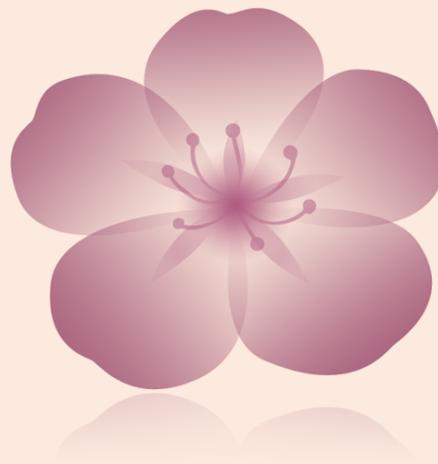


HUMANITY AT THE CROSSROADS



AN APPEAL TO SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND
WORLD UNIFICATION



BY THE MULTIFAITH ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA
MFA



The Multifaith Association of SA Inc.

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Adelaide, June 2015

Dear Spiritual Leader,

We are a multifaith group from South Australia, and we humbly ask you to read the following attached letter in peace and with an open mind. Humanity is at the crossroads and this letter is an appeal for spiritual leadership from all faiths and from all parts of our country.

These are our contemplations:

- Φ We accept the clear scientific facts that humanity through exploitation, excessive lifestyles and waste production has reached the limits of our ecological systems.
- Φ We recognize the clear messages expressed by the vast majority of the scientific community that we need to act with urgency in order to avoid catastrophic climate change and the collapse of the ecological systems we all depend on.
- Φ We express our great concern at the injustice that the poorest in the world, who have least contributed to the planet's imminent ecological collapse, are the ones who will suffer most from the consequences if we do not act.
- Φ We further recognize the intergenerational injustice in which future generations are unable to do anything about climate change, but will suffer the consequences of our inaction.
- Φ We believe that these injustices go against the doctrine and values of all religious faiths believing in justice, love, care and equality.
- Φ We are aware that implementing solutions will require strong faith and will to act. Religious faith can engender within people the will and the courage to act in a selfless way.
- Φ We ask you to reflect upon the issues mentioned within the attached letter and to specifically consider the options for Divestment.
- Φ We also ask you to speak with your faith communities on these issues, as we believe that raising awareness and developing shared solutions is essential.
- Φ We honour the role that religious leaders are already taking in asking governments for urgent action on climate change and by recognising their responsibilities based on religious faith.

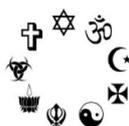
There has never been a more significant and crucial time to demonstrate religious leadership in order to protect this precious and unique world, home to so many divine souls, past, present and in future.

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Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

The Multifaith Association of South Australia



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Adelaide, June 2015

Dear Spiritual Leader,

We are writing to you as a multifaith group from South Australia to appeal for your help and spiritual leadership, as we are very alarmed by recent global developments.

In many ways it seems humanity is at the crossroads.

As we are exploring and indeed exploiting more and more of the planet's limited resources, the science has become clear and alarming: We have reached the limits and indeed have begun to cause the collapse of the ecological systems we depend on. Climate change is the most urgent issue emerging, as according to our science and medical research, climate change also leads to an amplification of the many issues with which humanity is already struggling - such as diseases, conflict, poverty, food and water security and a fairer distribution of resources (1).

This is very alarming as it places billions of lives at risk and further increases the threat of war and conflict as well as the scourge of poverty. Subsequently we believe that the need has never been greater for spiritual leadership to act now on the issue of climate change.

We urge you to stimulate thought on this issue and to outline ways that will empower people from all faiths to work together to create a world where care for the planet and justice for its inhabitants become the reality of reflecting God's will and purpose for humanity. Without a doubt, we are unlikely to succeed without spiritual and religious co-operation.

Although science may have the facts and technical solutions, religion engenders the will power to act and to act now. Hence there is a vital need for a greater spiritual application in order to solve these many significant problems.

Reassuringly, this urgent issue reflects neither a natural pre-defined state, nor something that is unchangeable or inevitable, for it is human-made. Acting on climate change now will also create a more fair, just and safer world for all in future, with better distribution of our remaining resources. At present, not only is there an unfair distribution of the world's wealth but, through climate change, also the potential of a long-term disaster that will most affect the poor and our future generations.

To put it simply, neither the poor nor future generations are responsible and nor are they able to do anything about the impending climate disaster. But WE ARE responsible and WE CAN do something. This injustice and intergenerational inequity are simply incompatible with the current doctrines of our great world religions and spiritual movements promoting love, justice, equality and unity.

One way to address these injustices would be to make new and clean energy technologies available to all nations and to reduce barriers to adoption so these solutions can be embraced quickly around the world. This would result in a triple benefit for world communities: a. enable significant and effective action on climate change by reducing greenhouse gases, b. allow nations access to the clean energies they desperately need to develop out of poverty without increasing emissions, and c. at the same time, allow rich developed nations to pay back the carbon debt we owe the developing world in a real and helpful way, by providing these technologies cheaply.

Within this great challenge for change, there is also a great opportunity. There is no doubt that dealing with climate change effectively will require a world-wide unified approach. The increasing cooperation and global unity of the large and many diverse faith communities is urgently needed to deal with conflicts and solve major challenges. Mutual co-operation unified through faith could define this century as one of the greatest advancements in the history of humanity instead of becoming one of the biggest failures.



Change will not be easy as our western civilization will need to be prepared for major shifts in our life-styles and expectations. Societies, politicians and policy makers must be encouraged through our spiritual leaders to embrace clean energy technologies and to continue to inspire the public to adopt much simpler and physically healthier lifestyles with wastage of far fewer resources.

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Simply, through spiritual leadership, education and awareness, the potential for motivational change is huge, as are the possibilities of heaven on earth.

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Many religious leaders are beginning to speak out on these issues: Pope Francis (2) and Desmond Tutu (3) have recently made clear statements expressing their concern in this regard. Both leaders have made clear links between our economic dealings, climate change and sustainability. Many Australian Catholics are joining the new international coalition of Global Catholic Climate Movement (4).

“On climate change, there is a clear, definitive and ineluctable ethical imperative to act.” — Pope Francis

In September 2014, over 200 religious and spiritual leaders from across the world voiced the commitment of their faith traditions to a just climate treaty at the Religions for the Earth conference in New York (5). Their aim was to spur conversations about climate change as a social justice issue, the moral imperative to care for the natural world, and to help shape and accelerate actions towards an effective international climate treaty.

Desmond Tutu is so concerned that he has repeatedly called for an apartheid style divestment boycott of our energy companies which

“Continue to exploit the last remaining fossil fuels for profit whilst being in complete disregard of our scientific warnings on the environmental limit.”

In simple terms, many energy companies continue mining, exporting and burning fossil fuels far in excess of the 2 degree warming limit, financed by our major lending institutions with our money.

For the same reasons that religious and spiritual societies have a moral and ethical prerogative not to invest and profit from products that harm or exploit others (e.g. tobacco, weapons, child slavery), they must consider any investments into companies, activities and products that result in the destruction of our vital productive and natural habitats upon which we and all future generations depend.

Divestment is an important and effective tool to bring more ethical considerations into our financial dealings. It has been employed successfully in the past with Big Tobacco and Apartheid, transferring our money out of destructive and into sustainable practices. An estimated 100 religious institutions, including the Uniting Church of Australia, and 14 Universities have already begun to divest their financial investments out of many fossil fuel industry sectors/shares/banks and to redirect their funds into more sustainable practices (6).

Leaders of the major Australian faith groups signed a joint letter urging the G20 leaders meeting in Brisbane not to ignore the urgency of climate change, to end fossil fuel subsidies and to transfer funds to cleaner, more efficient energy technologies (7). Leaders of major faith groups have also asked the government for stronger emission cuts and decisive action to avoid catastrophic climate change (8).

There has never been greater urgency to act. According to our scientists, we have nearly reached the threshold of catastrophic run-away global warming. Our most highly regarded international medical publications such as The Lancet and the BMJ (British Medical Journal) are calling it a “medical emergency” and “the biggest health threat of our times” with billions of lives threatened (9).

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Humanity at the Crossroads; An Open Letter of Appeal for Spiritual Leadership

We hope this letter finds you well.

We are aware that as a spiritual leader you have much to do and have little time. We therefore sincerely hope that you have the time and strength to act on this challenge and to inform your community of the huge potential of spiritual advancement and unity that the threat of climate change brings with it for humanity. Indeed, despite time pressures, many spiritual leaders are already taking action and we hope you can join them (3, 5, 6).

Divestment, considering our financial dealings in light of our values and ethics, is just one possible way of how such a journey could begin within your faith community.

Humanity is indeed at the crossroads, and every action taken now will have the potential to make a big difference before it is too late.

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Thank you.

Yours sincerely

The Multifaith Association of SA (MFSA)

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We have no further motivation but to humbly ask our divine spirit and Creator to give us strength to contribute our small and modest part to ensure humanity will live on earth the way it was intended to and according to the divine universal plan.

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Please feel free to contact us and find attached some further information on ideas for action on climate change including on Divestment. Please pass this letter on to other leaders in your community.



REFERENCES

1. IPCC Fifth Assessment– Synthesis Report 2014: See 15 min <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-Hcu3jH8G4&feature=youtu.be> or for 2 page headline statements from summary, see https://catholicclimatemovement.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/ar5_syr_headlines_en.pdf
2. Liberty Voice, by Erin Friar 23.5.14 “Pope Francis Links Climate Change and Economy”: <http://guardianlv.com/2014/05/pope-francis-links-climate-change-and-economy/>
3. The Guardian: by Damian Carrington 11.4.14 “Desmond Tutu calls for anti-apartheid style boycott of fossil fuel industry”: <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/apr/10/desmond-tutu-anti-apartheid-style-boycott-fossil-fuel-industry>
4. Global Catholic Climate Movement: <http://catholicclimatemovement.global/#sthash.w0lspFIQ.dpuf>
5. Religions for the Earth conference. Union Theological Seminary, New York, 19-21 September 2014 <http://unionforum.org/religions-for-the-earth/>
6. Religious groups divestments (includes Australia): <http://gofossilfree.org/commitments/>
7. The Australian: 12.11.14 “Religious group urge G20 climate action”: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/latest/religious-group-urge-g20-climate-action/story-e6frg90f-1227120233365>
8. ABC News 27.5.15: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-27/religious-leaders-pen-letter-to-government-over-emissions-cuts/6499358>
9. The Lancet 2009; Vol.373 May 16 “Managing the Health Impacts of Climate Change 2014”; 348 26.3.2014 “Climate Change and Human Survival”

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DIVESTMENT TOOL KIT

How do I divest?

Find out where your bank stands on fossil fuel investment. ^{A,C} Explain your concerns and ask them to make a commitment to divest from fossil fuels. If the bank’s reply is less than satisfactory, move your business to a bank committed to be fossil free and let your original bank know why they lost you.

Find out how exposed your superannuation fund could be to fossil fuels. ^{B,C,E} If your fund has a ‘Socially Responsible’ Investment option, review their inclusion and exclusion criteria; many SRIs don’t specify they are ‘fossil fuel free’. Make a complaint to your fund if they do not disclose their position or offer a fossil free option. As a last resort move your super funds to an alternative provider.

Will returns on my investments be less after divestment?

A recent study by the Aperio Group, a group of investment advisors, found that screening out the top 200 fossil fuel companies only increased portfolio risk by an insignificant 0.01%.⁹ In fact there may be significant financial risks in keeping money invested in fossil fuels in a carbon-constrained world.

Disclaimer: This information does not constitute individual financial advice. For specific financial advice contact a registered financial adviser!

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RESOURCES

- A. Market Forces (how to compare your banks) <http://www.marketforces.org.au/banks/compare>
- B. Super Switch (how to compare your Superannuation) <http://superswitch.org.au/>
- C. Carbon Tracker Initiative <http://www.carbontracker.org/wastedcapital>
- D. The National Energy Efficiency Network (providing on-line assistance for faith and community groups wishing to save energy and reduce emissions) <http://www.neen.org.au>
- E. The Climate Institute <http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/unburnable-carbon.html>
- F. The Vital Few <http://www.areyouthevitalfew.org/>
- G. The Asset Owners Disclosure Project <http://aodproject.net/>
- H. The Australia Institute <http://www.tai.org.au/content/climate-proofing-your-investments-moving-funds-out-fossil-fuels>

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IDEAS FOR FURTHER ACTION

- Φ Collaborate with other religious leaders to issue joint statements to congregations and the media.
- Φ Write a pastoral letter to the faithful, giving them hope and encouraging them to take action in their own lives.
- Φ As a leader, give your support to any congregation, school or church organization that is taking steps to make their operations more sustainable. Highlight positive stories on your website, making the links between your faith teachings and the practical steps taken by the community.
- Φ Make the operations of your own office and residence more sustainable, then publicise your actions and share the good news of energy and emissions reduction.
- Φ Visit Australian Religious Response to Climate Change for further much more information and help: www.arrcc.org.au

