

Press Release; LONDON, November 17-18 2015

Faith in Conservation: the Future of Religion and Conservation Networks

When Prince Philip, the International President of WWF, had the idea, 30 years ago, of bringing together conservation organizations and religious leaders to collaborate on environment protection, he could scarcely have imagined the enormous impact this would have on the environment.

In the three decades since, hundreds of thousands of successful faith-based conservation programmes, organisations and projects have developed; Religion & Environment is a recognized and researched academic subject at universities around the world, and secular organizations are increasingly recognizing the need to work with non-traditional partners and are acknowledging the importance of connecting to what really motivates people to protect their environment in order to create successful environment programmes.

However, there has never been an international attempt to consolidate lessons learned and best practices to help new partnerships and sustain the ones that have developed.

For the first time ever, key people who have brokered partnerships between religions and secular organizations and governments, will come together to share experiences, successes, failures, hopes, plans and dreams to help shape the next 30 years.

The landmark meeting will be held November 17 to 18 in the medieval Palace of the Archbishops of Canterbury, Lambeth Palace, just across the River Thames from the Houses of Parliament, and will be opened by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh.

This effort was developed by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) - the world's largest non-profit conservation organization and is funded in part by the Science for Nature and People (SNAP) partnership. Two years ago, TNC began to explore how they could work with religions and contacted the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), founded by Prince Philip in 1995, which for the past 20 years has been the main organisation brokering partnerships between faiths, governments and secular environment groups.

“There has been a growing interest in exploring working with faiths by many secular organizations but especially in the last few years, by conservation groups,” said ARC’s secretary general, Martin Palmer, who this year has worked with the World Bank, the United Nations and the French President and French

Government on high level attempts to explore a more human, personal side to reacting to climate change, to make these actions more effective.

“We’re delighted to be partners with TNC on this. Their whole approach when thinking of working with religions has been to listen and ask, to discuss and then see how partnerships might shape both what they do as well as what the faiths might do.”

The project’s support from the Science for Nature and People (SNAP) partnership is another sign of the growing recognition of the scientific conservation community that tackling the world’s most pressing conservation problems requires new and diverse partnerships that strive to achieve both conservation and human well-being goals.

Craig Groves, Executive Director, SNAP said: “Partnerships between conservation and faith groups hold great promise, yet face a number of challenges such as lack of understanding regarding what motivates different groups in conservation and how they operate. Overcoming such challenges at the nexus of conservation and human well-being is a core objective of the Science for Nature and People partnership.”

One of the key aims is to create guidance for secular and religious groups on how to work more effectively together written by a working group (to be created at Lambeth).

Attendees include:

- The broker for the first ever Fatwa against wildlife killings (in Indonesia)
- The brokers for the Daoist, Buddhist and Confucianist networks in China planning for nature conservation with support from the Chinese government
- People in Kenya, India, US, UK, and elsewhere who have successfully linked religions more effectively with national governments and communities on environment issues
- Those who pioneered conservation links with religions and the World Bank and United Nations
- Scholars who explore the intersection between religion and ecology

Sponsors

Sponsors include the Science for Nature and People (SNAP) partnership, WWF-UK, and The Pilkington Foundation.

Background

There are five key factors to why working with religions on environment has become increasingly important to secular bodies in the past five years.

1. Conservation goals are not being achieved at the necessary scale to address the escalating global environmental threats. Conservation success depends upon changing human values and behaviour, and religions often shape peoples' identity, values, and conduct.
2. Religion-based strategies to environmental issues are often effective and sustainable;
3. Earlier climate change talks have failed: and there is concern about how effective national governments and intergovernmental agencies can be. This has led to an increased awareness of the vital role of civil society in driving changes and religion is the largest sector of civil society in every country.
4. There has been a rise of religious extremism, and it has become critical to address religious issues collaboratively;
5. In June 2015 Pope Francis issued a moving, articulate, persuasive Encyclical, titled *Laudate Si*, on the human obligation to protect creation. He is the head of the world's biggest religious tradition, with 1.2 billion followers.

Websites and Social Media

ARC:	@arcworld	www.arcworld.org
TNC	@nature_org	www.nature.org
SNAP	@snap_is	www.snap.is
R20	@Regions20	www.regions20.org

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