

PRESS RELEASE: Historic meeting of Shinto priests and international environmental and religious figures to take place at Ise this June

May 23, 2014:

A unique meeting of 700 Shinto priests and leading international environmental and religious figures at the major Japanese shrine next month will help carve the future of how the world develops.

Jinja Honcho, the Association of Shinto Shrines in Japan, is holding its first ever international meeting, taking place in the sacred pilgrimage shrine of Ise from 2-4 June. This historic event is part of the commemorative events to celebrate the 62nd Shikinen Sengu of Jingu, also known as the 62nd rebuilding of the Grand Shrine.

With a dramatic opening ceremony and procession across the main ceremonial bridge to the Toba shrine (on June 2) *Traditions for the Future: Culture, Faith and Values for a Sustainable Planet* will be both a thoroughly modern and a thoroughly ancient approach to coming together to work out how to protect this planet, a planet on which, Shintoism believes, every rock and every tree - indeed all life - is sacred.

ARC Secretary General, Martin Palmer: "ARC is honoured to not only be invited to be Jinja Honcho's main partner in this historic event, but also, for the first time ever, to bring the UN to engage with this ancient tradition – and with all the traditions and faiths coming to Ise. Together we are shaping a better future!"

The discussions will feed directly into the Strategic Development Goals of the United Nations (which follow on from the Millennium Development Goals 2000-2015 and will start in 2015), but they will also lead to a host of practical environmental actions from religions around the world.

In addition to key discussions and planning of values helping draw in insights, not just from faiths, but also the Arts and Media; subjects include how religious groups can protect endangered wildlife and how pilgrimage (which involves more than 200 million separate visits to holy places around the world every year) can become more of a blessing to the earth, and less of an ecological threat. Some 8 million pilgrims visit Ise alone every year, for example, which has the benefit of opening many people to a spiritual, natural experience they will carry into their everyday lives, but at the same time it stretches resources, and leaves pollution.

The conference at Ise will also hear a keynote address from Olav Kjørven, Assistant Secretary General at the UN, who has been responsible for pushing the SDG process forward. Delegates will be able to make direct contributions to this discussion and to the SDGs as part of the event programme.

Held in collaboration with the UK-based Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), is the first time Shintoism has organized such an event and it represents a historic opening of the Shinto religion towards other faiths and cultures.

The Japanese spirituality inherited from the ancient ancestors has been gradually lost or hidden somewhere deep in our consciousness. It might not be an exaggeration if we said that not only environmental problems but also all problems of modern society have been caused by lack of the awe, reverence, and appreciation for nature that

ancient people used to have and taught us – the Shinto Statement on the Environment, 1995

OCEANS OF THE FUTURE

At the same time as the Ise event, the great historic city and Shinto shrine of Munakata in Kyushu, Japan is showing how Shintoism is taking seriously the challenges of the environment. With its theme “Oceans of the Future” (30th May to 2nd June 2014) the shrine and the city in partnership with UBrainTV, one of ARC’s media partners are bringing together religious, political, economic and scientific leaders to debate the future of the oceans. ARC has been honoured to have been part of the initial planning group and welcomes this new development of engaged Shintoism. This year’s event is planned to be the first of a long term series of annual environmental events.

Key speakers include José Ramos-Horta, Former president of East Timor and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Rajendra Kumar Pachauri, Chairman, of the International Panel on Climate Change.

As part of this innovative programme there is a major focus on youth leadership and reaching out to young people.

Highlights of the meetings will be available on UBrainTV in the next few weeks.

CONTACTS and PRESS DETAILS

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Interviews can be arranged, but as much warning as possible is needed.

Key potential interviewees include: Rev Tsunekiyo Tanaka, President of Jinja Hocho; Mr Hajime Komazawa, Director of PR for Jinja Honcho; Rev Katsuji Iwahashi, Chief of the International Section for Jinja Honcho; Martin Palmer, ARC Secretary General; Olav Kjoerven UN Deputy Secretary General.

BACKGROUND

- Every 20 years the ornate wooden Grand Shrine at the holy site of Ise in Japan is completely renewed. The major celebration of the latest shrine began in 2013 and this is one of the key events. The trees for rebuilding the shrine in a century's time are already growing in special Shinto groves. The pots, the swords, the robes and other objects of ritual are also remade. But also built in to the process is a way in which all the old materials are all recycled, reused and treasured. It is an extraordinary ritual example of how we need to be careful of, and grateful for, the environment and all it provides.
- Last time the shrine was renewed 20 years ago there was a sense there was something old fashioned and disappearing. When the 62nd Shikinen Sengu ritual at Ise took place in 2013 it marked a renewal of the role of Shinto in contemporary Japan and the perspective its roots in nature can provide, especially in response to questions raised by the 2011 tsunami and earthquake. There was a feeling in Japanese society and media coverage that this is about the future, not the past, and that it was a model for environmental care.
- Jinja Honcho is a founder member of the Green Pilgrimage Network, linking 28 pilgrimage sites worldwide, all pledged to reduce the carbon footprint of their pilgrimages.
- The Grand Shrine was built to be the home of the goddess Amaterasu-omikami, from whom the Japanese imperial family traces its descent.
- ARC was founded by HRH Prince Philip in 1995 to work with religions on environment programmes. It works with 12 distinct major faiths, helping them create long term environmental plans that are true to their teachings. www.arcworld.org
- Prince Philip writes: "I believe that this historic occasion marks the beginning of a new sense of respect and responsibility for the well-being of the natural environment in Japan. It is also a celebration of a partnership with the other members of ARC in their combined commitment to care for the future of our world."
- The Green Pilgrimage Network was founded by ARC in 2011. Now more than 30 pilgrimage sites around the world have made a commitment, through the network, to become more green because they are sacred.
- The Millenium Development Goals (2000-2015) include halving poverty, halting the spread of HIV/AIDS, providing universal primary education and ensuring environmental sustainability <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/envIRON.shtml>
- The issue of WHY communities, organisations and nations would want to implement the HOW of addressing sustainable development has either been ignored or seriously neglected in traditional discourse and planning around global targets. The Values Quest Programme of the Club of Rome (CoR) and ARC, was created explicitly to address the question of the values and the cultural context within which such solutions could be implemented. Too

often the assumption has been that what was needed was a monolithic model which was applied regardless of culture and values. This has also meant that the traditional partners in such global targets have been technological or ideological, and that contribution of for example the arts, media, religion and even sports have simply been left out of the equation.

- There are two key locations: the Jingu Kaikan (pilgrim hall) just 100 metres from the main bridge to the Toba shrine where there the Opening Ceremony on the afternoon of June 2 and sessions on June 3 including 700 Shinto priests discussing sacred forests. About 45 minutes away is the Shima hotel where most delegates will stay, and where some of the events will be held particularly on the morning of June 2.
- The meeting will be attended by a representative of the Imperial Royal Family
- It is possible to interview the artisans with sufficient notice, but they ask that you do not reveal their names.
- For more information on Shintoism and the environment please see <http://www.arcworld.org/faiths.asp?pageID=9>

LINKS

www.arcworld.org - website of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation

www.greenpilgrimage.net - website of Green Pilgrimage network, of which Jinja Honcho is a member

<http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=638> - more information about the Ise meeting