Religions for Peace Australia

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Senate Select Committee Inquiry into COVID-19
Religions for Peace Australia Submission

Religions for Peace Australia (RfPA) is particularly pleased with the opportunity to make this submission to the Senate Select Committee on Australia’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

RfP Australia is one of the 125 member nations of Religions for Peace International, the world’s largest interfaith organization with its headquarters in New York and one of the 21 member nations of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace with its headquarters in Tokyo.

We honour and acknowledge our First Nations, custodians of the oldest continuing culture of all lands in the world, pay our respects to past, present and emerging Elders and seek their support and wisdom.

Overview

Stimulus funding provides an opportunity to reshape our community and our country for the better. To do justice to this opportunity, we must face the full reality of our current (1) health (2) economic and (3) environmental crises.

Our country has so far dealt remarkably well with the global pandemic of the novel Corona virus SARS 2 COVID-19 (C-19) as measured on the coronavirus mortality database held on the John Hopkins University in Baltimore¹. It has shown how effective action is when led by the science in partnership with governments, business and community - a valuable lesson on the power of collective collaboration.

Yet Australia remains highly exposed to the increased intensity and frequency of extreme events that are the hallmark of a changing climate. It is in our nation’s best interest to heed the lessons of our recent devastating bushfires, floods, hailstorms and droughts and to accept the need to address root causes.

As religious and interfaith leaders we pray that you, our elected members of Parliament representing our community, tackle Australia’s role in the global climate challenge with courage and honesty.

Climate change is evident in the Asia-Pacific region, with particularly destructive impacts on small Pacific Island nation states such as Kiribati and Tuvalu and South-East Asian countries of the

¹ https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality
Mekong Delta, with recent major floods in Kerala, India as well as Iran, floods and heatwaves in Japan, cyclones impacting on the frontline Pacific Ocean state of the Philippines and drought and bushfires in Australia.

These disasters cost lives and impact upon livelihoods and assets. Climate-related disasters are likely to increase in the Asia-Pacific region according to UNESCAP’s 2019 *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report*.

**High Level Recommendations**

We ask the Senate to recommend that the National COVID-19 Coordination Commission moves to:

1. **Continue dedicated support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities:** including outreach and logistical support through First Nation organisations and community/faith groups across remote, regional and urban areas; prioritising cultural respect and clear materials in language.

2. **Representative Inclusivity to identify and coordinate support for vulnerable sectors:** Social equity in education, employment, training, healthcare, childcare, shelter and financial support must underpin every recovery plan and reach First Nations, migrant/multicultural and faith communities, international students, refugees on temporary protection (TPV) or safe haven enterprise (SHEV) visas; marginalised populations affected by mental health, domestic violence, homelessness or drugs; young, elderly, isolated and non-English speaking/CALD communities.

3. **Proactively engage faith groups to build social cohesion and address racism:** establish Emergency Services Welfare Covid-19 Task Force Commissioner (at Federal and State/Territory level); include two faith/religious welfare providers from different states in the Not-for-Profit working group; urge the Minister for Multicultural Affairs to regularly meet 8 major faith representatives (select via census figures) and include key multifaith organisations. Faith/community groups provide mental health, spiritual wellbeing and practical assistance for many suffering deprivation, without financial support.

   **b. Act swiftly to prevent the incitement of racial and religious hatred and to promote racial and religious harmony, including measures that:**

   - a. Follow the example set by the NSW Crimes Act in penalising the incitement of racial hatred and expand the provisions to cover the incitement of religious hatred.
   - b. Promote and support Governments, NGOs and multi-faith organisations in the development and operation of programs for the enhancement of racial and religious understanding and harmony.

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3 Noting that we applaud the efforts to translate Covid-19 materials into 63 languages
4. **Seek Integrated Outcomes by undertaking deep structural change:** optimise Covid-19 Stimulus Funding to address Australia’s economic, health, ecological, climate, water crises in line with scientific advice and deliver sustainable change in reshaping how society plans, builds, moves, produces, consumes, shares and generates energy⁴.

5. **Demonstrate global leadership in the development of a resilient future for our region:** Deferral of COP26 to November 2021 provides an opening for Australia to demonstrate true regional leadership in responding to global crises, such as climate action. Australia’s international standing can only benefit if we take a proactive and compassionate role in Oceania/South-East Asia. We applaud existing DFAT Covid-19 initiatives to assist Pacific island nations and suggest further Australian support, e.g. for enhancement of forest carbon stocks via REDD+ projects in Indonesia and Malaysia.

6. **Address Australia’s vulnerability to climate change:** honour Australian obligations under the Paris Agreement by taking swift measures to transition our energy/economic systems & contribute our fair share to reduce global emissions by 7% each year between now and 2030 to limit climate change below 1.5°C. Rapid decarbonisation provides opportunity to revitalise our economy in a move to net zero emissions by 2050 – failure to act will incur significant hardship for many.

7. **Deliver inter-generational measures** via financial institutions to assist families and young people to deal with mortgage stress, unemployment/under-employment, housing insecurity/homelessness and other issues as revealed by the Australian Poverty Map and other social research data.

8. **Upgrade communication education and training development opportunities:** timely investment in digital literacy and online education⁵ across Australia will reap significant rewards, assisted by design and communication of linguistically and culturally appropriate materials using existing faith/community distribution channels including TV, radio and social media.

9. **Reduce energy poverty in vulnerable households and communities:** Low-income households, children, the elderly and those in poor health are particularly vulnerable to health impacts of heatwaves and rising temperatures. Access to low-cost energy from residential solar, batteries or energy-efficient appliances is out of reach for many, especially those without their own homes. Prioritise investment in access to affordable renewable and energy efficiency measures, including communities in regional and remote areas where rising temperatures may make human habitation impossible unless action is taken.

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⁵ Noting many households in poverty cannot afford computers, laptops or tablets to educate their children at home.
10. **Drive Transition through Innovative Coordination/Collaboration:** engaging faith, community, business and government sectors in new partnerships will better coordinate resources and target activities, while enhancing scale and rapid uptake of new low carbon technologies and manufacturing.

**Global Trends**

Leading economists identify how investment in recovery can strengthen social cohesion while building more sustainable and climate resilient economies. There have been many significant calls for global stimulus funding to ensure alignment to Paris Agreement targets and set the pathway to achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

A recent Oxford/Cambridge study\(^6\) of 200 global central bankers, G20 finance ministry and academics across 53 countries suggest preparation and cooperation are vital to success and identify innovations. These include an informal global Sustainable Recovery Alliance, to be established at COP26 to promote global coherence among recovery packages, build resilience to shocks, and connect existing initiatives such as Mission Innovation and the Carbon Pricing Leadership Coalition.

A coalition of 155 multinational companies have reaffirmed their own science-based commitments to achieving a zero-carbon economy and called on governments to match their ambition\(^7\). The Under2 Coalition, established in 2015, now represents 1.3 billion people from 220 sub-national governments and 43% of the world’s economy. They cite research from the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate\(^8\) that moving to a zero-emission future can deliver economic benefits of US$26 trillion through to 2030, create 65 million new low carbon jobs and avoid 700,000 premature deaths from air pollution.

World health leaders\(^9\), representing c.40 million health workers at the frontlines of the Covid-19 crisis, warn that climate change, air pollution, fragile health systems and environmental degradation are threats to good health and increase vulnerability to disease and ill-health. Miguel Jorge, World Medical Association President: “we are seeing the immense loss of lives because of acting too late. We know now more than ever that healthy lives depend on a healthy planet. As we walk on the road to recovery, we need to build a system that will protect us from further damage.”

**Australian Priorities**

This submission shares information drawn from the Religions for Peace Australia committee and a wider network of religious leaders closely involved with their diverse communities across

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\(^6\) [https://www.smithschool.ox.ac.uk/publications/wpapers/workingpaper20-01.pdf](https://www.smithschool.ox.ac.uk/publications/wpapers/workingpaper20-01.pdf)


\(^8\) [https://newclimateeconomy.report/2018/](https://newclimateeconomy.report/2018/)

Australia. There is an opportunity for Covid-19 recovery plans to address the fundamentally interwoven economic, ecological and social issues that otherwise threaten the health and wellbeing of all Australians.

Our relatively low population on a vast continent with relatively uncongested cities has provided Australia with a natural advantage in combatting the spread of Covid-19, aided by swift government action and a compliant community moving with alacrity, collaboration and generosity to adhere to social distancing and other precautionary guidelines. Considerable effort has gone into protecting all members of our community, including the provision of health information translated into many languages.

This pandemic has shown us how effective our actions can be when led by the science in partnership with our governments, our businesses and our people. This is a powerful lesson. Yet this time of lockdown has also revealed serious weaknesses in our supply chains, our domestic manufacturing capacity, and our capacity to accurately identify and care for vulnerable population segments in our midst (including but not only international students, workers on temporary protection visas, the isolated elderly and those in remote/underprivileged Aboriginal communities/populations).

**Healing the Distress and Disadvantage of Social Inequity**

Australia is a lucky country, but only for some. The current Covid-19 pandemic highlights stark social inequity in many forms across our community. Serious intergenerational dislocation and disadvantage forced on our Stolen Generations and ongoing racism continues to ramify through First Nations; and is a contributing factor to high levels of incarceration and low levels of health, employment and self-esteem. Measures can be taken to promote racial/religious harmony and prevent racism/racial hatred of all types.

Across society, housing insecurity means families on low or no income may move frequently from the streets to shelters to poor quality housing. Many slip through cracks in our welfare, health and education systems - children missing school frequently may also miss out on primary health checks, vaccinations and mentoring. Over-crowding can lead to domestic violence. Inhabitants of poor-quality housing stock are more vulnerable to extremes of heat and cold and more likely to suffer energy poverty (when daily choices must be made to pay for food or for power bills).

Australia’s international students bring in significant wealth through our tertiary education sector. At this time of global crisis, students are expected to ‘look after themselves as declared in their visa applications’[^10], though most have lost their casual jobs and it has been left to their own cultural or faith communities to feed, care and support them. Given the population of international students (c. 560,000) still effectively stranded in Australia, this situation will create hardship and become untenable in the longer term for permanent residents offering them support. In time, this situation may reflect badly on our nation and could even have repercussions on our international standing in the region.

Addressing our Vulnerability to Water Security, Ecological Decline and Climate Change

“Our present economic, social and international arrangements are based, in large measure, upon organised lovelessness. We begin by lacking charity towards Nature, so instead of trying to co-operate ... we try to dominate and exploit, we waste the earth’s mineral resources, ruin its soil, ravage its forests, pour filth into its rivers and poisonous fumes into its air.” Aldous Huxley, (1947)¹¹

Stimulus funding needs to prioritise investment in ecosystem resilience and nature-based solutions by encouraging climate-ready agriculture, revegetation and restoration of carbon rich biodiversity habitat.

We need to acknowledge and act upon the water issues unfolding across our country. If atmospheric temperatures continue to rise, a proportion of agricultural production may cease or diminish. In 2019, for the first time, allocation of water was prioritized to meet critical human needs¹² in several major rural towns (Stanthorpe, Bathurst, Armidale). Respected scientists now call for declaration of a water emergency¹³ and propose principals for a new national water dialogue¹⁴.

Despite recent good rains, the Murray–Darling Basin remains in drought¹⁵ with rain needed over widespread areas to provide relief from the impact of sustained below-average rainfall. The rural community of the Basin ‘are labouring under a great weight of reform fatigue’ – across 77,000km of rivers, 2.6 million people, forty Aboriginal nations, 120 species of water birds¹⁶ – and all are in trouble. Long-term water security requires better protection and management of both surface and groundwater.

Australia is facing more intense and longer bushfire seasons and more severe heat waves. 2019 was the warmest December on record Australia-wide for all mainland States except Victoria, while large areas had their highest accumulated Forest Fire Danger Index based on records that date back to 1950¹⁷.

Evidence before the Bushfire Royal Commission reveals Australia’s ecological vulnerability to climate change. During our recent fires, 114 threatened species lost over 50% of their range (some

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¹³ https://www.policyforum.net/declaring-a-water-emergency


over 90%), while other species previously considered secure are now “imperilled” in a list that includes plants, mammals, reptiles, fish and invertebrates\(^{18}\).

Aboriginal traditional knowledge can help us look after this vast land. In the words of Victor Steffenson:

“If we are going to make changes to deal with the environmental challenges that lie ahead, we need to involve the children in the solution, learn how we can play our own diverse roles that contribute to the solutions of looking after the planet. Fire management becomes harder when the rivers are not healthy and the water has been taken away. Sorting out the water issues is key to sorting out our fire problems. No doubt the droughts play a harsh role in wildfires, but we could be smarter and better prepared.” \(^{19}\)

**Building Back Better**

Australian Governments must establish principles to guide the economic recovery with rapid decarbonisation of the energy sector a key priority. This means a strong bias for transition to renewables and phasing out fossil fuels. Our national regulatory and market settings must be updated to spur investment in clean energy, as for too long there has been an unhelpful link between policy uncertainty and investor uncertainty. The world is changing around us.

The Australian Sustainable Finance Initiative\(^{20}\) encourages recovery plans aligned with our international commitments (eg Paris and Sendai Agreements and UN Sustainable Development Goals), suggesting an inclusive economy is better able to weather future shocks and protect Australian jobs and livelihoods. Australia performs poorly in the Economic Complexity Index, but can seize opportunities to improve our advanced manufacturing capability and reskill our workforce into innovative technologies\(^{21}\).

According to Deloitte\(^{22}\), “Australia has great opportunities to lead the way to become a world-leading energy powerhouse, grow a world-leading green hydrogen industry, powered by our rapidly growing renewable energy sector,” noting that migrants bring “skills, innovation and deep cultural links important to underpin demand and supply in our future economy.” Australia can grow local jobs and opportunities by reducing damaging greenhouse gas emissions and decarbonising our economy.

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\(^{21}\) Bearup, G. *Make Australia Make Again*’ May 23-24 May 2020

The Views and Actions of Faiths around the World

All major religious traditions advocate harmony with and care for nature (see Appendix One), and religious leaders have begun to respond, albeit at different rates, as our ecological crises become more evident. Their responses emphasize degrowth in their advocacy of simpler lifestyles and trenchant criticisms of wasteful consumerism. Deep in these respective wisdom traditions are both respect and reverence for evolving nature and serious warnings about the over-exploitation of the earth’s natural resources. Sound ethical and ecological frameworks that incorporate opportunities for green development and growth will enable our society to transition beyond its current inequitable, exploitative and unsustainable economic systems.

Religious communities and their global, national and local organizations have given rise to many aid agencies at the forefront of alleviating human suffering from climate-related droughts, fires, cyclones, floods. These agencies help communities adapt to climate disruption and develop disaster resilience, and their global response to humanitarian crises improves the survival and well-being of countless millions.

Many religiously-based organizations (eg. GreenFaith, the Bhumi Project, OneEarthSangha, Global Muslim Climate Network, the Global Catholic Climate Movement and the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change) have emerged with life-affirming agendas and plans for climate action.

Recently many spiritual and faith traditions/communities called for just and low carbon investments to stimulate recovery from this global pandemic. In May, 42 faith institutions from 14 countries (UK, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Myanmar, Spain and the United States) announced their divestment from fossil fuels.

This included Anglican, Buddhist, Catholic and Methodist institutions – e.g. 21 Catholic organisations with US$40 billion in assets committed to the Catholic Impact Investing Pledge, while Jesuits in Britain divested a £400million (US517.5m) equity portfolio from fossil fuels.

In 2016, at the COP22 global climate talks in Morocco, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) became the first Muslim institution to divest its portfolio, and a more recent 2018 survey found the majority of Muslim Americans

- Correctly understand the origins of climate change (largely human activity)
- Are deeply concerned about the current and future impacts of climate change upon all of Allah’s creation, especially the most vulnerable and future generations
- Support shifting toward cleaner energy sources, and imposing a corporate polluters’ fee

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/17bl4y1ufCrawR1HMc25OsyPL55F8xSgmu5KlpHofaRM/edit#gid=0


These considered financial actions are underpinned by a deep spiritual morality. Religious leaders have spoken out as follows:

**Dr. Azhar Azeez, President of the Islamic Society of North America** “According to Islam’s most basic and fundamental teachings, human beings have been uniquely charged with the great responsibility of being Guardians of the Earth. It goes against the mission of the ISNA to invest in fossil fuel companies whose operations and products cause such grave harm to humanity and to Creation.”

**The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Reverend Dr Rowan Williams**: “The current health crisis has highlighted as never before the need for coherent international action in the face of global threat. Can we learn the lesson and apply it to the global threat of climate change? To do so means taking practical and effective steps to reduce our lethal dependence on fossil fuels.”

**Pope Francis**: “We need an ecological conversion that can find expression in concrete actions. As a single interdependent family, we require a common plan in order to avert the threats to our common home” From Laudato Si’: “I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.”

**Father Endra Wijayanta, director of the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Commission for the Archdiocese of Semarang, Indonesia**: ‘This COVID-19 pandemic is the exact time not only to reflect, but to act. We have to stop our ecological spiral of death. We have to revive our ecological hope, in massive repentance of humankind, by taking the pathway to more sustainable living”.

**His Holiness the Dalai Lama**: “Our Mother Earth is teaching us a lesson in universal responsibility. This blue planet is a delightful habitat. Its life is our life; its future, our future. Indeed, the earth acts like a mother to us all; as her children, we re dependent on her. In the face of the global problems we are going through, it is important that we must all work together... No matter how difficult the situation may be, we should apply science and human ingenuity to overcome the problems that confront us.”

Other faith responses are outlined in Appendix A.

**As UN Climate Change Executive Secretary Patricia Espinosa states:**

“If done right, the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis can steer us to a more inclusive and sustainable climate path... building a safe, clean, just and resilient world”27.

**Let us do our best to “get it right” for the sake of all Australians and the wider world.**

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Rev Dr Andrew Williams, Minister of the Word, Darwin Memorial Uniting Church Northern Territory
A MULTIFAITH PRAYER FOR OUR EARTH

All-powerful God,

you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor,

help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.
Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

AMEN

Reproduced from Pope Francis’ Ecological Encyclical Laudato Si’, Praise Be To You (2015) 28

APPENDIX A

The Role of Religion in a Healthy Society

In the emerging global era, we live in a very religious world with 84 per cent of the world’s population having a religious affiliation according to the Pew Religious Research Center. And research continues to demonstrate that religion, on balance, adds to personal well-being and national social wealth and social capital. According to psychologists, authentic religion is about believing, bonding, behaving and belonging. Its beneficial personal and community outcomes have been empirically demonstrated by the social sciences. A healthy society needs healthy religion, and in the governance and management of religion and religious diversity, the State has a responsibility to protect the right to religious freedom and to intervene when bad religious practice is producing harm such as religiously inspired terrorism. The right to religious freedom and practice is not an absolute and unfettered right, but it is a relative right. Central to the religion-state relationship is quality religious leadership. In the playing out of this relationship, such religious leadership is one of the keys to successful outcomes whereby the spiritual needs and aspirations of the people are met and religious communities contribute to national welfare and social cohesion.

Religion and the Attitude to Nature

The various anthropological frameworks (e.g. Kluckhorn & Strodtbeck) that describe the deep-seated cultural value orientations that differentiate societies suggest that there are three fundamental attitudes to nature, namely, (i) subjugation to nature (ii) harmony with nature and (iii) mastery or control over nature. Most religions, especially nature religions, reflect the subjugation attitude in fearing and trembling before the dangers and hazards that nature can inflict upon humanity such as earthquakes, cyclones, tornados, bushfires, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, floods, landslides and droughts as documented in the 2015 Natural Hazards Risk Atlas. Religious responses vary from explanations in terms of the revenge of the evil spirits, the wrath of God against humanity’s sinfulness to an acquiescent acceptance of the damage and destruction done.

Taoism
In Asian cultures with their rich pools of wisdom, love of and harmony with nature is central. The major Asian traditions insist that the increasing threat of natural hazards shows that nature is not in harmony. We see this in Taoism, for ‘humanity follows the earth, the earth follows heaven, heaven follows the Tao and the Tao follows what is natural’. In working to achieve this harmony, human beings should cultivate the way of no-action and let nature be itself. If the pursuit of development and profit runs counter to the harmony and balance of nature, people should restrain and curb themselves. Insatiable human desire will lead to the over-exploitation of natural resources. To be too successful is to be on the road to defeat.

Confucianism
The rich 2,500 year-old Confucian tradition which is re-emerging in new ways in contemporary Chinese thinking sees the solution to the world’s environmental problems in terms of unifying the trinity of heaven, earth and humanity in an alternative worldview. For example, China through its five-year plans is moving away from its huge dependence on coal which has fuelled 70 per cent of
its past energy needs to a growing commitment to renewable resources. Modern Confucians have in 2013 produced a Confucian Statement on the Environment. It proposes the self-cultivation of virtue, responsibility and a caring attitude in every person. “Nature is an unending process of transformation rather than a static presence, and as such is a source of inspiration by which we understand the dynamism of Heaven. As the first hexagram in the Book of Change symbolizes, Heaven’s vitality and creativity are without ends and we humans must emulate its ceaseless vitality and creativity”.

**Buddhism**
According to Buddhism, changeability and impermanence are central features of nature and of living - nothing is static. According to the Agganna Sutta which contains the Buddha’s discourses to two Brahmin monks, the world passes through alternating cycles of evolution and dissolution, each of which lasts for a long period of time. Hence, suffering is at the very centre of Buddhist thinking with its Four Truths about Suffering, but Buddhism believes that, while change is inherent in nature, humanity’s moral decline accelerates the change process and results in changes that are adverse to human well-being and happiness according to the five sets of precepts: physical laws, biological laws, psychological laws, moral laws and causal laws. The One Earth Sangha led the effort in the lead-up to the 2015 Paris Climate Conference to issue The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change.

The Buddhist leaders declared the climate change crisis to be ‘the greatest challenge that humanity has ever faced’, adding that ‘human activity (is) triggering environmental breakdown on a planetary scale’. As the root problem, ‘the compulsion to consume is an expression of craving, the very thing the Buddha pinpointed as the root cause of suffering. They thus emphasized the moral dimensions to reversing climate change.

**Hinduism**
Hinduism is a religion which is very near to nature, asking its followers to see the divine in every object in the universe. The Mahabharata (109, 10) says, “Dharma exists for the welfare of all beings. Hence, that by which the welfare of all living beings is sustained, that for sure is dharma”.

At the 2009 Melbourne Parliament of the World’s Religions, which was the occasion for a special gathering of global Hindu leaders, the Hindu Melbourne Declaration proclaimed, “The Earth is my mother, and I am her child”, adding that “a radical change in our relationship with nature is no longer an option…We cannot destroy nature without destroying ourselves”. In 2015 in the lead-up to the Paris Climate Conference, the second Global Hindu Declaration on Climate Change was issued. It called for meaningful action to slow and prevent climate change that is scientifically credible and historically fair in the transition to 100 per cent clean energy.

**Islam**
The Qu’ran states that “Mischief (fassad) has appeared in land and sea because of the deeds that the hands of men have earned, that God may give them a taste of some of their deeds in order that they may turn back (from evil)” (Qu’ran 30, 41). Whilst the World Muslim Congress has not made any formal statement, in 2015 a conference in Turkey led to the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change which led to the formation of the Global Muslim Climate Network.

The declaration crafted by five leading Islamic scholars called on the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims to play an active role in combatting climate change pointing to the example of the Prophet (pbh) who banned the felling of trees in the desert and established protected areas for the conservation
of plants and wildlife. The Islamic leaders pointed to the scientific consensus to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere and the need to set clear targets and monitoring systems. They called upon well-off nations and oil-producing states to phase out their emissions by 2050 and to have a zero emissions strategy. It also called on the business sectors to reduce their carbon footprints by committing to 100 per cent renewable energy sources. As well, there have emerged calls for a ‘green jihad’, and the concept of zohd or degrowth, that is, living lightly on earth in a green lifestyle.

**Christianity**

Within Judaism and Christianity, there has always been a reverence for creation beginning with the creation stories in the Book of Genesis, the first Book of the Bible. Christian Orthodoxy began its initiatives that date back to the 1970s and the 1980s, and September 1st was designated as a pan-Orthodox day to offer prayers for the preservation of the natural creation. Since his election in 1991, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has become known as the Green Patriarch, defining environmentalism as a spiritual responsibility. In 1997, a symposium on the Black Sea was held and subsequent symposia have focussed on the Danube, the Adriatic Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Amazon Basin, the Arctic Circle and the Mississippi River. The Patriarch has drawn attention to the word ‘ecology’ which is derived from the Greek word meaning ‘home’ or ‘dwelling’. “The world is indeed our home. Yet it is also the home of everybody, just as it is the home of every animal creature and of every form of life created by God. It is a sign of arrogance to presume that we human beings alone inhabit this world. Moreover, it is a sign of arrogance to imagine that only the present generation enjoy its resources”.

In his 2015 Papal Letter or Encyclical, *Laudato Si: Care for our Common Home*, Pope Francis insists the world must ‘hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor’. He severely criticizes both consumerism with its throw-away culture and irresponsible development because he believes humans no longer see God as the creator of time and space and the universe. The Pope laments environmental degradation and global warming, calling for ‘swift and unified global action’. But he admitted that it would not be easy to achieve consensus. He condemned the use of highly polluting fossil fuels, especially coal and oil. He blames apathy, the reckless pursuit of profit, excessive faith in technology and political short-sightedness. In combatting the climate crisis, the developed nations are morally obligated to assist the developing nations. The recent Amazonian Synod in October 2019 in Rome condemned the destruction of the Amazon’s rain forests.

**Judaism**

In 2015, 425 US rabbis signed a *Rabbinic Letter in the Climate Crisis*. They called for a new sense of eco-social justice that includes the healing of our planet. “For about 200 years, the most powerful institutions and culture of the human species have refused to let the Earth or human earthlings have time of space for rest”. In their view, the Earth is overworked, “precisely what our Torah teaches we must not do”. They concluded that “our ancient earthy wisdom taught that social justice, sustainable abundance, a healthy Earth and spiritual fulfilment are inseparable.”