

Faiths Unite: Visions for Transformative Climate Action

Online event 2 – COP26: Ramp up the Ambition!

Moderator: Lindsey Fielder Cook, QUNO

Host: Elena Cedillo, Lutheran World Federation

Speakers: Sarmad Iqbal, Islamic Relief Worldwide (Pakistan), Neil Thorns, Chair of the Climate Coalition and Advocacy Director at CAFOD (UK), Professor Joyashree Roy (Bangabandhu Chair Professor, Asian Institute of Technology, IPCC Author (Thailand), Moema de Miranda, Churches and Mining, Franciscans (Brazil), Ovais Sarmad, UNFCCC Deputy Executive Secretary (Bonn)

Opening

Lindsey Fielder Cook welcomes participants to the second ILC webinar, held amidst the geopolitical tensions and economic turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic. She speaks to the unprecedented nature of the current times and destruction of the natural world. ***“How do we stand tall with strength, hope and compassion? How do we stand tall with love, with vision and with courage to live and inspire a transformation for a healthy Earth?”***

Lindsey then introduces the event, which will be a conversation based around five questions related to the COP26 and raising climate ambition. The conversation will be followed by a time of reflection as to how interfaith work can support climate ambition.

Part 1 - *What is needed to make a reality of National Adaptation Plans to ensure that adaptation efforts are community-based and locally led?*

Sarmad Iqbal opens by speaking of the need to bring local communities into adaptation responses (both in terms of participation and knowledge sharing). He then offers some examples from Islamic Relief’s work in this area. IRW has adopted a ‘bottom up’ approach to climate adaptation, placing emphasis on the education of local communities on environmental issues: programmes have included work on water and sanitation, food security, and climate sensitive livelihoods. This, in turn, has meant that Islamic Relief has been able to advocate at a provincial and national level in a way that is informed by local knowledge. Sarmad ends by reflecting on how civil society stakeholders at the grassroots level offer a key point for collaboration in bridging the disconnect between local stakeholders and decisions at the policy level.

Joyashree Roy then addresses ***“the need for articulation and acceptance of the scientific fact that adaptation plans are nothing more than new development plans that are meant to reduce the climate risks to communities.”*** She reflects on National Adaptation Plans as being recognized as the same risk reduction strategies as those used by investors but on behalf of communities. She emphasizes the need to take into account the risks communities currently face and may face as a result of adaptation plans (e.g. how these intersect with already existent inequalities in terms of gender, social groups etc.). She then speaks to the need for

direct involvement of local scientific educational institutions in developing science-based adaptation plans for local communities. She closes by emphasizing the importance of communicating climate risks to local communities, stating that climate service providers who can monitor and evaluate climate risk have a crucial role to play in this capacity.

Part 2 - What is important to have on the agenda for COP26 and what does that mean for climate action now?

“The Paris Agreement may not be the perfect answer to everything but it is critical and historic for bringing together global efforts on climate change.” – Lindsey Fielder Cook

Moema Miranda begins by setting the scene for COP26. She recalls the political moment around the signing and ratification of the Paris Agreement in the years 2015/16, which also saw the publication of Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato si’* and the election of Donald Trump in the US. She says that the Covid-19 pandemic has shown that we cannot continue our way of living as we have done over the past 5 years. In terms of climate action Moema highlights two key points: mobilizing local communities and addressing climate denial. She links the first aspect to the need for personal responsibility amongst the wealthy and the need to address our consumerist lifestyle, as put forward in *Laudato si’*. On the second aspect, she notes that as people of faith we continue to live in a world affected by political power games. She therefore flags information sharing as crucial to facing climate denial head on.

Neil Thorns reflects on climate ambition as being key for COP26, noting that both the G7 and COP Presidency will be meeting in the UK in 2021. He notes that ambition must be reflected in countries’ Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) on which they must be prepared to deliver. He also notes that the COP26 must be responsive to the challenges raised by the pandemic and its interlinkages with the climate emergency and rising inequality: ***“How can we plan the future as opposed to planning for the future.”*** He emphasizes the need for a holistic approach that does not wait until COP26 to address these issues: he flags debt relief as being key, and emphasizes the need to put poor people at the heart of building back better. Closely linked to this point is the issue of financing the climate response and in addressing loss and damage. Neil closes by reflecting on the hope he is gaining from civil society spaces, emphasizing the need to enable and amplify the most marginalized in the global community.

Part 3 - What are Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and what is a fair share for countries’ NDCs?

Lindsey Fielder Cook opens the discussion by reflecting on climate justice and fairness, emphasising that the Paris Agreement is based on developed countries’ willingness to lead in mitigation and finance. She reflects that in Britain, where the industrial revolution started, there is a strong call for an ambitious stance on climate justice.

Joyashree Roy begins by offering an introduction to the basis of the NDCs: these are voluntary contributions to GHG emission reductions based on what a country can do in terms of adaptation and mitigation. She then reflects that many studies already show that the current NDCs, even if implemented, is falling short of the need for 1.5C target. If we do not ramp up our ambition to climate contributions, suffering and damage will continue to rise. Joyashree reflects on the topic of the NDCs fairness: the bottom 90% of our global population account for 48% of emissions. She notes that ***“this is complex because we work in a fragmented***

world but we are pledging for a global whole.” IPCC studies are showing that a decent standard of living can be met without negatively impacting the climate system, so irresponsible consumption can go down without negatively impacting individuals’ levels of wellbeing.

Neil Thorns reflects on the interdependence of the world, as addressed by Pope Francis in *Laudato si’*. Neil speaks to the perception of NDCs, emphasizing that we must view them as a global contribution. In terms of fairness, he notes that NDCs must have proven policies in them as to how to get to 1.5C and in recognition of countries’ common but differentiated responsibility. As to the situation in the UK, he emphasizes the need for the UK government to catalyse ambition (for example, by significantly increasing the fifth carbon budget) and to recognize its role as a historic emitter.

Sarmad Iqbal offers a reflection on the situation in Pakistan, where there has been increased ambition on the NDC. He speaks of this ambition in light of the climate impacts Pakistan is facing. Islamic Relief has been engaged with working with the Pakistani government on reviewing the NDCs, ensuring that the voices from provincial governments and communities faced with the challenges are being taken into account. He closes by offering hope for an ambitious approach to NDCs at the next COP inshallah.

Ovais Sarmad opens by reflecting on what he sees as most important for the COP26 agenda, emphasizing the need for a successful outcome based on leadership and trust between parties and different stakeholders. Article 6 and the provision of climate finance to developing countries are both emphasized. He finally, emphasizes the need to ensure confidence in the multilateral system, linking this to a need for moral and ethical responsibility at all levels. When it comes to NDCs, Ovais places a clear emphasis on the need for continued and urgent focus on decarbonization over the next 10 years.

Part 3 - Speaking to 1.5, do we address root causes of climate change or do we address symptoms? Does geoengineering offer a potential solution to climate change or is it an excuse for business as usual?

Neil Thorns begins by noting that geoengineering offers solutions to only one aspect of climate change without addressing the structures that are causing it. He emphasizes that it is important to understand where the call for geoengineering is coming from. He speaks about the private sector’s responsibility, noting that 100 of the large global companies have been the source of 70% of GHG emissions since 1988 but have not significantly altered their business practices. He closes by emphasizing that ***“We are not in a business as usual situation, we need fundamental change to the way we work and the way we live our lives.”***

Joyashree Roy responds by noting that the removal of CO₂ from the atmosphere that can be done in many ways. She reflects that oceans and forests have been doing this for many years. The IPCC report on reaching 1.5C shows that human communities can make choices that will effectively remove CO₂ from the atmosphere. Joyashree emphasizes that how we go about mitigating climate change is a choice. She offers the example of how some cities have adopted measures to reduce air pollution, whilst others have not even begun to address this aspect. Geoengineering is a domain where we have less certain information and we are unsure about its impact. ***“Do we choose to step into the known or unknown world?”***

Ovais Sarmad responds by recalling the moral questions that climate action raises. ***“We have a huge responsibility and accountability to ensure the protection of our Earth [...] and there is a huge reward in it.”*** In relation to questions on climate altering technology, he emphasizes the need for decarbonization and mitigation of climate change.

Part 5 - What does climate ambition mean to you? From your heart, outside of your role? What does it mean to you and how can these interfaith efforts strengthen us on a daily basis?

“I have one life as a human life. I want to live a life doing no harm to others. So if any of my carbon footprint causes harm to others, I want to get out of that. For example, I have made adjustments to walk more to live a fossil fuel free day [...] You see the principle of doing no harm to others in the way we talk about externalities. But love is the sole driving force. If we are driven by love, I don’t think we can do harm to others. I want to live a life full of love for everything.”

- Joyashree Roy

“These moving feelings are those that keep us going [...] We can more connect with an open love, with a kind of love that can involve all of Earth – not just Nature, but all of Creation. We can form a big net of love that comes from God’s heart and brings us all together. This sense of being together can open our heart and mind to the suffering of others.”

- Moema Miranda

“Making a difference every day through making a positive change every day [...] Even if you send that one email to address issues of climate change, then reflect on how can you do that better tomorrow? Be very stubborn against strong hurdles.”

- Ovais Sarmad

“To live simply, sustainably and in solidarity. And by taking the hard actions that we need.”

- Neil Thorns

“Islam teaches us to be just, ethical and humanitarian in all aspects of our lives. With this belief you can mold your life accordingly. [...] All our actions have an impact on the most vulnerable. This compels us to act. The motivation of faith will help us to stand firm.”

- Sarmad Iqbal