sustainable development is at risk as evidence proves that warming of the climate system is now undeniable and human activities are its primary cause. We must limit global temperature rise to below 2 degrees Celsius if we are to avoid the worst effects of climate change. Carbon dioxide is the largest contributor to human-induced climate change. Fossil fuels usage and deforestation are its two main sources. Increasing warming will make severe, pervasive, and irreversible impacts more likely. The longer we wait to take action towards sustainable production and consumption, the more it will cost to solve the problem and the greater the technological challenges will be. Adaptation can reduce some risks and impact of climate change. Most urgently, we must adopt a meaningful, universal climate agreement by the end of 2015.

**Justice: to promote safe and peaceful societies, and strong institutions**

"Effective governance for sustainable development demands that public institutions in all countries and at all levels be inclusive, participatory, and accountable to the people. Laws and institutions must protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. All must be free from fear and violence, without discrimination. We also know that participatory democracy, free, safe, and peaceful societies are both enablers and outcomes of development.

"Access to fair justice systems, accountable institutions of democratic governance, measures to combat corruption and curb illicit financial flows, and safeguards to protect personal security are integral to sustainable development. An enabling environment under the rule of law must be secured for the free, active and meaningful engagement of civil society and advocates reflecting the voices of
women, minorities, LGBT groups, indigenous peoples, youth, adolescents and older persons. Press freedom and access to information, freedom of expression, assembly and association are enablers of sustainable development. The practice of child, early and forced marriage must be ended everywhere. The rule of law must be strengthened at the national and international level, to secure justice for all.

"We need to rebuild and reintegrate societies better after crises and conflicts. We must address state fragility, support internally displaced persons and contribute to resilience of people and communities. Reconciliation, peacebuilding and state-building are critical for countries to overcome fragility and develop cohesive societies, and strong institutions. These investments are essential to retaining the gains of development and avoiding reversals in the future.

**Partnership: to catalyse global solidarity for sustainable development**

"A revitalized global partnership for sustainable development must be built on the foundations agreed in the Millennium Declaration and in Monterrey and Johannesburg. It must be effective in mobilizing the means and in creating the environment to implement our agenda. Mobilizing the support to implement the ambitious new agenda will require political will and action on all fronts: domestic and international, public and private, through aid and trade, regulation, taxation and investment.

"Implementation is not just about quantity. It is also about doing things together, uniting around the problem. Inclusive partnerships must be a key feature of implementation, at all levels: global, regional, national and local. We know the extent to which this may be transformative. The sustainable development goals provide a platform for aligning private action and public policies. Transformative partnerships are built upon principles and values, a shared vision, and shared goals: placing people and planet at the center. They include the participation of all relevant stakeholders. Mutual accountability is at the center. This means principled and responsible public-private-people partnerships.

**Integrating the six essential elements**

"Sustainable development must be an integrated agenda for economic, environmental, and social solutions. Its strength lies in the interweaving of its dimensions. This integration provides the basis for economic models that benefit people and the environment; for environmental solutions that contribute to progress; for social approaches that add to economic dynamism and allow for the preservation and sustainable use of the environmental common; and for reinforcing human rights, equality, and sustainability. Responding to all goals as a cohesive and integrated whole will be critical to ensuring the transformations needed at scale.

"The agenda itself mirrors the broader international human rights framework, including elements of economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights, as well as the right to development. Specific targets are set for disadvantaged groups. Indicators will need to be broadly disaggregated across all goals and targets.

"The essential elements are further integrated by the application of the principle of universality. In addressing them to all countries and all people we take account of environmental, economic, and social interdependence, while also recognizing the realities of differentiated national needs and capacities.

"Finally, the new framework provides a much-needed opportunity to integrate the broader United Nations agenda, with its inextricably linked and mutually interdependent peace and security, development, and human rights objectives."

From an IEF perspective, most of the report and the whole UN process is basically, and by necessity, top-down, setting an agenda but very weak on implementation. It is necessary and highly desirable to have this global vision, but not sufficient. If it is not supported by a bottom-up process from the people most directly concerned, which is all of us, governments will not move, vested interests and inertia will slow or block progress, and we shall as usual do too little, too late. Trickle down does not work in the economy, and it will not work here either.

A much greater effort is needed, by the UN and all the partners in this process, to publicize this challenging and inspiring post-2015 agenda, to make it relevant to and accessible by people everywhere, to build public buy-in and ownership, and to motivate ordinary people to start applying
the six essential elements in their own neighbourhoods and communities without waiting for governments to act. This process can start now, and does not have to wait for the decisions to be taken by governments this year.

One action component must be education as a key to encourage bottom-up initiatives and awareness. There is a goal with targets for education, but this should not be interpreted as only dealing with "education for all", or that "quality education" is only improving employability and not necessarily developing character and a sense of global solidarity. Education for a more responsible and sustainable future is easily fragmented when absorbed into curricula as an extra item rather than a core skill. The emphasis should be on ethical or moral principles that motivate action. If young people are to be mobilized, they need capacity building and training. A particular emphasis should be placed on pre-adolescents 11-15 years old in their morally-formative years, who have idealism and capacity and can learn the bounty of being of service to society. The IEF is part of the Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living (PERL) preparing values-based educational materials in support of education for sustainable development and the 10YFP on Sustainable Consumption and Production. Efforts along these lines should be expanded in the post-2015 process.

IEF has suggested to the UN that they build a wide partnership with organizations of civil society, the media, youth, and the grassroots, to take the key messages from the Secretary-General forward through other than its usual channels. This is what UNDP did in 2008-2009, in partnership with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), to request all the major religions to prepare Action Plans on Climate Change, which were presented to the Secretary-General at Windsor Castle in November 2009, a month before the Copenhagen Climate Summit. The UN could similarly request all the religions to explore how the six essential elements of the Secretary-General’s report are reflected in their own scriptures and traditions, giving their followers a scriptural basis and a spiritual motivation to put this agenda into action. Thematic alliances could also be built around specific goals and targets, with the potential to reach beyond the traditional constituency of organizations directly involved with the United Nations.

The post-2015 agenda summarized by the Secretary-General is too important to be left only to governments. The Peoples’ Climate March showed that there is a latent desire for mobilization. We hope that the Secretary-General will reach out in the coming months to a much wider constituency to build momentum for the necessary transition to a just and sustainable society. The members of IEF should consider what they can do in their own small way to take these values forward and to apply them in their own communities.

The SG’s Synthesis Report is available at: http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5527SR_advance%20unedited_final.pdf

Civil society responses to the report are listed and linked at https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/13-kT5hsvKV0c7phmvLbt5VvGvs5--LIJioN9aYvGP8/pubhtml

This paper is posted on the IEF web site at http://iefworld.org/node/715, and the IEF official response to the SG’s report as submitted to the UN is at http://iefworld.org/node/714

**IEF response to SG’s Synthesis Report**

**Official IEF reaction to the UN Secretary-General’s Synthesis Report on the Post-2015 Agenda**

**The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet**

The International Environment Forum (IEF) is a professional organization for environment and sustainability accredited to WSSD and Rio+20 in the science and technology major group, with members in over 60 countries. We try to make constructive inputs to UN processes, particularly at the interface between science and ethics.

We greatly appreciated the Secretary-General’s Synthesis Report, and more generally the work in the UN on the post-2015 agenda and the results of the Open Working Group on SDGs. The following comments may be useful as the process goes forward.
The Secretary-General's report refers to young people as torch bearers, and the "first truly globalized, interconnected, and highly mobilized civil society, ready and able to serve as a participant, joint steward, and powerful engine of change and transformation." He makes reference to "the power of the new agenda to inspire and mobilize essential actors, new partnerships, key constituencies, and the broader global citizenry," and the role of volunteerism "to localize the new agenda by providing new spaces of interaction between governments and people for concrete and scalable actions." He concludes by saying that the new agenda must be embraced by people.

However, most of the report and the whole UN process is basically, and by necessity, top-down, setting an agenda but very weak on implementation. It is necessary and highly desirable to have this global vision, but not sufficient. If it is not supported by a bottom-up process from the people most directly concerned, which is all of us, governments will not move, vested interests and inertia will slow or block progress, and we shall as usual do too little, too late. Trickle down does not work in the economy, and it will not work here either.

A much greater effort is needed, by the UN and all the partners in this process, to publicize this challenging and inspiring post-2015 agenda, to make it relevant to and accessible by people everywhere, to build public buy-in and ownership, and to motivate ordinary people to start applying the six essential elements in their own neighbourhoods and communities without waiting for governments to act. This process can start now, and does not have to wait for the decisions to be taken by governments this year.

One action component must be education as a key to encourage bottom-up initiatives and awareness. There is a goal with targets for education, but this should not be interpreted as only dealing with "education for all", or that "quality education" is only improving employability and not necessarily developing character and a sense of global solidarity. Education for a more responsible and sustainable future is easily fragmented when absorbed into curricula as an extra item rather than a core skill. The emphasis should be on ethical or moral principles that motivate action. If young people are to be mobilized, they need capacity building and training. A particular emphasis should be placed on pre-adolescents 11-15 years old in their morally-formative years, who have idealism and capacity and can learn the bounty of being of service to society. The IEF is part of the Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living (PERL) preparing values-based educational materials in support of education for sustainable development and the 10YFP on Sustainable Consumption and Production. Efforts along these lines should be expanded in the post-2015 process.

The UN should be building a wide partnership with organizations of civil society, the media, youth, and the grassroots, to take the key messages from the Secretary-General forward through other than its usual channels. One example from our own experience was the effort from UNDP in 2008-2009, in partnership with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) to request all the major religions to prepare Action Plans on Climate Change, which were presented to the Secretary-General at Windsor Castle in November 2009, a month before the Copenhagen Climate Summit. The Baha’i International Community asked us to help them prepare the Baha’i action plan presented at that time. The UN could request all the religions to explore how the six essential elements are reflected in their own scriptures and traditions, giving their followers a scriptural basis and a spiritual motivation to put this agenda into action. Similarly, thematic alliances can be built around specific goals and targets, with the potential to reach beyond the traditional constituency of organizations directly involved with the United Nations.

The post-2015 agenda is too important to be left only to governments. The Peoples’ Climate March showed that there is a latent desire for mobilization. We hope that the Secretary-General can reach out in the coming months to a much wider constituency to build momentum for the necessary transition to a just and sustainable society.

Civil society reactions are listed and linked at https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/13-kT5hsvKVK0c7phmVLbt5VvGvs5--LJJioN9aYvGP8/pubhtml
Meaning, Religion and a Great Transition by Michael Karlberg
A review and commentary by Arthur Dahl

The Great Transition Initiative is an international collaboration for charting pathways to a planetary civilization rooted in solidarity, sustainability, and human well-being. It operates an on-line forum of leading intellectuals moderated by the Tellus Institute in Boston. Papers are commissioned for discussion, and then published. A couple of IEF members take part in these discussions, which have been largely on scientific, political and institutional themes. In November, for the first time, the topic was "Meaning, Religion and a Great Transition" with a paper prepared by Michael Karlberg which has now been published online. The discussion was lively and controversial, with the more secular scientists contesting that religion could be considered a knowledge system or be anything more than subjective and not worthy of serious consideration, while others welcomed this as an essential part of any transition. At the end of the month, Michael responded to the debate, and his commentary is also on line.

Summary

It is difficult to summarize such a well-reasoned and carefully-worded analysis of religion and science, addressing the concerns of skeptics and demonstrating the usefulness of religion to the challenges we face.

Karlberg starts with the importance of systems of meaning, often unconscious, that underly our cultures, and notes that major structural changes in society will occur only with the emergence of larger systems of meaning that render them imaginable, desirable, and feasible. With reference to religion, he notes that the vast majority of the earth's inhabitants continue to draw meaning and inspiration from religion, so any movement with global aspirations needs to consider this relatively universal human impulse. Also, religion has made vital contributions to many progressive social movements in the past two centuries.

"At the same time, organized religion has all too frequently been corrupted and abused by political and economic interests that pervert its accomplishments and distort its ends, foster superstition and blind imitation, set religion at odds with science and reason, and breed sectarian conflict and violence. In addition, religious belief and practice has frequently been characterized by the uncritical transmission of inherited cultural prejudices and oppressive social norms. Therefore, the concept of religion is, itself, in need of a great transition. Like every social institution, our understanding and practice of religion must evolve in order for it to make an ongoing contribution to the advancement of civilization."

Karlberg presents a concept of religion as an evolving system of knowledge and practice that, much like science, embodies a collective human endeavor to generate insights regarding significant dimensions of reality and apply those insights to the betterment of the human condition. He develops an extended parallel between the evolution of science to a single universal and increasingly rigorous process, and the need for religion to follow the same path. Science has gradually uncovered the governing dynamics of the natural world. But there are other governing dynamics for highly intangible spiritual forces, such as the powers of love, compassion, and justice, of which we have only a dim understanding at present. The essence of human nature—the human spirit or the rational soul—responds to these spiritual forces even if we do not adequately understand them, just as human bodies have always responded to forces such as gravity, regardless of whether we understood those forces. Neither secular nor religious intolerance constitutes a viable path to global human solidarity.

What he calls for is a constructive conception of religion that provides normative standards of religious practice in relation to the emergence of a more just and sustainable global civilization. This requires focusing on religion as a singular, universal, trans-historical phenomenon.
If religion is understood as a system of knowledge and practice that seeks insight into spiritual reality and applies that insight to improving the human condition, then one condition it would need to satisfy is that it be practiced in a thoughtful, intelligent, and rational manner complementary to and harmonious with science. Religion must grow beyond dogmatic and narrow-minded assertions of truth and adopt instead a posture of systematic learning. There is a need for humility in the interpretation of religious texts, coupled with rational methods for the ongoing generation of knowledge regarding how to apply spiritual insights to the betterment of humanity. These rational methods might include, for instance, a consultative and reflective approach to inquiry, grounded in constructive social action, which draws on diverse perspectives and experiences within evolving frameworks of understanding built upon ethical commitments and altruistic ideals.

Religion can also recognize and promote the systemic unity and interdependence—the organic oneness—of humanity. It can acknowledge the human being as having a twofold purpose: to develop one’s latent individual capacity and to contribute to the advancement of civilization. This leads to a holistic and co-evolving view of the individual and society, with individual and collective well-being inextricably linked. Within this framework, normative concepts such as progress, justice, prosperity, sustainability, education, and empowerment begin to take on new meanings that reflect the needs of the age in which we live.

He contrast the negative press that religion receives today with an overly positive view of science, which is in fact in a relative state of systemic crisis, even though this is seldom recognized by scientists. Contemporary science, as a system influenced by powerful social forces, too often lacks critical reflection and is uninformed by a wider social and ecological consciousness. The crisis in science reflects its increasing privatization, industrialization, and commercialization into a self-serving system inextricably tied to the political economy of today’s maladaptive social order. The contemporary systems of consumer capitalism and partisan politics are becoming inseparable, and each embodies and reinforces the same underlying competitive logic, which aligns with the narrow short-term interests of the most powerful segments of society, and is becoming one of the most influential systems of meaning on the planet today, rivaled in its influence only by religion.

He concludes that we need a more critical normative discourse regarding the practice of science, and religion, at this critical juncture in history when all inherited social institutions and practices urgently need to be re-examined.

At its best, religion enables humans to grapple in meaningful ways with universal and existential questions that cannot be ignored but are beyond the scope of science. Moreover, in the process, religion can reach the roots of human motivation and prompt the will to struggle—and the willingness to make personal sacrifices—for the betterment of the human condition. We therefore need to encourage the ongoing evolution and refinement of religion as a partner in a growing global citizens movement.

Commentary

IEF member Arthur Dahl, in his contribution to the discussion of Karlberg’s paper, raised a number of additional points. Some commentators were revolted by religion as the source of intolerance, atrocities and “holy war.” Horrendous crimes in the name of religion are nothing new, but the headlines they are now making produce an emotional reaction that makes any rational discussion of religion difficult. The fact that such crimes are in fundamental contradiction with the essential teachings of those religions (i.e. Thou shalt not kill), and thus demonstrate the moral bankruptcy of the perpetrators twisting a religious vocabulary for other ends, gets overlooked, as does the fact that other ideologies and political movements, including some similarly twisting science to their ends, have produced equally tragic outcomes. All this illustrates the depths to which human beings can sink when they have lost any moral compass.

Karlberg’s paper rightly insisted that we approach religion objectively, not only seeing its negative contribution embodied today in rigid structures, dogmas and fragmented interpretations under that heading, but as an evolving dimension of human experience with undeniable positive impacts on individual lives and on the advancement of civilization at key transitions in our historic past. It is religion, not science, if broadly understood to include spirituality in all its forms, that gives life meaning and purpose, and that raises our sights above the merely material. It is religion, not science, that speaks to the need to subjugate pride, ego and selfish desires to the altruism, humility, trustworthiness, and spirit of service that humans
are capable of. We need to ask how this positive contribution can be mobilized for the transition we are all working for.

Discussants from the philosophical/spiritual/religious perspectives were more open to a balanced and respectful exploration of the harmony of science and religion than secular atheists, who found it difficult to accept that much of human experience and the less material accomplishments of civilizations are part of human reality and forms of knowledge as valid as science. Karlberg has carefully explained that science itself is constantly evolving and cannot escape from subjective elements. Both religion and science need to be treated with the same normative rigor and rational approaches, while being open to those dimensions for which material proofs are irrelevant or inappropriate. We must be careful not to fall into the same trap as the fundamentalists in narrowing the interpretive frame that defines what is reality.

One of the challenges to science in this context is the assumption that we are intellectually capable of knowing and explaining everything, and that we shall some day have perfect models and formulas for each domain of science. The human mind has its limitations, as anyone trying to understand quantum physics or complex systems experiences. The corollary of this assumption is that anything that we cannot fully understand does not exist or is "subjective" and beyond serious academic consideration, and therefore that religion cannot be considered a system of knowledge complementary to science. This is a denial of much of human experience, experience that is highly relevant to the Great Transition.

Karlberg has called for a reconceptualization of religion in support of the great transition. One challenge that appeared in the comments is the gap between those who see spiritual experience at an individual level as the central focus, and those for whom there is a spiritual reality beyond material reality that transcends individuals and includes what he has called a Source, a First Cause, a Supreme Animating Will or Power, and others refer to as God, Allah, etc. The latter orientation both encourages an other-centred focus for the individual, turning out from the self, and also provides an external source of authority for the ethical precepts offered by religion to structure community life and society. Many of those precepts, when understood in an evolving framework responding to human needs at different points in our social evolution, would counter the values of our present materialist consumer culture and support the great transition. There is a lot in the progressive and constructive practice of religion to build on.

One suggestion that only religion may be able to give us the courage and grace to live through the traumatic times ahead may be an additional short-term rationale for giving more attention to it, but should not detract from the more positive role it should play in building not only understanding but deep commitment to the major structural changes required, providing "larger systems of meaning that render them imaginable, desirable, and feasible", as Karlberg has put it.

If significant numbers of people are to support the transition, they need the support of an inclusive combination of the positive aspects of the diverse religious, spiritual and ethical dimensions of human experience, as a motivating force for the individual, community and institutional transformations that are required. Karlberg’s paper proposes a way forward and raises the questions we need to address.

Michael Karlberg: Meaning, Religion and a Great Transition

Karlberg’s author’s response to the debate

This review is posted on the IEF web site at http://iefworld.org/node/716