

Alliance of Religions and Conservation
Religions and the environment: Background information on Islam
for pupils (to be used in conjunction with ARC GCSE lesson plan 1)

Muslim Assisi Declaration, 1986

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Key points

- The essence of Islamic teaching is that the entire universe is God's creation. ... The whole of the rich and wonderful universe belongs to God, its maker.
- God created mankind – a very special creation because mankind alone was created with reason and the power to think. ... we can only properly understand ourselves when we recognise that our proper condition is one of submission to the God who made us. ... our freedom is that of being sensible, aware, responsible trustees of God's gifts and bounty.
- For the Muslim, mankind's role on earth is that of a **khalifa**, vice-regent or trustee of God. ... We are not masters of this earth; it does not belong to us to do what we wish. It belongs to God and He has entrusted us with its safekeeping. The khalifa will render an account of how he treated the trust of God on the Day of Reckoning. The notion that describes the accountability of the khalifa is **akhrah**.
- The central concept of Islam is **tawheed** or the Unity of God. ... (Allah's) trustees are responsible for maintaining the unity of His creation ... by balance and harmony. ... Islam is the middle path and we will be answerable for how we have walked this path, how we have maintained balance and harmony in the whole of creation around us.
- It is these values which led Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, to say: "If a Muslim plants a tree or sows a field and men and beasts and birds eat from it, all of it is charity on his part." and again, "The world is green and beautiful and God has appointed you his stewards over it."
- If I sincerely intend to be God's khalifa ... than I must have an opinion about (current) environmental issues), must prepare myself to make choices about them, because I will be accountable for what mankind has wrought with these devices in the hereafter.
- Islam is a very practical world-view. It seeks, in all its principles and injunctions, to give pragmatic shapes to its concepts and values. ... Such Shariah institutions as **haram** zones ... reserves established solely

Religions and the environment: Background information on Islam for pupils

for the conservation of wildlife and forests, form the core of the environmental legislation of Islam.

- Shariah should become the vanguard for environmental legislation. Our ethical system provides the bearings for all our actions. Yet our actions often undermine the very values we cherish. We must imbibe these values into our very being. We must judge our actions by them. They furnish us with a world-view which enables us to ask environmentally appropriate questions properly weigh the environmental costs and benefits of what we want, what we can do within the ethical boundaries established by God, without violating the rights of his other creations.
- If we use (these) values ... then I believe we will create a true Islamic alternative ... to the environmentally destructive thought and action which dominates the world today.

You can download the full text of the original Assisi declarations, including the Muslim declaration, at: <http://tinyurl.com/c378tvw>

Islam & the environment: Quotations from scriptures and others

“The Divine Law (al shariah) is explicit in extending the religious duties of man to the natural order and the environment” – Seyyed Hossein Nasr

“The world is green and beautiful, and Allah has appointed you his guardian over it,” taught the prophet Muhammad.

“It is He who produceth gardens with trellises and without and dates and tilth with produce of all kinds and olives and pomegranates similar [in kind] and different [in variety]: eat of their fruit in their season but render the dues that are proper on the day that the harvest is gathered. But waste not by excess: for Allah loveth not the wasters” – Qur’an 006.141

“... He created everything and determined them in exact proportions” – Qur’an 25:2

“So set thou thy face steadily and truly to the Faith: [Establish] Allah’s handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: no change [let there be] in the work [wrought] by Allah: that is the standard Religion: but most among mankind understand not” – Qur’an 030.030.

Religions and the environment: Background information on Islam for pupils

"The world is sweet and verdant green, and Allah appoints you to be His regents in it, and will see how you acquit yourselves..." – Sunnah of the Prophet.

"God is in the water of the lake; he is also in the cracked bed of the lake, when the lake has dried up. God is in the abundant harvest; he is also in the famine that occurs when the harvest fails. God is in the lightning; he is also in the darkness, when the lightning has faded... Brothers and sisters, you pile up stones to make shrines, imagining that God will make himself present there. Then you are surprised when these shrines do not ease your cares and worries." From *366 Readings From Islam*, translated by Robert Van der Weyer, Pilgrim Press, 2000.

"It is He who hath made you [His] agents inheritors of the earth: He hath raised you in ranks some above others: that he may try you in the gifts He hath given you: for thy Lord is quick in punishment: yet He is indeed Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful" – Qur'an 006.165.

"Our freedom is that of being sensible, aware, responsible trustees of Allah's gifts and bounty. For the Muslim, mankind's role on earth is that of a Khalifah – vicegerent or trustee of Allah. We are Allah's stewards and agents on Earth. We are not masters of this Earth; it does not belong to us to do what we wish. It belongs to Allah and He has entrusted us with its safekeeping. Our function as vicegerents, Khalifahs of Allah, is only to oversee the trust" – His Excellency Dr Abdullah Omar Naseef, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, 1986

Muslim Seven Year plan (2012-2019)

This Muslim Seven Year Plan on the environment was drawn up by the UK-based Earth-Mates Dialogue Center in co-operation with the Kuwaiti Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. Some 22 key Muslim participants met in October 2008 in Kuwait to draw up their plan. It was endorsed in Istanbul in July 2009 by about 200 Muslim scholars, leaders, and government officials, and launched at ARC's Windsor Celebration in November 2009. It included proposals to:

1. Create a Wakf in one year in order to implement the climate change plan.
2. Establish Islamic labels for different products – an Islamic system with strict authenticity standards.

Religions and the environment: Background information on Islam for pupils

3. Work towards a 'Green Hajj' with the Saudi Minister of the Hajj. Aim to have the Hajj free of plastic bottles after two years; introduce initiatives over the next 5-10 years to transform Hajj into a recognised environmentally friendly pilgrimage.
4. Plot the construction of a 'Green Mosque' showcasing best practice in heating, light, design etc. Plan to use this model for building other mosques worldwide

Planned Actions

Capacity building

- Establish an institutional enabling framework
- Create a Wakf
- Develop Islamic labels for products
- Establish an umbrella organisation (Macca – the Muslim Association for Climate Change Action)

Education

- Support research (annual prize; sponsor students; link to scientists and academic institutions; establish professorship; database of research)
- Develop education resources (Imam guides; teachers' guides; textbooks; translation of relevant textbooks; university curricula)
- Best practice environmental guide for businesses
- Build models for environmental friendly mosques

Communication, Outreach & Partnerships

- Develop content of the message (Islam & Environment)
- Develop websites, TV, magazines, films, mobile exhibition
- Establish a special TV channel for Islam & The Environment
- Establish a network of Muslim journalists, publish guide on climate change for the media
- Choose 10 cities in Muslim world to implement the plan

Religions and the environment: Background information on Islam for pupils

Examples of Islamic Environmental Action

Dynamite fishing challenged through Islamic teaching

<http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=70>

In the islands off Zanzibar in the Indian Ocean the fishermen were using guns and dynamite to kill the fish rather than traditional net fishing. These destructive methods were destroying the fragile coral habitat and endangering marine wildlife, while the overfishing and waste was causing their catches to fall dramatically.

In one Muslim island community it was the message of the Qur'an that persuaded the fishermen to change their ways and return to sustainable fishing methods. Religious leaders were persuaded to use conservation messages based on the texts of the Qur'an, teaching Islamic environmental ethics that encourage care of nature.

The impact of this was clear when, thanks to sustainable fishing practices, catches began to increase again, while the proliferation of wildlife has made the area a favoured tourist destination, earning funds to support community development in the islands. One local Muslim fisherman summed up the reason for the impact of the teachings: "It is easy to ignore the government, but no-one can break God's law."

Saudi Arabia – Jabal Aja biosphere reserve established

More than 2,000 square kilometres of land, including a mountain massif, in Saudi Arabia have been dedicated as a protected reserve for a 'gene bank' of plant and animal species in line with the Islamic principle of 'hima'. These are traditional 'inviolable areas' set aside for conservation purposes, where forestry and animal grazing is restricted to protect the wildlife. The wetlands of Jabal Aja are home to threatened species including the Arabian wolf, striped hyena and Nubian ibex.

Cairo, Egypt - municipal dump converted to public park

The 30-hectare municipal rubbish dump of al-Darassa in the Egyptian capital Cairo was completely cleaned up and restored to provide a green, landscaped place in the heart of the city. After the restoration work al-Darassa now houses clean water reservoirs, orchards, landscaped gardens and plant nurseries growing trees and shrubs to be replanted throughout the urban area.