



LEAVES, A Newsletter of the INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM  
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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@ief.org](mailto:newsletter@ief.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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## IEF Matters

### IEF Board News

At its first meeting, the IEF Board elected Arthur Dahl as President and Christine Muller as General Secretary, and appointed Monica Maghami (United Kingdom) and Nava Khorram (Latvia) as non-voting members for this administrative year. The Board is looking forward to the fresh perspectives from these two younger IEF members.

### Interested in creating short videos for the IEF?

At the IEF General Assembly, IEF members expressed the desire for short videos with topics relevant to the IEF. Isn't this a wonderful idea? The only barrier to implementing it is a lack of human resources. Would you like to help – and learn on the way?

The IEF is grateful for the work of Bill and Aaron Kelly who have edited all the videos from our past conferences and webinars and are willing to continue with this wonderful service. For the creation of short videos though, we would need more capable volunteers.

Are you interested in learning how to edit videos? This skill is useful for many professions and for Baha'i service of all kinds. Creating videos can also be a meaningful hobby! Bill and Aaron are willing to teach their skills to IEF members or associates who are interested in serving the IEF in that way. The best way to learn is to serve! :-)

Of course, any member or associate who already knows how to edit videos, is also very welcome to volunteer and/or to share their skill!

Please, send an email to the IEF secretariat if you are interested: [ief@iefworld.org](mailto:ief@iefworld.org)

## “A haven of peace”

### Native forest at Colombia temple promotes environmental action



A native forest project on the grounds of Colombia's Bahá'í House of Worship demonstrates how spiritual principles can guide environmental conservation. Image Credit: Baha'i World News Service

#### **Bahá'í World News Service, 4 December 2024**

AGUA AZUL, Colombia — Against the backdrop of the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP16) in Cali, Colombia, participants from around the world witnessed how spiritual principles can guide environmental conservation through a visit to a unique initiative: a native forest adjacent to the local Bahá'í House of Worship in the Norte del Cauca region.

“This initiative reflects the Bahá'í principle that humanity has a sacred responsibility to be a steward of the natural world,” said Ximena Osorio, a member of the Bahá'í Office of External Affairs of Colombia, in a conversation with the News Service.

“When we care for nature with love and wisdom,” she continued, “we not only protect biodiversity but also nurture our collective spiritual growth and development.”

The expression of the principle of humanity's harmonious relationship with nature was evident during the day-long visit to the site, which included an interfaith devotional gathering with readings from Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Zoroastrian traditions, as well as the Bahá'í writings.

The initiative emerged in response to pressing environmental challenges in the Norte del Cauca region, where the proliferation of sugarcane plantations across the land over many decades has impacted traditional farms, forced residents to lease land to sugar mills, and diminished the biodiversity of the native ecosystem.

When plans for the House of Worship were first announced in 2012, it catalyzed conversations among the local population about the revival of the natural habitat. Through a

series of consultations, residents were inspired to envision how the temple grounds could reflect the region's biodiversity, and the idea emerged to grow a native forest on the surrounding land.

"Rather than viewing the temple grounds in isolation," said Mrs. Osorio, "participants in those consultations envisioned how the grounds could contribute to ecological restoration while providing opportunities for service and education."

This vision took concrete form through what would become the native forest project. As its coordinator, Taraneh Rezvani, explained, "The project aims to provide a space for environmental education and promote reflection on the importance of preserving the environment and our connection to nature."

Spanning 11.5 hectares, the initiative focuses on recovering tropical dry forest—one of the most threatened ecosystems globally, which in Colombia has shrunk to just 8% of its original size.

What distinguishes this initiative is how it expresses the essential relationship between worship and service that Bahá'í Houses of Worship embody. Open to all people, Houses of Worship offer a space where prayer and contemplation inspire service to society.

The surrounding native forest exemplifies this harmony of worship and service through opportunities for practical service to the environment and community.

Mrs. Osorio explains that the project is guided by the Bahá'í principle that science and religion are complementary systems of knowledge and practice. "The project draws on both traditional ecological wisdom and modern conservation science in its approach to restoration," she explained.

From its inception, the project drew on both traditional practices and community participation. Through "mingas"—a traditional practice where people gather for collective service—residents planted over 1,500 trees. Local families and regional institutions donated 1,000 of these trees, representing more than 180 species of fruit and timber trees.

"The native forest provides a unique space where one can experience the deep spiritual significance of our relationship with nature," noted one attendee. This perspective resonated with many conference participants from diverse faith traditions that had gathered at the site.

In the years since its inception, the project's impact on local biodiversity has become increasingly evident.

"Fifty bird species have been identified within the native forest area," shared Mrs. Rezvani. "Many of these species had long disappeared from the region."

The project has also successfully recovered 15 native plant species, with 19 more in the process of recovery. These developments were highlighted during the recent visit by COP16 conference attendees.

"After so many days of intense participation in COP16 activities, coming here has been a source of joy and spiritual and mental revitalization, this is a haven of peace" said one participant.

Another noted that "religious communities can make a significant contribution to biodiversity conservation, starting with the very lands they own, transforming them into a refuge for native and diverse species."

Looking ahead, the initiative aims to broaden its educational function to increase public appreciation for regional biodiversity, streamline its supply of seeds and seedlings to the local population, and contribute to mitigating climate change effects.

SOURCE: <https://news.bahai.org/story/1768/>

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## COP29 Exploring new approaches to climate action

BAKU, Azerbaijan — Delegates from the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) explored how the principle of humanity's oneness, along with new approaches to consultation and decision-making are essential to addressing the climate crisis more effectively.



Image Credit: Baha'i World News, At the UN Climate Conference, BIC delegates highlighted how the principles of humanity's oneness and consultation are essential to addressing environmental challenges.

In reflections shared with the Bahá'í World News Service following the conference, Daniel Perell of the BIC's New York Office observed: "A climate governance framework negotiated

through norms of division and opposition undermines the collaboration and unity humanity needs to address the planetary nature of the crisis.

"The current system of international cooperation, often characterized by competing interests and predetermined positions, has not generated the transformative changes required at this moment in history."

Mr. Perell added. "Only through recognizing our fundamental interconnectedness can we move beyond these limitations."

In the contributions to discussions at COP29, BIC representatives explored how Bahá'í efforts in social action could inform global climate efforts, including those initiatives that promote environmental stewardship.

The BIC representatives shared experiences from communities in [Colombia](#) and [Vanuatu](#) where environmental initiatives emerged through processes that recognized the knowledge, wisdom, and capabilities of local populations.

These experiences, explained the BIC representatives, were guided by spiritual principles such as the harmony between science and religion and the concept of capacity building at all levels of society, which views people, communities, and institutions as protagonists in charting their own path of development.



“What the worldwide Bahá’í community is learning about is how local communities can develop their abilities to identify challenges, analyze circumstances, consult on solutions, and take collective action,” Mr. Perell explained.

“When people are empowered to address challenges in their own surroundings through these processes, the outcomes are more lasting and meaningful than when changes are imposed from outside.”

During the conference, these themes resonated with other participants seeking new approaches to climate action. Speaking at a BIC event at the conference’s Faith Pavilion, María Fernanda Espinosa, former president of the UN General Assembly, emphasized how faith-based perspectives could help address what she called a “hope deficit” in climate discussions.

“The fear of what is happening, the sense of loss and risk” was a source of concern in the COP29 discussions, she observed. However, Ms. Espinosa noted that approaching these challenges through the lens of “human responsibility and working for the common good” could help transform how humanity approaches global governance.



Image: Daniel Perell, of the BIC’s New York Office, speaking at a side event co-hosted by the BIC and the Government of Vanuatu, where the discussion took the form of a ‘Tok stori’—a practice of sitting in a circle on mats to share perspectives. Photo credit: UN Climate Change – Kiara Worth

Speaking to the News Service after the conference, Ramazan Asgarli, a member of the BIC delegation from Azerbaijan, reflected on how the conference revealed humanity’s growing awareness of its interconnectedness. “These forums represent an important space where the world comes together to address our common future,” he noted.

“The mounting environmental challenges are gradually awakening humanity to the reality of its essential oneness—a recognition that will be vital for developing approaches equal to the planetary scale of these issues.”

Drawing on experiences from Bahá’í community-building activities worldwide, Cecilia Schirmeister, another BIC representative at COP29, observed how effective initiatives emerge when people begin to see their identity as inseparable from the wellbeing of the whole community.

“When young people see the needs of the community as their own responsibility, it creates a sense of collective ownership over changing one’s reality,” she said. “This builds confidence that individuals can make meaningful change, which then motivates action.”

This understanding of collective responsibility and shared ownership reflects a broader vision of how communities can address challenges together. Rather than relying on external intervention or adversarial processes, such an approach emphasizes genuine consultation and unified action.

Mr. Perell stated: “True universal participation goes beyond simply having different voices present.

“It requires creating spaces where people can genuinely learn from each other, remain open to new insights, and work together to understand complex realities. The problems we face are global, so our solutions must integrate diverse perspectives and experiences.”

The BIC’s participation at COP29 represented one aspect of its ongoing contribution to the discourse on [environmental sustainability](#) and [global governance](#), offering insights drawn from the Bahá’í community’s experience in fostering patterns of collective action that can address the challenges facing humanity.

Source: Baha’i World News Service: <https://news.bahai.org/story/1769/>

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## Letter on Climate COP Reform

The Club of Rome delivered an open letter to the Climate Change COP29 in Baku on 14 November 2024. It has been included in news reports on the COP. Many Climate Governance Commission members have now also signed, as has IEF President Arthur Dahl, a member of the CGC steering committee.

You can read the open letter with its suggested measures for reform of the COP process here: <https://iefworld.org/node/1644>

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## Multifaith Triple COP Call to Action 15 November 2024

*The International Environment Forum has endorsed the following interfaith call to action addressed to the Conferences of the Parties (COP) of the three Rio conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification.*

As we approach a pivotal alignment of the meetings of the three Rio Conventions in 2024, we, leaders, representatives, and organizations from diverse faith traditions and other communities, unite our voices to address the urgent environmental crisis facing our planet. In this critical moment, we stand to reaffirm and reinvigorate the visionary spirit that birthed these United Nations conventions at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit: UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (CCC), and Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD).

Since then, we have seen the global community come together to advance and reaffirm that vision in a variety of ways. We recognize, however, that we are falling short in protecting the environment and safeguarding it for future generations: we are on track to miss the 1.5 degree goal of the Paris Agreement, in the past 50 years we have lost approximately 70% of global biodiversity, and up to 40% of the world's land is degraded, affecting the livelihoods of about 3.2 billion people.

In the face of these challenges, the wisdom of Rio in 1992 rings true today: the crises of nature and biodiversity loss, climate change, and desertification, among others, are intrinsically linked and mutually reinforcing, demanding a coordinated global response. They reflect humanity's discordant relationship with the rest of the natural world. As we face these interconnected challenges, a comprehensive and restorative approach is necessary to truly "make peace with Nature," aligning with the principles of the Rio Conventions.

Advances in scientific knowledge, technical capacity, and material resources need to be matched by a parallel will for implementation. History has demonstrated that this gap between knowledge and action can be bridged by faith - religious faith, faith in humanity, or faith in the possibilities that emerge through collaboration. The inspiration to act in unique, profound, and collective ways, conscious of our responsibility to present and future generations, can ensure that words on a page become a lived reality for the planet.

To do so, to heal our fractured relationship with the natural world, requires cooperation and action at every level:

- Globally and nationally, we must realign policies and actions to reflect the urgency and interconnectedness of biodiversity loss, climate change, and land degradation, ensuring that all efforts are consistent with the targets and commitments set forth by the Rio Conventions.
- Locally, we must encourage and nurture community-based, whole-of-society initiatives that honor and protect the ecosystems that sustain life.
- Internally, we must cultivate coherence between inner and outer restoration, recognizing that our personal and collective flourishing is inextricably linked to the health of our planet.

As people of faith and goodwill, we offer these as pathways towards a flourishing world for all. Dialogue and collaboration across boundaries and borders will be instrumental in overcoming the challenges before us. We, therefore, call for enhanced cooperation and partnerships across all lines of distinction to fulfill the objectives of the Rio Conventions and ensure a sustainable future for all.

Now, the fundamental challenge is to return to the spirit of collective effort and potential that animated humanity in 1992. Beyond trying to stop a downward spiral, if we muster the limitless human capacity to break through deadlocks, we can create unprecedented global solidarity and help bring about a better future for all.

Recognizing previous declarations and activities from faith communities on the importance of environmental care, we hereby sign this new Call to Action, reaffirming our commitment to the vision of the Rio Conventions and our sacred responsibility to nurture and protect our planet alongside the rest of Nature.

**NOTES:** The Multifaith Triple COP Call to Action was drafted and reviewed by representatives of the following organizations:

Anglican Communion  
Baha'i International Community  
Catholic Youth Network for  
Environmental Sustainability in Africa  
G20 Global Land Initiative

ProSocial World  
Soka Gakkai International  
UNEP Faith for Earth Coalition  
United Religions Initiative  
WWF Beliefs and Values Program

The drafting of the statement was supported by the G20 Global Land Initiative.

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## **From Stockholm to Rio and Geneva Six Decades of Enhancing Collaboration in the Fight Against the Triple Planetary Crisis: A Roundtable with Elders**

On 18 November, the Geneva Environment Network organized a roundtable discussion as part of their 25th anniversary series of events. It aimed to celebrate Geneva's legacy in global environmental governance. Retired high-level experts and diplomats who have worked in International Geneva have been invited to provide their reflections and examine the evolution of partnerships and frameworks that address the triple planetary crisis. IEF President Arthur Dahl was one of the panelists.

Speakers explored the historical roles of Geneva-based institutions in the early stages of environmental governance, as well as the city's role in key global milestones, from the Stockholm Conference, the Brundtland Commission, the First World Climate Conference, to the UN Conference on the Human Environment. Panelists reflected on their personal experiences in international Geneva, highlighting moments of meaningful impact and the collaborative spirit that has defined the city's approach to global environmental challenges.

Discussions also examined the evolution of environmental conventions and multilateral environmental agreements, reflecting upon the development of foundational environmental frameworks – from the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to the Strategic Approach to Integrated Chemicals Management (SAICM) to more recent agreements – from the Paris Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) to the Global Framework on Chemicals (GFC). Panelists assessed the strengths and gaps in these frameworks, offering perspectives on their ambition and proposing adjustments that may strengthen their impact.

For a recording of this event and speaker information, go here: <https://www.genevaenvironmentnetwork.org/events/from-stockholm-to-rio-and-geneva-six-decades-of-enhancing-collaboration-in-the-fight-against-the-triple-planetary-crisis-a-roundtable-with-elders-gen-25/>

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## **Women Faith and Climate Network UNEP Faith for Earth**

21 November 2024

A groundbreaking initiative bringing together women faith leaders to combat climate change was launched 24 October 2024 in Frascati, Italy.

The new Women, Faith and Climate Network engages women-led climate action networks from diverse faiths and geographies. The network's aim is to scale up the powerful reach and influence women of faith to go further, faster towards achieving climate goals.



Fifty women leaders from 8 major faiths and 15 countries met to forge collaborations, and to launch the new Women, Faith and Climate Network.

The combined reach and influence of women of faith networks is enormous. Participants estimated that their networks reach over 73 million people, including groups like Mothers' Union, with over 4 million members in 83 countries, the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation USA and its 6 million women, Brahma Kumaris with 600,000 women members and UISG with its 600,000 Catholic sisters across the globe.

The initiative is unique in its diversity, and its focus on practical action and collaboration. It aims to increase the visibility of the vast ongoing women led practical climate action and grassroots and national level, scale up best practices, foster radical collaboration among diverse women of faith networks, and mobilize women of faith in support of mass mobilisations of women for climate action.

The next steps for the Women, Faith and Climate Network:

- Increase visibility of women led climate action through storytelling, mapping and communications
- Expand partnerships and collaborations on greening houses of worship, renewable energy and tree planting
- Combine forces for joint advocacy at key climate related events in 2025, including COP 30
- Establish a coordinating mechanism for the Network to support connection, exchange and collaboration among members.

Source: Slightly shortened from [https://iefworld.org/node/1647?check\\_logged\\_in=1](https://iefworld.org/node/1647?check_logged_in=1)

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## **The Evidence Base for Policy: Exploring New Data on the Relationship between Ecological Threats and Conflict**

On 18 November, the Stimson Center and the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) cohosted an insightful COP29 discussion on how rising food insecurity, water stress, natural disasters, and demographic pressures are reshaping the future of countries, regions, and cities worldwide.

The recording is available here: <https://www.stimson.org/event/the-evidence-base-for-policy/>

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## **COP29: Key outcomes agreed at the UN climate talks in Baku**

Developed nations have agreed to help channel “at least” \$300bn a year into developing countries by 2035 to support their efforts to deal with climate change.

However, the new climate-finance goal – agreed along with a range of other issues at the COP29 summit in Baku, Azerbaijan – has left developing countries bitterly disappointed.

They were united in [calling](#) for developed countries to raise \$1.3tn a year in climate finance.

In the end, negotiators agreed on a looser call to raise \$1.3tn each year from a wide range of sources, including private investment, by 2035.

Some countries, including [India](#) and [Nigeria](#), accused the COP29 presidency of pushing the deal through without their proper consent, following chaotic last-minute negotiations.

Countries failed to reach an agreement on how the outcomes of last year's "[global stocktake](#)", including a key pledge to transition away from fossil fuels, should be taken forward – instead shunting the decision to COP30 next year in Brazil.

They did manage to find agreement on the remaining sections of Article 6 on carbon markets, meaning all elements of the Paris Agreement have been finalised nearly 10 years after it was signed.

COP president Azerbaijan – a country that sources two-thirds of its government revenue from fossil fuels – faced accusations of conflict of interest and malpractice, with one minister labelling its hosting style “deplorable”.

For in-depth analysis of all the key outcomes in Baku – both inside and outside the COP, visit Carbon Brief's website: <https://www.carbonbrief.org/cop29-key-outcomes-agreed-at-the-un-climate-talks-in-baku/>

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## On Civil Society and Enduring Relationships

by Daniel Perell

**Bahá'í International Community Perspectives**

17 October 2024

The Summit of the Future was an integral part of my professional life for more than a year. Naturally, I have been asked numerous times for my perspective on what actually took place.

Yet I find myself reflecting on a different set of lessons, an analysis of the “how” rather than the “what.” How was the process successful? How do we measure meaningful engagement of civil society? How did we expect change in the world to come about? And how were results achieved ... or not?

The relationship between civil society and UN Member States is often defined in terms of advocacy and accountability. Civil society pushes for various outcomes and then it strives to ensure that governments live up to their commitments. This approach has helped humanity advance in numerous ways. But I find myself wondering: what kind of relational dynamic does this lead to?

I was talking to a Member State diplomat after an event in which a civil society actor had become quite contentious. In a conversation with the diplomat afterward, they said that when a participant becomes passionate in this way, the diplomat's tendency is to shut down mentally, and disengage from the interaction altogether.

It's a reaction that many of us would understand, and a situation none of us would want to be in. And one person browbeating another does not suddenly become a constructive or effective interaction, regardless of the rightness or wrongness of the argument.

In speaking with Member States and UN agencies about what worked in the lead up to the Summit, relationships of mutuality and expertise, rather than pressure and protest, seem to have had the most lasting impact. Of course, this is not an either/or proposition; many different strategies can and should exist concurrently.

I recall a negotiation class in which my classmates told me that I would often “give too much” to the other side. When the professor asked me why I was willing to take a sub-optimal deal (in material terms), I said that while I did not get the maximal result in the short run, I believed that my approach would lead to something far more meaningful. After all, life is ultimately

about relationships. Over time, my interactions would be characterized by honesty and mutual benefit, rather than mistrust and suspicion.

In the short run, I might not have secured what appeared to be a better outcome by traditional metrics, but the value of cultivating long-term relationships far outweighed the immediate benefits. This experience shaped how I view engagement at a larger scale, including in the context of civil society and Member States. And, in many ways, it is coherent with what the Baha'i International Community tries to contribute.

I am not naive to the challenges we face in the world and the urgency with which they must be addressed. But perhaps we fall prey to a collective naivety if we think that short term, transactional relationships—often built on competition, pressure, and compulsion, rather than cooperation, forbearance, and encouragement—can truly lead to the outcomes we seek.

What might this change look like in practice?

On the widest scale, humanity is united on one side of the table, facing existential threats like climate change, biodiversity loss, and nuclear conflict. To treat one-another as the problem may not only miss the space for good outcomes, but could exacerbate the risks we face.

Working from the same side of the table starts with agreement about the challenge before us, and then allows a conversation to continue. In fact, it can demonstrate that what may seem like solely one challenge (climate change) is actually part of a complicated web of challenges (employment and a just transition, education, inequality, historical injustice). Moreover, solutions that are collectively reached win greater ownership and better implementation. Accountability can become a source of positive motivation, rather than adversarialism. And the relationships built in this process are constructive and, we are learning, impactful.

So, what are my reflections on the Summit of the Future? Helpfully, the discourse has expanded significantly for conversations about justice, trust, solidarity, and our responsibility to present and future generations, and this is beneficial. In terms of specific outcomes, their success will only be evident in the coming years. Naturally, not all problems were solved in those few days, or in the outcome documents. But who thought they would be?

Moving forward, I am thinking about how our approach as civil society can continue to evolve to include more strategies that could help ensure that space is open to its contributions. Perhaps proactively seeking opportunities for a collaborative posture—as civil society, the United Nations, and Member States—can help us ensure that the promises made in the Pact for the Future (and other UN documents) become lived realities for people around the world.

Daniel Perell is a representative to the United Nations for the Bahá'í International Community and a member of the International Environment Forum.

SOURCE: <https://www.bic.org/perspectives/civil-society-and-enduring-relationshi...>

