



TOWARDS RIO + 20 AND BEYOND - A TURNING POINT IN EARTH HISTORY

Speaking truth to power

As leaders and teachers of the world's religious and spiritual traditions, we express our concern for Earth, our common home. We applaud the United Nations' initiative to gather the international community in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. We seek to contribute to a renewed political commitment to sustainable development and to the assessment of progress made since the historic Earth Summit in Rio in 1992.

While some progress has been made since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, with sadness we recognize that the interconnected problems of development, equity and ecology have become more severe over the past twenty years. We painfully realize that our credibility as bearers of the image of the Divine is at stake in a world where we allow so many to live in misery, in a habitat devastated by the pursuit of short-term self interest.

The ideals of a shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family and the greater community of life have been expressed passionately in the Earth Charter, the Johannesburg Declaration, and in many other commitments since the Rio Earth Summit. What has prevented us from realizing these commitments?

Adherents of spiritual traditions should be the vanguard of speaking truth to power. We have to take part of the blame, as we have allowed ourselves to become fragmented. We acknowledge that we have failed to live as compassionately as we could have, and that some have created human misery in the name of religion. Yet we believe in the power of repentance, and seek to counter fear with hope. We cannot change the past, but from the honest acknowledgement of our mistakes, we can draw the strength and insight to change the future for the better. Our soul-searching compels us to enter the conference rooms in Rio not by preaching, but by leading through example.

The missing element – a spirit of trust and collaboration

All negotiations will fail as long as there is no trust, no respect and no hope. In our different traditions and cultures there exist similar parables that urge us to express empathy on a global scale. Humanity is one body. When one part of the body aches, the other parts feel the pain.

For breaking the threshold in the international negotiations we need to rebuild trust between governments of the North and the South, East and West, between NGOs and the business sector, and different schools of thought. When we are able to help each other transcend the prison of self interest, everything will be possible. We should not have to fear anymore the presumed hidden agendas of the others but rather be open to see in each others' eyes the manifestation of the image of the source of all being. This is the spirit which we hope to see at the Rio + 20 Conference.

At the heart of the great diversity of our spiritual teachings, there is a common theme: They teach that, in this world of death and suffering, ignorance, fear and desire – through right understanding and practice – an individual can connect to the deeper, ultimate, radiant and



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caring source of all that is, and create a way of living that assists all in finding a fulfilling and enduring life.

To make development truly sustainable, our economic, scientific and technological accomplishments should assist the processes of individual, psychological and spiritual development. We must reorient our economic bottom line to support this full human development if we wish to live in a flourishing Earth community.

Our commitments to accelerate the Great Transition towards sustainability, equity and well-being

We, who represent such a magnificent diversity of religious and spiritual expressions, commit to the following:

We commit to transcend traditional boundaries and speak in one unprecedented unified voice.

We repent where our traditions and organizations have promoted violence and injustice towards others, and have supported the destruction of the environment.

We embrace with joy the blessed opportunity to forge a global partnership to truly care for Earth and one another.

We recognize that the principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, spiritual, and ethical traditions, calling us always to treat others as we wish to be treated ourselves.

We commit to fully engage in the paradigm shift towards universal responsibility and global empathy with all our brothers and sisters, and the whole community of life on Earth. Manifestations of this global empathy such as the Earth Charter, the Charter for Compassion, and the Uppsala Interfaith Climate Manifesto will guide our way towards strengthened interfaith collaboration for creating a more just, peaceful, and sustainable future.

We commit to tread more lightly on Earth and regard it as our sacred duty to lead through example and demonstrate sustainable living in our religious and spiritual communities. In this, we draw strength, encouragement and inspiration from the many good practices that are already being applied by religious communities around the world.

We commit to educate ourselves to work effectively in development policy arenas, understanding the critical changes that need to be made in our economic and governance structures to create a flourishing future for all.

We commit to redouble our efforts of serving as forces for good, by weighing in on the major international processes including Rio + 20, the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development and the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals.

We speak out for recognizing the importance of the global ethical and spiritual consciousness awakening in civil society around the world for advancing the transition to sustainable development. In fact, we consider this global ethical consciousness as the foundation of the other three pillars of a sustainable way of life, because it involves the internalization of the values of sustainable human development; it is a source of inspiration



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and motivation for action, as well as an essential guide regarding the path to genuine sustainability.

This elevated intention of the world's spiritual and religious leaders to awaken a global ethical and spiritual consciousness in civil society is bound to have a vibrant impact on others. Inspired by the values and commitments of this community of leaders, it is our hope that the world community will find the courage and strength to fully engage in elevated action and shift the old paradigm, taking us beyond national self-interest.

Our appeals to the Rio + 20 Conference

We appeal to the representatives of governments and international institutions to likewise transcend national boundaries and take measures which seem to contravene national self interest but are necessary for preserving the community of life.

We applaud your courageous steps towards unified action at the beginning of the third Millennium by adopting the Millennium Development Goals. We urge you to honour your commitment to realize these goals by 2015, and adopt goals that go further by 2030, which should include the goal to completely eradicate poverty by that date.

We urge the representatives of all governments to:

- Show courageous leadership in addressing the major global challenges that threaten the very survival of humanity on this planet.
- Create a green economy that ensures social justice and equity, protects the ecological balance and creates economic sufficiency by internalizing social and environmental costs into the economic bottom line.
- Create structures for global governance with a global trusteeship mandate for Earth's common goods such as fresh water, healthy soil, clean air, the oceans, the atmosphere and the diversity of life that are essential conditions for human life and well-being which cannot be sensibly privately owned and traded on markets.
- Affirm a framework of strong sustainability aimed at securing Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations, such as the Earth Charter, as a guide to development policy and practice.
- Acknowledge the importance of the spiritual dimension of sustainability – that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more.

A solemn moment of existential global decision making

Our religious and spiritual traditions command us not only to feed the hungry, but to give of our own bread. This is not a deed of charity but of justice. We therefore call upon each citizen of the world community, especially within the rich countries and communities, to pledge each year an extra Millennium Share of 0.1 % of one's income to raise the necessary funds to alleviate abject misery, to realize the Millennium Development Goals, and to respond to urgent humanitarian crises such as the current famine in the horn of Africa.



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We hope that in time we may form out of our midst a Council of Conscience which speaks with moral authority, provides guidance on the urgent global challenges humanity is facing and issues alerts about perilous trends and hidden conflicts that escape the attention of the media and public awareness.

This is a solemn moment of existential global decision making. The Rio + 20 Conference provides a historic opportunity to lead the world into a more sustainable future. We do not have another twenty years to lose. To move forward in our best interests and even more in the interests of those yet to be born, we must change our course of negotiation and realize that only together can we forge inclusive solutions.

Humble in the recognition that we are but dust and ashes, we are conscious that the consequences of our decisions and actions will be felt by many generations to come. We turn to the Source of All Blessings for strength and courage. May our children, and our children's children not be disappointed with our actions, may we be able to make them proud.

Submitted to the United Nations as a contribution to the Compilation Document for the Zero Draft Outcome Document of the Rio + 20 Conference by

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