



**LEAVES, A Newsletter of the  
INTERNATIONAL  
ENVIRONMENT FORUM**  
Volume 19, Number 12 15 December 2017



**International Environment Forum** A Baha'i inspired organization addressing  
the environment and sustainable development

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### **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](mailto: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.

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## **UN Environment and Faith-Based Organizations**

Report by Arthur Dahl

As part of a United Nations-wide effort to strengthen its relationship with religions, led by a UN Task Force on Religion and Development, UN Environment (formerly UNEP) is developing a **Strategy for Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations**. To help it finalize the strategy, UN Environment organized a **Consultation meeting on Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations** in Nairobi, Kenya, on 30 November 2017, among the events around the 3rd UN Environment Assembly. Participants represented Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Bahá'í, Judaism, Hinduism, Spirituality and interfaith organizations, and global, national and local perspectives. The International Environment Forum (IEF) was invited to represent the Bahá'í Faith, with Arthur Dahl as the IEF participant.

The purpose of the meeting was to agree on the Strategy objectives and activities; identify top priority environmental issues of mutual focus; map global, regional and local environmental Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs); identify existing Knowledge management tools and networks; share existing experience and involvement; identify faith-based investment entities; and make commitments of specific support. Each organization replied to a detailed questionnaire on these topics, and also made a short presentation during the meeting.



UN Office in Nairobi

The UN Environment Strategy for Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations aims to inspire, empower and engage with Faith-based Organizations to innovatively deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030 at all levels. The strategy has three major goals:

- 1: Strengthen Partnerships with Faith-Based Organizations' Leadership for Policy Impact
- 2: Green Faith-Based organization's assets and transform Financing the SDGs
- 3: Science-Faith-Based Evidence

It includes detailed lists of outputs and corresponding activities for each goal. It is intended that the initiative should be directly linked to the Office of the Executive Director in the Division of Policy and Programming, with an advisory committee representing major faith-based organizations and religions to provide guidance and direction.

### The consultation

The meeting was opened by Erik Solheim, Executive Director of UN Environment, after which Dr. Iyad Abumoghli, Principal Advisor to UN Environment on Strategic Engagement with Faith-Based Organizations, summarized the proposed strategy, and Alexander Juras, who heads the Major Groups and Stakeholders Unit, described synergies between these groups and UN Environment.



Dr. Iyad Abumoghli; FBO participants in the consultation

The head of the **UN Task Force on Religion and Development**, Dr. Azza Karam, made a presentation by video link on the experience of the Task Force. The Task Force began functioning informally in 2007, and was formalized as part of the UN Development Group in 2010. Its members represent 17 UN system entities involved in development, peace and security, and human rights. Its objectives are to:

- Seek information, scientific knowledge and secure sharing thereof around religion, religious groups and religious engagement (research, policy roundtables);
- Build internal UN system capacities around religion, religious groups and religious engagement (strategic learning exchanges/trainings, database of interfaith networks);
- Advocate/advise on religion, religious groups and religious engagement at intergovernmental gatherings (functional commissions, High Level Political Forum, UNGA);
- Provide policy guidance/advice to UN management (World Humanitarian Summit);
- Serve as a UN-portal for FBOs to access more information and knowledge and enhance partnerships with UN system entities (UN NGO committees, etc.).

Some of its achievements include countering narratives of violent extremism, expanding and innovating in the way we do development, supporting environmental protection and stewardship (with UN Environment, Yale University Environmental Network and WWF), countering harmful human rights practices perpetuated in the name of religion, ensuring freedom of religion and belief and protection of religious minorities, defining decent work, and supporting informed religious knowledge for women's empowerment and gender equality. The task force has acquired a lot of experience on what to do and not to do in dealing with faith-based organizations.

Many of the organizations present shared their experiences on environmental stewardship, ranging from running international universities to national networks and local community activities. The IEF described the long involvement of the Bahá'í International Community with the United Nations, and its environmental engagement starting at the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, and continuing with the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) and Rio+20 in 2012, with at least 36 statements on issues relevant to the environment and sustainability. It then explained the role of IEF as a Bahá'í-inspired professional organization for the environment and sustainability, accredited by the UN in the science and technology major group, maintaining web resources, designing interfaith courses, organizing annual conferences and side events at UN conferences, producing a monthly newsletter, and partnering in other networks. It also mentioned another Bahá'í-inspired organization, ebbf-Ethical Business Building the Future, that encourages sustainability in business and the workplace.



FBO participants in the consultation; UN Office in Nairobi

## Summary of reflections by Faith-Based Organizations

There was then an open consultation with FBOs on the UN Environment Strategy, looking for concrete suggestions on leadership, investment, and science, knowledge and communications, summarized as follows.

The groups called for a forum or platform to exchange experience, and to post resources to, and UN Environment said it will open a page on its web site for this. There needs to be a network of networks to assemble existing resources and best practices. It could also

include reports on faith-environment events; annual events and a calendar of future events could be listed. For materials in other languages, it would be helpful to have a title or summary in English. Many things are happening in FBOs, but they are not getting out, so there is a need to let the world know. It should become a community of practice to keep sharing.

FBOs are well placed to explore the root causes of environmental problems, and to express the values that speak to the heart. The FBOs could help to move to transformational impacts, with a big message to impact from the global level. They could help to find win-win solutions. They need to discuss what they can do together to have lasting transformational impact, exploring core issues like human purpose. What makes humans human, and not just machines? They should inspire soul-searching; Who am I? Faith communities have another time-line, a long-term perspective, such as the First Nations in North America considering 7 generations. This will be an important contribution to UN Environment.

It is important to include youth in faith dialogues, and to build on their use of technologies. This should include activities on the ground for practical applications. Everything today is expressed and valued in economic terms, and this is driving the world in unsustainable directions. Faith-based groups should advocate for alternatives.

Pollution and food waste were proposed as specific areas of focus for global impact. Pollution is the theme of UNEA 3, so FBOs could support implementation of its outcomes. The theme of the next UNEA in 2019 has not yet been decided, but could become an area of focus. The UNEA should have resolutions including the ethical dimension.

There was agreement that the initial focus could be on three priority environmental issues: pollution, water, and waste reduction and management. Water has an important symbolism in many religions that could be built on. These could be issues around which to build faith-based messages. What in scriptures would reinforce the messages of UNEA? FBOs could reflect on their work from a pollution perspective, and rephrase the issues in their own language, making them relevant to work at the local level. Sustainable consumption and production could be a more cross-cutting alternative, beyond just resource efficiency. It already is a UN Environment global programme. FBOs could contribute to the 10-year Framework of Programmes on SCP, and some already do.

On the goal to Strengthen Partnerships with Faith-Based Organizations' Leadership for Policy Impact, it was noted that the Pope's encyclical *Laudato Si'* came from the top. A global movement needs direction from the top so that the faithful will follow it. It would be good to reach the highest levels of leadership. An alternative view was to go from the local to the global, starting with letting local communities determine their own priorities, and building from there. Most of the strategy is addressed towards reducing poverty and this is essential, but FBOs also have important messages for the rich who are over-consuming and producing most environmental impacts. There is a rising middle class even in developing countries being drawn into the consumer society that needs to be reached.

The present draft for the goal to green Faith-Based organization's assets and transform financing the SDGs appeared too focused on finance, and should include a wider greening of FBO's consumption, assets, buildings and lands.

For the goal on Science-Faith-Based Evidence, there was a feeling that the concept of science in this goal should be refined. Science should include traditional knowledge, which is often less organized. We need more than just knowledge and science. A holistic view is needed to transform people, and to help them reconnect with nature. An alternative would be to use the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs - and look for ways they embody faith beliefs. It is important to avoid the conflicts of science and religion, and to recognize their

complementarity.

FBOs were asked what they could offer to UN Environment, and to make concrete commitments, for example the use of their networks to share messages more widely, the availability of knowledge resources, and training of trainers to reach the grassroots of communities. One suggestion for the future would be for the UN to consider creating a Forum of Faith-Based Organizations comparable to the Forum of Indigenous Peoples, to formalize the dialogue between governments and FBOs in the UN framework.

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## **World Scientists' Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice**

On 13 November 2017, a warning supported by more than 15,000 scientists, reviewed the status of the world environment since a first warning 25 years ago, and showed that almost all the trends were negative. They concluded:

"To prevent widespread misery and catastrophic biodiversity loss, humanity must practice a more environmentally sustainable alternative to business as usual. This prescription was well articulated by the world's leading scientists 25 years ago, but in most respects, we have not heeded their warning. Soon it will be too late to shift course away from our failing trajectory, and time is running out. We must recognize, in our day-to-day lives and in our governing institutions, that Earth with all its life is our only home."

You can access the whole article at:

<https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/advance-article/doi/10.1093/biosci/bix125/4605229>  
or <https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/bix125>

Any scientist that would like to endorse the article now after publication can visit ([scientists.forestry.oregonstate.edu](http://scientists.forestry.oregonstate.edu)).

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## **Oxford economists raise alarm at vanishing wealth of nature**

Top economists show that the decline of nature poses severe threats to continued national and global prosperity. New research

(<https://www.greeneconomycoalition.org/assets/reports/webWealthofNature.pdf>) from a team of Oxford economists launched at the World Forum on Natural Capital

(<https://naturalcapitalforum.com/>) in Edinburgh shows that Ministries of Finance and Treasuries are often blind to how dependent economies are on nature, which is declining at a dangerous rate. As a result, businesses and politicians are failing to register the systemic risk building up as the natural world fails. Professor Cameron Hepburn, who led the research at the University of Oxford's Institute for New Economic Thinking at the Oxford Martin School, says that flawed economic and political institutions are to blame.

"Much of the value that economies create is built upon a natural foundation – the air, water, food, energy and raw materials that the planet provides. Without nature, no other value is possible." It's called natural capital, and it's the basis for all human prosperity. But because most economies fail to account for this dependency, "business as usual" is driving a dangerous trend of environmental decline. Extreme weather, mass extinctions, falling agricultural yields, and toxic air and water are already damaging the global economy, with pollution alone costing 4.6 trillion USD every year. And we're in danger of losing other indispensable natural capitals, like topsoil for food production or a stable climate, without which organised economies cannot function. "We are poisoning the well from which we drink," says Oliver Greenfield, convenor of the Green Economy Coalition

(<https://www.greeneconomycoalition.org/>), who commissioned the research. "The dire

state of nature and the implications for our future, barely registers in economic decision-making. To put this another way, we are building up a big systemic risk to our economies and societies, and just like the financial crisis, most economists currently don't see it". The research finds three central failings are to blame. Firstly, we currently lack the tools to adequately measure and understand the value of nature, meaning it is largely invisible to policymakers. Secondly, many economic models assume that environmental value can be easily and indefinitely replaced by man-made value; for example, the loss in natural capital from logging a forest is off-set by the creation of valuable jobs and timber – ignoring the question of what happens when the last tree is cut down. Finally, we don't have the laws and institutions required to protect our critical stocks of natural capital from unsustainable exploitation. Thankfully, the research finds encouraging signs that our economy can be rapidly rewired to protect the planet. Governments and businesses must start measuring their stocks of natural capital in comprehensive natural wealth accounts, and ensure that those assets are protected and improved. Better data is needed on the value of the natural wealth that underpins economic activity, so that value can be accounted for by treasuries and financial centres. And critical natural assets – without which society cannot survive – must be given special status so that they cannot be squandered. This research is an urgent wake-up call to governments and businesses around the world: our economies are flying blind, and new models and methodologies are urgently required. "The opportunity to properly value nature is not just a task for economists but for all of us," Oliver Greenfield added. "The societies and economies that understand their dependency on nature are healthier and more connected, with a brighter future."

Emily Benson, Programme Manager, Green Economy Coalition

<https://www.greeneconomycoalition.org/>

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## **Progress on the UN 2030 Agenda**

The High Level Political Forum was an outcome from the 2012 Rio+20 Conference to replace the Commission on Sustainable Development in overseeing implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Each year governments can volunteer to present national reviews of their progress. In 2018, 48 countries have offered to present their Voluntary National Reviews. The UN also prepares a synthesis of the reviews presented. The Synthesis Report of Voluntary National Reviews 2017 is now available online at

[https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17109Synthesis\\_Report\\_VNRs\\_2017.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17109Synthesis_Report_VNRs_2017.pdf)

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## **The Imperatives of Sustainable Development: Needs, Justice, Limits**

by Erling Holden, Kristin Lingered, David Banister, Valeria Jana Schwanitz and August Wierling. London and New York: Earthscan from Routledge. 263 p.

published in July 2017

**Book review by Arthur Lyon Dahl**

The debate about sustainable development has been going on for thirty years since the World Commission on Environment and Development chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland

published "*Our Common Future*" in 1987. It has taken form in Agenda 21 (1992) and been redefined in the UN's 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in 2015. While the International Environment Forum has long emphasized the ethical foundations of sustainable development, these have often been lost in the complexity of the issues involved.

Here is an extremely important book that aims to restore the ethical heart of sustainable development and to make it operational with indicators and thresholds defining the sustainable development space that should be the goal of all countries. From a holistic perspective, it lays out a simplified and transparent reality to capture the essentials of sustainability in a form understandable by the general public. The first chapter defines the moral imperatives of sustainable development, followed by three theoretical chapters on needs, justice and limits. The central chapter gives a normative model of sustainable development, followed by more practical chapters on implementation, with facts and figures, an analytic narrative, how much has been lost in translation, especially in implementing sustainable development at the local level, and a final chapter on next steps.

The book starts from three equally important moral imperatives: satisfying human needs, ensuring social justice, and respecting environmental limits. For each of these, it reviews available theoretical frameworks, and selects the one most fit for purpose: Sen's capability approach for needs; Rawls's two principles of justice for justice; and the planetary boundary approach for limits. From these, it derives six sustainability themes, two for each moral imperative. For each theme, it reviews the available indicators and data availability, and recommends those that would be the most workable at the present time. It then sets thresholds for each indicator that would define what is sustainable or unsustainable for each indicator. The themes are non-negotiable and cannot be substituted. All must be achieved together for sustainability.

The six sustainability themes and their headline indicators are:

1. eradicating extreme poverty (Poverty line)
2. enhancing individual human capabilities (Human Development Index)
3. ensuring rich participation in society (Participatory Democracy Index)
4. ensuring fair distribution of resources (Gini Coefficient)
5. mitigating climate change (Tons CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per capita)
6. safeguarding biosphere integrity (Aichi biodiversity targets)

The result is the definition of a sustainable development space which should be the goal of all countries and the planetary system. There is no single pathway to this space. Different countries face different challenges and must follow different pathways. Calculations show that no country today is in that space, and for many the trajectory for at least some themes is in the wrong direction, especially with the human population still increasing within a limited global environment, per capita consumption increasing, and people living longer so that lifetime impacts are increasing as well. We have a long way to go, while the negative consequences of our unsustainability are accelerating.

The book concludes with four issues that will define sustainable development over the next 30 years: developing countries and urbanization, resource efficiency and technology, healthy people and healthy planet, and governance - engagement and participation.

The approach is academic, with frequent references to the literature and step-by-step development of their argument, which can take some time to get through but produces a certain clarity of thought that is important for such a complex subject. My only question concerns their optimism that urbanization is part of the solution to sustainability, when communities at a more human scale closer to their resources while integrated through information technology may be socially and environmentally more desirable. There has unfortunately been some sloppy editing, including some repetition and two places where

lines of text have been repeated or misplaced, but these are minor concerns relative to the importance of the message.

Holden and his co-authors, motivated by a fundamental desire for justice, have provided an essential complement to the Sustainable Development Goals, to which they have been careful to link their approach. Integrating all those goals, targets and indicators is a major challenge. Here is an essential set of tools to provide general measures of our progress (or lack of progress) towards sustainability. For organizations like IEF, and all faith-based organizations as well as many civil society organizations for which ethics are important, this book provides an approach to sustainable development with values at the centre. We should be pushing for its integration into international, national and local efforts to guide the transition to sustainability that is so urgently needed.

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## Towards a pollution free planet

The Third United Nations Environment Assembly met in Nairobi, Kenya, on 4-6 December 2017, with pollution as its special focus. It adopted the following declaration.

Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its third session  
**“Towards a pollution free planet”**

We the world’s ministers of the environment, believe that every one of us should be able to live in a clean environment. Any threat to our environment is a threat to our health, our society, our ecosystems, our economy, our security, our well-being and our very survival. That threat is already upon us: pollution is cutting short the lives of millions of people every year.

We gathered at the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to work towards a pollution-free planet, with political, scientific, private sector, and civil society leaders.

We reaffirm that our efforts to combat pollution should continue to be guided by the Rio Principles on Environment and Development.

It is imperative that we alert people everywhere to the following:

1. Every day, 9 out of 10 of us breathe air that exceeds WHO guidelines for air quality and more than 17,000 people will die prematurely because of it . Hundreds of children below the age of five die from contaminated water and poor hygiene daily . Women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected, whether it be from cooking with dirty fuel or walking further to find safe water. Every year we dump 4.8 to 12.7 million tonnes of plastic in our oceans and generate over 40 million tonnes of electronic waste annually - increasing every year by 4 to 5 percent - causing severe damage to ecosystems, livelihoods and our health.

2. We believe that it is both inexcusable and preventable that tens of thousands of chemicals are used in everyday objects and applied in the field without proper testing, labelling or tracking. Far too many communities either lack information about the chemicals and hazardous substances they use or are exposed to, or the capacity to manage them safely.

3. However, we also understand that knowledge and technological solutions to reduce pollution already exist, though many stakeholders have yet to explore and implement the many opportunities available. We are encouraged by the numerous success stories of

countries, cities and businesses addressing air, soil, freshwater and marine pollution issues. Recent examples include the adoption of the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol and the entry into force of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

4. As countries are making efforts against pollution in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, relevant multilateral agreements and instruments, including the Paris Agreement adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, we acknowledge the links between pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation. We further acknowledge that pollution disproportionately affects the poor and the vulnerable. Tackling pollution will contribute to sustainable development by fighting poverty, improving health, creating decent jobs, improving life below water and on land, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

5. We are concerned by the legacy of damage and pollution that armed conflict or terrorism causes to the environment, often delaying recovery, undermining the achievement of sustainable development and threatening the health of people and ecosystems.

6. We are also concerned that unsustainable land use and management can lead to soil degradation and pollution and creates phenomena such as forest and biodiversity loss, sand and dust storms, increasing wildfires, and other undesirable effects that pose a great challenge to sustainable development.

7. We are convinced that determination, collaboration, knowledge generation and sharing, innovation, efficient use of resources and clean technology can provide concrete solutions to tackle pollution, but that we can do more.

8. Therefore, we are determined to honour our undertakings to prevent, mitigate and manage the pollution of air, land and soil, freshwater and oceans by taking the following actions:

(a) We will increase research and encourage the development, collation and use of reliable scientific and disaggregated data. This will include providing better multidisciplinary indicators; improving capacity for efficient gathering, verification and monitoring of data; and increasing transparency by making it easier to access such information more widely.

(b) We will promote science-based decision making in the public and private sectors, effective standard setting processes by all stakeholders and greater participation by individuals from all walks of life.

(c) We will target pollution through tailored actions, including environmental agreements.

(d) We will accelerate the implementation and promote cooperation among existing multilateral agreements, conventions, regulations and programmes to prevent, control and reduce pollution.

(e) We will foster inclusive and sustainable economic productivity, innovation, job creation and environmentally sound technologies.

(f) We will encourage sustainable lifestyles and move forward to ensure more sustainable consumption and production patterns, by providing reliable sustainability information to consumers, increasing education and awareness raising, and making it easier to rethink, reuse, recycle, recover and remake any products, materials and/or services and prevent and reduce waste generation.

(g) We will promote the adoption of policies and approaches such as those for the environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste, including the use of integrated life cycle, value chains and sustainable chemistry.

- (h) We will make the best use of science, education, policy links, trade, investment and innovation opportunities in order to tackle pollution and promote sustainable development.
- (i) We will work with local governments to encourage sustainable models of urban development to address pollution.
- (j) We will promote fiscal measures such as incentives to stimulate positive changes, taking into account the importance of minimizing pollution and making every effort to invest in more sustainable environmentally sound solutions.
- (k) We will strengthen and enforce more integrated policies, laws, and regulations. We will achieve this by supporting institutions and building their capacity; bolstering monitoring and accountability systems; and sharing best practices, standards, policy instruments and tools, and enhancing environmental education and training.
- (l) We reaffirm our political commitment to create an enabling environment to tackle pollution in the context of sustainable development and in the spirit of global partnership and solidarity, including through adequate and predictable means of implementation as agreed in the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.
- (m) We will continue to develop and expand partnerships, between governments, the private sector, academia, relevant United Nations agencies and programmes, indigenous peoples and local communities, civil society and individuals.
- (n) We will promote North-South, South-South, and triangular cooperation while recognizing that South-South cooperation is not a substitute for, but rather a complement to North-South cooperation. We will also promote regional dialogue and coordination across the United Nations to target pollution.

9. As ministers of environment, we recognize our role in delivering these commitments and promoting coordinated action. We will focus on preventive measures and building resilience, taking account of each country's responsibilities and capacities.

10. However, responsibility for combatting pollution does not rest with national governments alone. We need commitment and leadership from governments and involvement and partnership from the private sector, international organizations, civil society and individuals. Everyone has a responsibility as mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, sisters and brothers, friends, employers, colleagues, neighbours and communities.

11. We cannot overstate the need for rapid, large-scale and co-ordinated action against pollution and applaud the \_\_\_ pledges made so far by individuals and countries of the world on action to reduce pollution in the Beat Pollution engagement campaign.

12. We support the actions, commitments and resolutions adopted by the UN Environment Assembly and call for their adequate and coherent implementation.

13. We acknowledge the magnitude of challenges and opportunities highlighted in, among others, the report by the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Towards a Pollution-Free Planet .

14. Moving towards a pollution-free planet is a long-term endeavour. Building on the outcomes of the Third Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, we request the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme to submit a plan for implementation in consultation, with the Committee of Permanent Representatives, for our consideration by no later than the next United Nations Environment Assembly.

15. As addressing pollution is a crucial element for achieving the sustainable development goals, we will advocate for this declaration in all relevant fora, including at the High-Level

Political Forum on Sustainable Development, and we will follow up on its implementation at our next session in 2019.

16. This is our commitment to work towards a pollution-free planet for the health and wellbeing of our people and the environment.

Source: UNEP/EA.3/L.19 of 5 December 2017

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## Education on International Governance

The Global Challenges Foundation in Sweden has taken the lead in encouraging creative new thinking about international governance, with the New Shape Prize competition earlier this year, for which the winning proposals will be announced in Spring 2018.

Now the Foundation has launched the Educators' Challenge, which aims to encourage the development of innovative approaches to engage students and broader audiences in discussions on better frameworks of global collaboration. These approaches should provide a basis for continued reflection and discussion on how to address the greatest challenges of our time.

All educators – from teachers in schools and universities, journalists, content creators, PR professionals, YouTube hosts to game developers and other influencers – have a vital role to play in steering the conversation and increasing knowledge and positive action. They are invited to take on the task of increasing knowledge about global institutions and engagement around institutional reform.

Proposals should develop an innovative and effective way of creating interest in global governance. The competition platform opened for entries on 1 November 2017. The final submission deadline is 30 June 2018, and the results will be announced in November 2018. Ten prizes of 5000 USD will be awarded to the proposals that best fulfill the mission. For more details, see the Educators' Challenge competition platform: <https://www.globalchallenges.org/en/our-work/educators-challenge>.

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## Fiji Climate Change Conference COP 23 in Bonn

The 23rd meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 23) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was held from 6 to 17 November in Bonn, Germany, under the presidency of the government of Fiji, the first time that a small island nation has served in this role.

The Paris Agreement adopted at COP 21 in 2015 was finally signed by all 197 Parties to the Convention, leaving the United States as the only country which has rejected it, although it can't officially withdraw until 4 November 2020, one day after the next U.S. presidential election.

It was expected to be a transitional and technical COP – and it was -- with delegates charged with the complex task of writing the so-called "Paris Rulebook" for all of the elements mandated in the Paris Agreement and Decision text which is scheduled to be adopted next year at COP 24. They also had to complete the design of the 2018 "Facilitative Dialogue," a test run for the "Global Stocktake" which all countries will conduct every five years starting in 2023 to assess and strengthen their "nationally determined

contributions” (NDCs) and global progress toward reaching the goal of the Paris Agreement: to hold the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C and pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Fiji brought vision to this technical COP through the Pacific tradition of “talanoa,” derived from “tala” meaning “talking or telling stories,” and “noa” meaning “zero or without concealment.” In the Fijian context, frank expression without concealment, in face-to-face dialogue, can lead to all participants understanding each other’s feelings and experiences.

The main COP decision – to be known as the Fiji Momentum for Implementation – contains three elements: a call for enhanced Pre-2020 Implementation and Ambition, a reiteration of the Paris Agreement Work Programme, and the design of the Facilitative Dialogue, rebranded by Fiji as the Talanoa Dialogue.

Here’s a shortlist of issues where progress (or no progress) was made in Bonn:

The design of the 2018 Talanoa Dialogue was jointly prepared by the COP 22 presidency of Morocco and the COP 23 Fijian presidency and will be launched in January 2018 under the leadership of Fiji and the COP 24 presidency, Poland. It aims to take stock of the collective efforts of Parties in relation to progress towards the implementation of the Paris Agreement, namely, the long-term goal of holding the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C and to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Many Parties, especially developing countries, worked hard to ensure that the Fiji Presidency will continue to guide the Talanoa Dialogue throughout the year.

The Fiji Momentum for Ambition decides that the outcome of the 2018 Talanoa Dialogue will feed into the COP stocktake on pre-2020 ambition in 2019. The pre-2020 decision and the Talanoa Dialogue together create an ongoing series of dialogues and reviews to enhance pre-2020 action, which will hopefully build enhanced trust to increase ambition for both mitigation and support in the post-2020 period.

Less progress was made on finance. The Adaptation Fund under the Kyoto Protocol will also serve the Paris Agreement. The final decision on Loss and Damage is hopelessly weak, leaving no guarantee of financial support for those affected by catastrophic disasters or even for the body tasked to find that finance. The outcome of the climate finance negotiations on long-term finance (LTF) – continued efforts by developed countries to jointly mobilize USD 100 billion annually by 2020 – were predictably unremarkable. An opportunity to build more trust in the pre-2020 and Paris implementation processes was missed.

While COP23 saw many attempts to promote quick technofixes for the climate crisis (ranging from nuclear energy to carbon capture and storage (CCS), Bioenergy with CCS / BECCS to solar geoengineering) at side events and “climate action” spaces, there were also, encouragingly, increased debates between academics and civil society on transformational approaches and pathways for 1.5°C – targeting the fossil fuel and energy sector, transport, agriculture, lifestyles, financial institutions, GDP growth, and many other out of the (climate) box ideas. Members of the CBD Alliance expressed their alarm over increased talks of geoengineering in the UNFCCC in an Open letter to the UNFCCC: “Geoengineering is a distraction from the real priorities – emission reductions”.

The Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement collected notes on what countries wanted in the “Paris Rulebook”. Another part of the “Paris Rulebook” creation is tasked to the SBSTA – the Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technical Advice. These deliberations are crucial because they focus on international cooperation to enhance ambition as defined in Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. One provision (Article 6.2) establishes “internationally transferred mitigation outcomes” (ITMOs) for countries to meet their NDCs. With regards to land use in the Rulebook, observers are detecting a link between the

CORSIA, the carbon offsetting scheme which was established last year by ICAO -- the International Civil Aviation Organization, a specialized UN agency -- and the numerous references in the SBSTA text to cooperative approaches “outside the NDC.” This refers to mitigation outcomes, including possibly from REDD+, the UN framework to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, being transferred to non-state actors such as CORSIA, which will likely require billions of dollars to offset growth in aviation emissions.

A breakthrough early in the second week after five years of what could only be called bad faith negotiations on agriculture came as a genuine surprise to many observers. Developed countries stepped back from their opposition to long-standing proposals from developing countries and agreed for the subsidiary bodies to “jointly address issues related to agriculture, including through workshops and expert meetings,” and to take “into consideration the vulnerabilities of agriculture to climate change and approaches to addressing food security.” The decision on agriculture mandates a submissions process -- which includes observers -- to provide information on a number of topics so that scientific talks can now progress into action and the UN system can provide more strategic support to countries that need it.

Civil society observers and activists with a handful of allies in governments continue to push for inclusion of the Human Rights language from the preamble of the Paris Agreement into the Rulebook. Meanwhile, civil society, human rights defenders, and representatives of national and international human rights institutions held several meetings on the sidelines of COP 23 to establish a narrative that frames climate change as a human rights issue and to discuss legal avenues for holding big polluters accountable for human rights abuses resulting from climate change. Meanwhile, it was encouraging to see real progress achieved during the duration of COP 23 in a handful of investigations and court cases of strategic climate litigation around the world.

After several negotiating sessions over the first eight days of the COP, and with the specter of failure hanging over the negotiations, a final push propelled negotiators to agree on a Gender Action Plan (GAP). Building on the language of the Paris Agreement, the Gender Action Plan reminds Parties that gender-responsive climate policy continues to require further strengthening in all activities concerning adaptation, mitigation, and related means of implementation (finance, technology development and transfer, and capacity-building) as well as decision-making on the implementation of climate policies. Above all, it requires women to be represented in all aspects of the Convention process and gender mainstreaming through all relevant targets and goals in activities under the Convention as an important contribution to increasing their effectiveness.

The need to strengthen the efforts of local communities and indigenous peoples in responding to climate change was recognized in the Paris Decision text which established a platform for the exchange of experiences and sharing of best practices. A highly successful “open dialogue” on advancing the platform took place at the UNFCCC inter-sessionals this past May, and an agenda item on creating the platform was included in the official negotiations for the first time at this COP. So it was a big advance when final text appeared and was adopted. The Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform is a small step towards recognizing and respecting the perspectives and knowledge of indigenous peoples in this process that can now be built on.

Based on the report from the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung: <http://klima-der-gerechtigkeit.de/2017/11/22/we-will-not-drown-we-are-here-to-fight/>

## Global Civil Society Declaration on Climate Induced Displacement

Across the globe, people are literally running for their lives as their homes and countries are ripped apart by the impacts of climate change. Extreme weather patterns, rising seas levels, and more frequent and catastrophic 'natural' disasters are forcing more and more people to leave their homes. Coordinated and collective action at the local, national and global levels is necessary to protect the human rights and dignity of those affected by climate induced displacement.

At the conclusion of International Civil Society Week 2017 (ICSW) on December 7th, more than 700 civil society leaders and activists from over 100 countries have called for climate change to be formally recognized as a primary driver of migration.

The Global Civil Society Declaration on Climate Induced Displacement was first presented to delegates of ICSW, co-hosted in Suva, Fiji by global civil society alliance CIVICUS and the Pacific Islands Association of Non Governmental Organizations (PIANGO). This is the first time in more than 20 years of convening that ICSW was held in the Pacific region, where rising sea levels are already displacing communities.

The declaration calls on the international community to commit to protecting the human rights of all persons, regardless of their migratory status, and fulfill the objectives of the Paris Climate Agreement.

Civil society is leading the way in preventing and mitigating the impacts of migration and forced displacement. But this is not enough – both governments and the international community need to be part of the solution. In 2016, world leaders began drafting a new Global Compact on “safe, orderly and regular migration”, to be finalised by September 2018.

“The UN global compact process is a critical opportunity to develop a consensus position on how the international community should promote rights-based migration and protect refugees,” said Danny Sriskandarajah, Secretary General of CIVICUS. “We are urging policymakers to protect the rights and dignity of individuals who are being forced to move, and promote the cultural rights of the communities affected,” said Sriskandarajah.

The Declaration calls on the international community to include the following in the Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration:

- Recognition that climate change is a driver of internal and international displacement.
- Commitment to fulfil the objectives of the Paris Agreement.
- Reaffirmation of international and regional human rights commitments.
- Recognition that communities must have key human rights like food, water, housing and health protected to reduce the necessity of migration.
- Commitment to consultation and engagement with impacted communities.
- Commitment to those who are most vulnerable to climate displacement.

Organizations which have contributed to the declaration include the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, the Pacific Islands Development Forum, Oxfam Pacific, 350.org, ACT Alliance and CIVICUS, among others.

Sign on to the Climate Declaration and call on policy makers to protect climate refugees  
<http://bit.ly/2B6eVDI>

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### ALERT

The Alliance of Leading Environmental Researchers & Thinkers (ALERT) has launched a blog where experts can raise the alarm about critical nature conservation and environmental challenges and threats in a short blog format: <http://alert-conservation.org/>