



ALLIANCE OF RELIGIONS AND CONSERVATION

launched in 1995 by HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh KG KT

PRESS RELEASE

Celebration of Faiths and the Environment

Many Heavens, One Earth: Faith Commitments for a Living Planet

Windsor, November 3, 2009: United Nations Secretary-General His Excellency Mr Ban Ki-moon called on political leaders to join the world's faiths and the United Nations in taking bold steps to address dangerous climate change.

Speaking at Windsor Castle before HRH The Prince Philip and some 200 faith and community leaders at the Celebration of Faiths and the Environment, organised by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation and the United Nations Development Programme, Mr Ban Ki-moon said religions had a vital role to play in inspiring world leaders to "act more courageously" at next month's critical Copenhagen climate summit.

In a heartfelt speech, that frequently deviated from his prepared text, Mr Ban said: "Science has made it quite clear – plainly clear – that this climate change is happening and accelerating much, much faster than one realises.

"We have knowhow, we have resources but the only vacuum is political will. You can inspire, you can provoke, you can challenge your leaders, through your wisdom, through your followers.

"Together let us walk a more sustainable path, one that respects our planet and provides for a safer, healthier, more equitable future for all."

Mr Ban said he had long believed that "when governments, civil society and particularly religious communities work together, transformation can take place. Faiths and religions are an essential part of that equation.

"Indeed, the world's faith communities occupy a unique position in discussions on the fate of our planet and the accelerating impacts of climate change."

That was because of the scale of their reach*, he said: "You are the leaders who can have the largest, widest and deepest reach.

"Together the major faith groups have established, run or contribute to more than half of all schools worldwide.

"You are the third largest category of investors in the world. You produce more weekly magazines and newspapers than all the secular press in the European Union. Your potential impact is enormous."

He added: “You can – and do – inspire people to change.”

Mr Ban said climate change affected us all but not equally – with the poor “least responsible” for the emissions currently in our atmosphere yet “most likely to suffer first and foremost” from the impacts of climate change.

Faith groups spoke “to the heart of humanity’s deepest needs, our concerns and hopes for the world,” he said.

He added: “This is why the voices, the deeds and the teachings of the world’s faith groups are so vitally important. In the coming weeks I urge you to make your voices heard loud and clear. Do all you can in your power, in your teaching, through your wisdom, to your followers.”

He added: “This is why we work with organisations like the Alliance of Religions and Conservation which is co-hosting this event, together with the UNDP.”

Mr Ban welcomed the long-term action plans on the environment announced by nine of the world’s major faiths – Baha’ism, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hindu, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism and Sikhism. Between them they have announced a total of 31 detailed plans, full of practical initiatives to “protect the living planet”, to be rolled out over five, seven, eight, nine and 10 years with the aim of affecting generations to come.

Faith representatives were today presented with certificates by HRH The Prince Philip and Mr Ban in honour of their long-term action plans, before sitting down to the first vegan Royal banquet to be served at Windsor Castle.

This was followed by a special celebration of performances and prayers – and as Mr Ban himself said, “the word ‘celebrate’ is important to highlight” – given the faiths’ ability to generate hope at a time when ordinary people can feel despair at the size of the environmental challenge.

Martin Palmer, head of ARC, said: “The Secretary-General of the United Nations goes to Copenhagen not just with the prayers and best wishes of every major faith tradition in the world but with the knowledge that if, God forbid, the nations of the world are unable to rise to the occasion at Copenhagen, the faiths will – and already have.

“It may well be that it falls to civil society to have the energy, the vision, the strength and the will to go where no major national government will go.

“Nothing would give us greater pleasure than for the governments of the world to walk side by side with the faiths but if they cannot, then we and many other sectors of civil society will journey on and hope that at some point in the future they might catch us up.

“My sense is that the Secretary-General has drawn great hope from the fact that the religions of the world have made commitments which will probably touch the lives of more than two billion people.

“We hope and pray that those nation states that are timorous will likewise be encouraged by the fact that we have already gone on before them and will support them if they are bold enough to join us in making peace with the planet.”

The plans cover all the key areas where the faiths have outreach: assets – greening their buildings, land and forests; education; wisdom in times of crisis; traditions of simple living, pilgrimage and food sourcing; advocacy and media; ability to create and fund networks and partnerships; and celebration.

Prince Philip founded ARC in 1996.

* Together the world’s faiths reach out to 85 per cent of the world’s population, according to the Atlas of Religions, published by Earthscan, 2007.

Ends

For more information visit the ARC website at: www.arcworld.org
The full transcript of Mr Ban Ki-moon’s speech will appear on the UN website later today.