

Second is **Gro Harlem Brundlandt**, Norwegian Chairwoman of *Our Common Future*, the World Commission on Environment and Development's 1987 report⁵ that set out for the first time in an articulate whole, the range of efforts needed to preserve the vibrant healthy life as we know it on earth.

Brundlandt's foreword was written when the world population stood at 5 billion – I quote:

“Scientists bring to our attention urgent but complex problems bearing on our very survival: a warming globe, threats to the Earth's ozone layer, deserts consuming agricultural land. We respond by demanding more details, and by assigning the problems to institutions ill-equipped to cope with them. And as part of ‘our development’, we have amassed weapon arsenals capable of diverting the paths that evolution followed for millions of years and of creating a planet our ancestors would not recognise. Responsibly meeting humanity's goals and aspirations will require active support of us all. Environmental degradation, first seen as mainly a problem of rich nations and a side effect of industrial wealth, has become a survival issue for developing nations.”

Yet *‘Our Common Future’* was not just a prediction of ever-increasing environmental decay, poverty and hardship in an ever more polluted world among ever decreasing resources. Instead it set out the possibility for a new era of economic growth, one based on policies that sustain and expand the environmental resource base – seeing our hope for the future dependent on decisive political action now to manage environmental resources to ensure both sustainable human progress and human survival.

The report acknowledged burning fossil fuels and releasing carbon dioxide and other gases into the atmosphere causes a ‘greenhouse effect’ that may ‘by early next century’ [ie now] ‘increase average global temperatures enough to shift agricultural production areas, raise sea levels to flood coastal cities, and disrupt national economies’ (ibid p2). It stated that the planetary ecosystem could not stand ‘increasing global energy use by a factor of five to bring developing countries’ energy use up to industrialized country levels by 2025, if the increases were based on non-renewable fossil fuels.’ It identified new dimensions of political will and institutional cooperation were required to achieve the clear imperative ‘of a safe, environmentally sound and economically viable energy pathway that will sustain human progress into the distant future’ (ibid pp14-15).

In 2020, with a global population of 7.8 billion, we face the reality of increased intensity and frequency of extreme climatic events. A 2019 Disaster Report suggests many Asia-Pacific countries may reach tipping points beyond which disasters fuelled by climate change exceed their capacity to respond, highlighting the importance of regional cooperation to closely monitor disasters that don't stop at country borders, and to build cross-border resilience that can help mitigate the impacts.⁶

Covid-19 has forced us all to face the degree of economic interdependence between nations and the implications of disrupting supply chains. Ecology and economics are similarly interwoven – locally, regionally, nationally and globally – into a seamless net of causes and effects. We meet today at an important moment in 2020, before the G20 meeting where discussions and decisions on Covid 19 stimulus funding to restart the global economy will have significant influence on whether our world's largest economies will invest wisely in a safer future for all life on our common home.

Economist and Nobel laureate Professor Jeffrey Sachs recently stated:⁷

“We need to build back in a climate safe way and ecologically safe way. The zoonotic diseases are a reflection of the great pressures human activity is putting on animal ecosystems, which raise the contacts with animal pathogen reservoirs, like the bat populations of south-west China. Going forward we need to rebuild in a serious way, using principled companies and the best of our knowledge.”

Thirdly, I am inspired by **Christiane Figueres**, tireless Costa Rican diplomat and former UN Secretary for Climate, who criss-crossed the world building agreements that led to the historic, unanimous signing of the Paris Agreement by 195 countries in 2015. A student of Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hahn, she recognised many people suffer the paralysis of learned helplessness in the face of climate change. She left the UN and co-wrote ‘The Future We Choose’⁸ convinced we need to develop optimism⁹ in our capacity to address the climate crisis, and established Global Optimism¹⁰, a centre of excellence that encourages us all take individual and collective action to achieve our collective climate commitments.

South Australia has shown that transition to 100% Renewable Energy is achievable, reaching twin milestones, with rooftop solar energy¹¹ (11 Oct 2020) and wind¹² (15 Oct 2020). SA Energy Minister, Dan Van Holst Pellekaan is committed to 100% net renewable energy by 2030 – This brings hope.

I was a community delegate at COP21 in Paris. To this day I remain grateful to young people from all nations who raised their voices and put 1.5°C target on the agenda and into the final Paris communique – *“1.5°C to stay alive”*.

Nowhere is this target more meaningful than in Oceania, where entire Pacific Island communities are contemplating whether they will need to leave their islands, their homes, their ancestral burial grounds, their countries. On 19 October 2020, the Pacific Island Council of Queensland hosted an online forum to discuss how the entire concept of national sovereignty is threatened by climate change for atoll nations (nations composed entirely of atolls) across the Pacific. Their livelihoods, culture, sense of place and belonging, ancestral burial grounds and maritime boundaries are tied to having a reference point on land.

At a deep level, Pacific Islanders see *‘humankind and nature as inextricably linked and themselves as guardians of the ecosystem. They believe that people belong to the land and not land to the people; and with this they have gained a strong sense of identity. They see the land and the sea and all that exists as interwoven and interconnected with all of life’s processes – a source of life: it nourishes, supports and teaches; it is the core of culture; it connects people to the past (home of the ancestors), the present (provides resources) and the future (a legacy they hold and touch for the grandchildren)’*¹³.

In 2020, there is an opportunity for voices of faith to overcome the geo-political impasse.

The world needs a compassionate, just response to COVID-19 and climate change. People of faith can lead the way, united by a fundamental belief that all people, all living things, and the Earth are sacred.

A global, multi-faith coalition of established and emerging climate leaders in faith communities - across 14 countries - has come together to create an ambitious statement [“Sacred People, Sacred Earth”](#) and accompanying [day of action](#) on 11 March 2021 that reflects our deepest values and beliefs.

We pray 300 senior faith leaders around the world will [sign this statement](#) as individuals or as representatives of an institution – if possible by 18 November, at latest well before 11 March 2021.

Faith-leaders who have signed already include:

- His Eminence Cardinal Turkson, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development
- Prof. Azza Karam, Secretary General, Religions for Peace International
- Rev. Dr James Bhagwan, General Secretary, Pacific Conference of Churches

Governments will present climate commitments at COP26 in November 2021. As faith leaders, we need to make our voices heard. Compassion, love and justice require no less of us all.

Squamish leader, Chief Seattle (1788 – 1866) spoke thus to the tribal assembly of 1854:

“Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves

Words of wisdom from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in conclusion:

“We need a clear awareness of the interdependent nature of nations, of humans, of animals and the world. Many problems, especially man-made problems, are due to a lack of knowledge of the interdependent nature of life. Yet, given human beings love of truth, justice, peace and freedom – creating a better, more compassionate world is a genuine possibility – the potential is there. It is under the greatest adversity that there exists the greatest potential for doing good.

In the present circumstances, no one can afford to assume that someone else will solve the world’s problems. Every individual has a responsibility to guide our global family in the right direction.

Good wishes are not sufficient – we must become actively engaged.”

May optimism & ingenuity prevail - May our prayers be heard -
May we create a safe climate future for our world

REFERENCES

¹Pope Francis (2015) *Laudato Si’* On Care for our Common Home.

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

² Venerable Ajahn Sumedho (1992) *The Four Noble Truths*, p61. Amaravati Publications, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire England ISBN 1 870205 10 3.

³ Schell, J. (1982) *The Fate of the Earth*. Pan Books, ISBN 0 330 26915 5, London pp166-167.

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/25/world/americas/nuclear-weapons-prohibition-treaty.html>

⁵ The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) *Our Common Future*. Chair, Gro Harlem Brundtland. Oxford University Press 400pp.

⁶ Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2019) *The Disaster Riskscape across Asia-Pacific - Pathways for Resilience, Inclusion and Empowerment*. Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2019.

<https://www.unescap.org/publications/asia-pacific-disaster-report-2019>

⁷ Fairtrade ANZ (2020) Professor. Jeffrey Sachs [Globalisation and Economic Recovery Post-Covid-19](#) webinar, permission to share widely. (See also [“Five Critical Outcomes on the Road to Recovery”](#))

⁸ Christiana Figueres (2020) *The Future we Choose: Surviving the Climate Crisis*, presented by the Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre, University of South Australia, March 10, 2020 (with permission)

https://www.unisa.edu.au/Business-community/Hawke-Centre/Events-calendar/hawkecentre_christiana_figueres/

⁹ https://www.ted.com/talks/christiana_figueres_the_case_for_stubborn_optimism_on_climate#t-9481

¹⁰ Global Optimism <https://globaloptimism.com/> founded by Christiana Figueres & Tom Rivett-Carnac. “We must cut global emissions by half between 2020 and 2030, reaching net zero by 2050 - undeniably the greatest challenge in human history. But it is also our greatest opportunity”

¹¹ <https://www.energymagazine.com.au/solar-fuels-south-australia-total-energy-demand-in-australian-first/>

¹² <https://reneweconomy.com.au/twin-peaks-south-australia-reaches-100-pct-solar-and-then-100-pct-wind-power-in-same-week-48193/>

¹³ Dickie (2005) *Indigenous traditions and sacred ecology in the Pacific Islands* in Rowland, P. (2019) *Ecosystem Services and faith communities in Oceania*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecoser.2019.100994>

RESOURCE LINKS

Multifaith Association of SA (MFASA) is glad to share resources, including:

- *Commitment to Interfaith Harmony* written after the first racist Reclaim Australia Rallies (2015);
- *Humanity at the Crossroads – an Appeal for Spiritual Leadership on Climate Change COP21* (2015)
- **Interfaith Prayer for the Bushfires (January 26, 2020)**

The Very Rev Frank Nelson, Dean of St Peters Anglican Cathedral - <https://youtu.be/mbbsoN9oLUc> (3.20m)

Sri Dilip Chirmuley AM, senior Hindu priest - <https://youtu.be/OvtfFcWcpE4> (4.30m)

Rev Rob McPherson, Unitarian Universalist Minister - <https://youtu.be/mUsnzGeX000> (2.44m)

Mrs Beady Kunz, representative of the Baha'i Community of SA - <https://youtu.be/dLrvDjdoYGQ> (6.36m)

Mr Bronte Wilson, Moderator, Uniting Church of Australia in SA - <https://youtu.be/cQ7KAHTdDL4> (7.11m)

Ani Tenzin Drolkar, Tibetan Buddhist Institute - <https://youtu.be/pH2OzPMTcNA> (5.45m)

Damian Outtrim, representative of the Brahma Kumaris of Australia - <https://youtu.be/bUnnFrpuqTI> (6.18m)

Rabbi Shoshana Kaminsky, Beit Shalom Synagogue - <https://youtu.be/hAY1KjiYsVg> (3.39m)

Father Philip Marshall, Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide - <https://youtu.be/a6GG8eabOxI> (6.30m)

Mrs Balbir Kaur, Sikh Society of SA, Glen Osmond Gurdwara - https://youtu.be/14vh_poyPg4 (3.12m)

Mr Jamie Herrick, Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints - <https://youtu.be/VICB0rvSQ9k> (4.48m)

Philippa Rowland, President of Multifaith Association SA. - <https://youtu.be/z-erQnSaWNI> (6.34m)

- **Interfaith Prayer Vigil for Healing the Earth (April 24 2020)**

https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=241109323937833&ref=watch_permalink

Speakers (in order) were: Kurna elder, Uncle Frank Wanganeen; Mahboobeh Aryanpad, Baha'i Community External Affairs Officer, daughter Nava Revalk sang a Baha'i Prayer "*O Thou Kind Lord*", with Damian Vahlis on guitar; Sheikh Helmi Bahkour, Imam of Adelaide Mosque; Rabbi Shoshana Kaminsky, Beit Shalom Synagogue; Sri Dilip Chirmuley OAM, Senior Hindu Priest and Vani Shukla, Hindu Council of Australia, SA; Father Philip Marshall, Apostolic Administrator Delegate, Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide; Buddhist Philippa Rowland, President Multifaith SA; Rev. Dr Vicky Balabanski, Director of Biblical Studies, Uniting College for Leadership & Theology SA and Rev. Peter Balabanski, Priest of St John's Anglican Church, Halifax St, Adelaide

International Day of Peace Event (September 21, 2020)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sriHtvG2YIf7YtD7hqNrt1ZUQG24O3IM/view?usp=sharing> (<5minutes long)



Adelaide's Interfaith Prayers for Australia's Bushfires – Multifaith Association of SA - 26 January 2020