

G20 Interfaith Forum - European Regional Online Consultation

Working Group 2, “Safeguarding the Planet”

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Introduction

Acknowledgement: We acknowledge that humans are responsible for many aspects of the threats to the health of our planet. And that the choices of the governments of the world’s powerful nations, as well as populations from the world’s wealthiest countries, consciously or otherwise, are disproportionately exacerbating the problem. Conversely, these groups of people and countries, many of which lie in Europe, have the potential to make the greatest impact if they take corrective action.

European context: Europe has a long history in developing and implementing environmental policy. More recently it has sought to reflect the need to integrate environmental priorities across all policy and action. For example, the European institutions that have supported the United Nations 17 environmental, economic and social goals for 2030 as the overarching strategy for Europe. These Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been built within the 6 Key Priorities 2019-2024 for Europe wide action and are reported on annually. One of these priorities is the European Green Deal which was launched in December 2019. This aims to transform the Union into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where climate and environmental challenges are addressed and turned into opportunities, while making the transition just and inclusive for all. It includes a roadmap with actions to move towards a circular economy, stop climate change, revert biodiversity loss and cut pollution. Moreover, it outlines investments needed and financing tools available.

Rationale for interfaith alliance action: Most of the Earth’s population recognises the crucial value of the resources humans have at their disposal to secure our wellbeing. The majority of the world’s population have a faith and will often describe our planet as God’s creation and a gift given to humanity to look after wisely on behalf of everyone now and in the future. This is often called “stewardship”. It follows that, for them, the task of safeguarding the planet and of equitably sharing its benefits- as well as being a scientific and social necessity -is also a divine duty, requiring dedication and sacrifice. That long-term perspective and mindset can powerfully compliment the efforts of secular or non-faith-based actors with similar goals, such as local and national governments and international partnerships.

The European Interfaith Forum consultation around the issues of climate change; the circular or restorative economy; and partnerships with faith groups has raised a number of policy ideas for consideration by Europe wide decision-makers and the forthcoming G20 summit.

Recommendations

1. Promote the European approach in using the SDGs as the ultimate framework and indicator of success internationally

Faith groups are deeply uncomfortable with the current narrative around economic growth being the primary goal of human purpose, progress and international cooperation. They also recognise there is not yet a consensus around an alternative economic model. With developed nations needing to accept less, developing

nations still requiring growth to lift millions out of poverty, and technology advances not being enough to achieve the levels of decoupling of pollution and growth required to achieve agreed international targets.

Therefore, the European approach of recognising the 17 SDGs, of which only one is centred around economic growth, is welcomed as a useful framework to guide national and international progress and cooperation. This framework also helps to identify the interconnection of policies and outcomes, such as gender, young people, poverty and justice. It is also an arena to develop and test new narratives and approaches about “good growth”.

For more information on this approach and progress to date within Europe on the 17 SDGs see: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/11011074/KS-02-20-202-EN-N.pdf/334a8cfe-636a-bb8a-294a-73a052882f7f>

Therefore, we ask that:

- 1a. The SDGs replace economic growth as the ultimate framework and indicator of success internationally** as the European Union has begun to demonstrate.
- 1b. A widespread, accurate and empowering spread of knowledge concerning the SDGs and the role of environmental protection become an educational priority** supported by the newfound public appreciation for the scientific community and approach of evidence gathering, dealing with risk, uncertainty, and the precautionary principle.
- 1c. Religious institutions be encouraged to train religious leaders and educators to integrate lessons about the SDGs and sustainable living into formal and informal religious education.** This includes drawing upon spiritual and philosophical values (e.g. prudence, self-discipline, equity and modesty) to help cultivate a mindset in which people can grieve for the destruction of our home, feel optimistic even in times of change, and be prepared to advocate and live sustainable lifestyles. Secular educational authorities should consider including ethical and faith-based perspectives when designing corresponding environmental modules, to heighten the relevance of lessons to people of faith.

2. Accelerate action and consistency of the use of existing market based mechanisms to deliver carbon reduction, resource efficiency and environmental protection

Until we can develop a better system, the current market based one is required to deliver urgent action. Faith groups are frustrated that the required urgency and consistency to tackle climate change is often not evident in the implementation of international agreements into national and local action. For example, there has been a varied response in how “green” the COVID-19 economic stimulus packages have been across governments in Europe. Globally early estimates are of only 0.2% of recovery spending on climate priorities, despite there being strong correlations between job and wealth creation through housing energy efficiency retrofits, electric vehicle infrastructure, low carbon energy generation, storage, research and innovation.

For more information about the different economic recovery packages see: <https://www.carbonbrief.org/coronavirus-tracking-how-the-worlds-green-recovery-plans-aim-to-cut-emissions>

Therefore, we ask that:

- 2a. The overall impact of economy recovery plans be beneficial to climate goals, the environment, and to help in a fair transition** by ensuring that companies and firms which benefit from subsidies as part of the economic recovery after COVID-19 abide by principles of sustainability. And that

sectors required for green growth or change are prioritised for support, such as those set out in the European Green Deal.

- 2b. Taxes, tariffs and subsidies** be adjusted to ensure that a product's cost accurately reflects its positive or negative externalities in its production, use and disposal.
- 2c. Faith communities be encouraged to continue to model the right behaviour** through a review of their own investments and pension funds, and operations from buildings to transport and energy, food and waste. They can help educate their communities on how to be “conscious consumers” by aligning their values with their purchases, willingness to share, and how to campaign and put pressure on companies that are not changing fast enough.

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