Energy Security for a Sustainable Future

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This draft report was prepared in advance of a May 26, 2026 forum at Georgetown University – Faith for Impact – organized under the auspices of the G20 Interfaith Forum. It represents an effort to promote discussion within and across religious and interfaith communities and to encourage constructive policy dialogue with the Trump Administration, which has made energy security one of the three priorities of its 2026 G20 presidency. The report and its draft recommendations will be revised in light of the discussions at the forum and adapted for presentation at the IF20 annual gathering to take place in Salt Lake City in October 2026.

Executive Summary

The Trump administration has identified energy security as one of three priorities for its 2026 G20 presidency (alongside economic growth and AI innovation). Under the heading “Unlocking Affordable and Secure Energy Supply Chains” the administration seeks to promote “affordable,

reliable, and secure energy as the foundation of economic growth and national security" and to ensure that "energy sources meet growing global demand." The topic is set to figure prominently at the December 2026 G20 Summit in Miami.

This priority presents a challenge for the world's leading religious and interfaith communities, who have overwhelmingly advocated a rapid green energy transition as a means to meet the global climate crisis. The faith sector has recognized the challenges facing developing nations seeking to promote growth and combat poverty, on the one hand, and transition to renewables on the other. But they have almost unanimously opposed continued reliance on fossil fuels during an extended period, insisting instead on a green transition with the necessary financial and technical support from the wealthy nations who have disproportionately contributed to human-driven climate change.

There is a stark tension between favoring increased energy production – whatever the source – and insisting on the absolute priority of decarbonization and renewable energy. But might there also be some basis for dialogue and even compromise between these two opposing visions?

This report argues that even as they maintain their focus on sustainability and a green transition, faith communities have an opportunity to engage constructively with the Trump Administration's agenda. The US call for affordable and secure energy that meets growing demand in the Global South addresses, at least indirectly, the call for economic justice and poverty reduction promoted by most religious and interfaith organizations around the world. No faith communities have insisted that developing nations sharply reduce their reliance on fossil fuels if it cripples economic development and hurts the poor. Instead, they have emphasized – together with much of the international community – the imperative of debt forgiveness and climate finance for low-income countries in the service of a just transition. Given that such

redistribution has not materialized at a sufficient level, and is unlikely to in the near future, there

may be a pragmatic case to be made for some positive role for fossil fuels in the Global South as part of a more extended green transition to a sustainable world economy.

While the approaches of the Trump Administration and faith communities – abundance v. sustainability – are in stark opposition, there is some common ground around a growth agenda that addresses the poverty challenge. There may be creative ways for faith communities to work with governments and corporations to secure energy access for those who need it most – the world's struggling countries and their poorest citizens – while at the same time advancing the medium-term goal of decarbonization and a transition to renewable energy.

This discussion paper sets out the Trump administration's abundance agenda, outlines the contrasting positions of leading religious and interfaith communities on sustainability and energy

security, and recommends paths of constructive engagement between both camps.

Introduction

Since it assumed the 2026 G20 presidency on December 1, 2025, the Trump administration has centered its agenda on three priorities: reducing regulatory burdens to boost economic prosperity,

securing affordable and reliable energy supply chains, and advancing innovation in AI and emerging technologies. Cross-government working groups are working on concrete proposals in each area – in consultation with other G20-governments – to be reviewed at a summit with world

leaders scheduled for December 2026 in Miami.

So far the picture is clearest on the first, economic priority. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has outlined goals including streamlining financial regulation, improving debt transparency, fostering a digital assets ecosystem, improving cross-border payments, and addressing global economic imbalances – the latter a priority of the French G-7 presidency in 2026. A trade

working group has also been set up. The AI working group, for its part, is working to identify best practices for accelerating advances, especially as they relate to economic growth, and to maintain and strengthen public support for emerging technologies.

On the energy front, an “Energy Abundance Working Group” is focused on “market-driven energy production” to “deliver lower costs for consumers, provide for faster infrastructure development, and support genuine innovation.” In sharp contrast to previous G20 presidencies, the Trump administration has not acknowledged climate change as a problem and is seeking to exclude it from the agenda. It is instead encouraging other countries to embrace the US approach, with “each nation choosing its own energy mix, but all committed to the principles of energy security, abundance, addition, and affordability to meet 21st century energy demand.”

In the meantime, there is extensive evidence that the global climate crisis is deepening. The implementation of the 2015 Paris Agreement, signed by 194 countries, has been uneven. The goal of a 60% cut in global carbon emissions is not being met; in fact, overall emissions levels are about 5% higher than a decade ago. Existing national reduction plans, if implemented, will likely deliver only about a 12% cut by 2035. The fact that the US, the world’s second largest carbon emitter after China, abandoned the accords (for the second time) after Trump took office

in January 2025, is exacerbating the situation. If current trends continue, the threshold of 1.5 degrees centigrade above preindustrial levels – identified by many scientists as a tipping point – could be reached as early as 2030.

There has been limited progress on climate financing to support mitigation efforts and energy transitions in less wealthy nations. At COP29 in the Baku in 2024, the global community pledged to mobilize $300 billion annually by 2035 to support the effort – a target far from being met. In the meantime, global warming proceeds apace and experts predict further rising sea levels and catastrophic weather events which disproportionately impact the world’s poor. If trends continue, the number of countries facing extreme climate conditions could rise to 65 by

2040.

In the meantime, under the Paris Agreement, low- and middle-income countries are encouraged to embrace decarbonization while carrying historically high debt burdens. Their external debt reached a record $8.9 trillion in 2024, even as about 730 million people still lack electricity and roughly 2 billion lack access to clean cooking, relying instead mainly on wood burning.

Energy Abundance v. Green Transition

Donald Trump has justified the US departure from the Paris Agreement on two main grounds: because it imposed unequal and unfair burdens on the United States and because its underlying assumption – that human-made climate change poses an existential threat – was false. The US G20 presidency is based on the premise that global warming is a hoax, ignoring the entire issue of climate change and focusing instead on the overarching theme of energy abundance.

The US government sees the G20 as a forum to pitch its domestic energy abundance agenda ("Drill, baby, drill!") as an example for the world to follow: "Deregulation, permitting reform, and market-driven energy production deliver lower costs for consumers, provide for faster infrastructure development, and support genuine innovation.

" So far the administration has not

articulated a clear global vision for energy abundance, beyond Trump's suggestion at the 2025 UN General Assembly that the rest of the world follow the US example, with its high reliance on fossil fuels to meet increasing energy demands, including the rapid buildout of data centers. "If you don't get away from this green scam, your country is going to fail" he told world leaders. Even as his tariff campaign was inflicting pain on the global economy, he insisted: "We stand ready to provide any country with abundant, affordable energy supplies, if you need them."

Within the administration, Energy Secretary Chris Wright has made the explicit case that economic development in low-income countries requires access to fossil fuels. "Over 2 billion people today cook their daily meals and heat their homes burning wood. The indoor air pollution

from this activity alone is estimated to kill over 2 million people annually," he told an energy industry gathering in March 2025. "We need more modern energy. 2 million readily preventable deaths. Where is the COP conference for this far more urgent global challenge?"

The rest of the international community has overwhelmingly rejected this logic. Most governments insist on a rapid green transition in the developing world to be supported by generous debt relief and climate financing, with major oil-exporting countries a key exception. While UN institutions back a rapid transition, the EU has acknowledged some positive role for natural gas in developing economies. Leading secular environmental NGOs, including Greenpeace, Oxfam, Sierra Club, and Friends of the Earth, have backed rapid decarbonization and insisted that renewable energy sources are an underutilized and affordable option for low-income countries, with appropriate levels of international technical and financial support.

Strong green transition advocates do recognize the particular challenges facing resource constrained countries. The Paris Agreement itself does as well, noting that signatories "aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, recognizing that peaking will take longer" for some countries and highlighting "the principle of common but differentiated

responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances." In that spirit, a major Oxfam report published in 2025 recommended that countries in the Global North "leave enough carbon budget" for poor countries that need fossil fuels to provide energy access. They should be given "more time for their transition pathway". There should not be a one

size fits all but rather "equity-based framework" that defines timelines based on a country's historical contributions for the climate crisis and its economic development needs. But the same report excoriates the energy sector for its one-sided approach to marketing fossil fuels and refusal to grant debt relief and adequate financing, insisting on the absolute priority of renewables. The report's full title reflects the dominant view within the secular environmental

community: “Unjust Transition. Reclaiming the Energy Future from Climate Colonialism.

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Given the fact that debt forgiveness and climate finance transfers are unlikely to meet the needs of Global South in the short and medium-term, might we expect pragmatic discussions about how best to provide energy access through a combination of fossil fuels and renewables? To pose the question is to immediately run up against the deep divides that frame the debate. For the

Trump administration the abundance agenda and climate change skepticism are articles of faith; for leading environmental groups and their political allies, the green transition and the climate crisis have the same authoritative status. For either side to engage with the other in a constructive

conversation about pragmatic ways forward is typically seen as consorting with the enemy – if not with outright evil. No real conversation is taking place.

Might there be ways for leading religious and interfaith communities, with their twin commitments to poverty relief and sustainability, to bridge the divide and find practical ways forward, while acknowledging the deep commitments of those on both sides of the debate?

Religious and Interfaith Communities on Energy Security and Sustainability

There are reasons to be skeptical that faith institutions, working together or separately, can have

a meaningful impact.

While more than three-quarters of the world’s population are affiliated or identify with religious communities, national and international politics are dominated by states and corporations. Economic and political elites, whatever their personal religious beliefs, are beholden to the logic of business, financial, electoral, and security competition. The result is too often a gap between rhetoric about the common good and policies and strategies that serve narrow interests. We live

in a prosperous world in which leaders across sectors profess their commitment to poverty reduction and environmental protection while poverty persists on a massive scale and – unless technological innovations should save us – we are hurtling towards global climate catastrophe. Faith leaders are not only up against the interest-driven logic of dominant secular institutions. Historically, divisions within and across religious communities have also undermined efforts to shape national and global policy agendas. It is not just that our economic and political systems reward self-seeking, competitive behavior. Religious communities, too, have often put their narrow interests first, resisting cooperative efforts to come together and articulate and advocate

for their ethical values in the public square. That picture has improved since World War II, with the growth of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Today it is difficult to find a religious group or interreligious organization not committed to the principle that faith sector can and should mobilize around global challenges, including both poverty reduction and climate change. The G20 Interfaith Forum is one effort among many in this space.

Since the turn of the century, and the 2015 Paris Agreement in particular, leading religious and interfaith communities, with few exceptions, have made protecting the environment and climate

change a major priority. Leaders of the Abrahamic traditions (the focus here) have articulated care for God's creation as a central value – from Pope Francis's call for "care for our common home" to the Islamic focus on Khalifa (stewardship) and the Jewish imperative of Tikkun Olam (healing the world). In policy stances and interfaith statements Abrahamic leaders have raised the

alarm on climate change and called for a rapid transition to renewables. They have embedded these calls within older, more established commitments to social justice and solidarity with the poor, calling for wealthy nations – the major carbon emitters – to generously support low- and middle-income countries in their green transitions. In the process, they have creatively combined

commitments to climate justice and social justice, heeding what Pope Francis, in his 2015 encyclical Laudato si', referred to as "the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

Christianity

There are some exceptions to dominant environmentalist thrust of religious and interfaith engagement, for example within Protestantism in the United States. Several evangelical organizations aligned with the fossil fuel sector have made the case that a green transition undermines social justice. In line with the Trump administration's abundance agenda, they insist that only access to inexpensive coal, oil, and natural gas can provide adequate energy security and energy access for the world's poor. The most notable of these is the Cornwall Alliance, which begins with a wholesale rejection of climate change science, insisting that God created the earth "robust, resilient, self-regulating, and self-correcting." The alliance also claims that decarbonization imposes unfair burdens on poor countries: "The demand that they forgo the use of inexpensive fossil fuels and depend on expensive wind, solar, and other 'Green' fuels to meet that need is to condemn them to more generations of poverty and the high rates of disease and premature death that accompany it."

In fact, most Christian (and non-Christian) communities do not demand that poor countries forego the use of coal, oil, and natural gas if they have no viable economic alternative. But they insist that, for the sake of the planet, those renewable alternatives must be made available without delay, notably through climate finance bolstered by generous debt relief. With very few exceptions, they do not positively affirm the necessity of continued reliance on fossil fuels for an extended transition, for fear of cementing an environmentally unstable status quo. One exception – at least for a time – was Pope Francis, who in Laudato si' in 2015 called for replacing fossil fuels "without delay" but added that "until greater progress is made in developing widely

accessible sources of renewable energy it is legitimate to choose the less harmful alternative or to

find short-term solutions." But by the time of his follow-on 2023 apostolic exhortation Laudate deum, this affirmation of the legitimacy of interim measures had been dropped. Interestingly, even Catholic leaders in the Global South have rejected a positive affirmation for fossil fuels use in economic development. The African Bishops Conference, for example, has stated: "We must stop the expansion of fossil fuels and instead expand clean, renewable energy solutions."

A recent, March 2026 manifesto of Catholic bishops across the developing world follows the same line of argument. It acknowledges the problem, noting that "more than 650 million people"

remain "in the dark (without electricity), especially on the African continent," and affirming that "energy must be a right, not a commodity, to guarantee a dignified life in this century." But instead of acknowledging a role for fossil fuels during an extended green transition it, calls for the "immediate" cessation of "all new exploration and production of coal, oil, and gas," declaring

new fossil fuel infrastructure "unethical." Wealthy nations, it affirms, "must provide the necessary financial assistance and technology transfer to enable developing countries to adopt clean energy pathways without compromising their development." Left unaddressed are ways forward for hundreds of millions without power if that envisioned support does not materialize.

The leading global ecumenical Protestant organization, the World Council of Churches, went through a similar evolution – initially acknowledging dependence on fossil fuels as a regrettable but unavoidable reality in the South. "Emission levels from countries of the economic South are rising rapidly as they pursue development to meet the basic needs of their people," a 2008 statement pointed out. "We must make a distinction between the 'luxury emissions of the rich' and the 'survival emissions of the poor'." In the years that followed, the WCC has taken a more resolute line on a rapid green transition. "Use of existing fossil fuel sources must be phased out without further delay," the 11th WCC Assembly resolved in 2022. "No new fossil fuel or nuclear

energy projects can be developed." As with the Catholic Church, this uncompromising stance extended to faith leaders in the developing world. A WCC gathering in Nigeria, for example, called for “a transformative change of heart and lifestyle – in the region, and globally, away from the destructive and exploitative fossil fuel economy and towards sustainability and justice.” To reconcile this hardline stance with the pressing need for energy access, the WCC, too, impressed upon the Global North linked demands for "climate justice, debt relief, and just transition".

Islam

The picture within global Islam is more varied, because of both a greater decentralization of authority and the importance of oil and natural gas production in key Muslim-majority countries, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Nigeria.

The 2015 Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change, which brought many Muslim leaders together around the Paris Agreement negotiations, called investment in "decentralized renewable energy" the "best way to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development". It is worth noting that no senior Saudi, Emirati, Qatari, or Kuwaiti religious authority endorsed the declaration. A similar pattern continued in 2022, with the release of Al-Mizan, a major Islamic statement on the environment put together by a team of leading international scholars. It called on governments and corporations to steer the energy economy in the direction of renewables as a way to promote social justice; they should “ensure a global just transition to 100 per cent access to renewable energy globally, support dependent economies to diversify away from fossil fuels and enable all people and communities, not least poorer countries, to flourish." Interestingly, Al-Mizan critiqued the weaker language endorsed at COP 28 in the UAE under OPEC pressure – it is for a '”transitioning away” from rather than a “phasing out” of fossil fuels.

As in the Christian world, the depth of opposition to fossil fuels among Muslim environmental

advocates is evident in the rejection of any new fossil fuel projects to meet energy demand anywhere, including in the Global South. Islamic Relief, an influential NGO, has exemplified this principled stance, directly taking on energy firms that pitch and gas as engines of development. "We support every ethical action designed to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions,"

they stated in a 2025 report. "These include ending exploration, production and use of coal, oil and gas, and replacing them with renewable sources of energy." Islamic groups, like their Christian counterparts, have not addressed the tradeoffs between economic development and climate change mitigation. In theory there are no tradeoffs – in a world in which wealthy nations paid off the ecological debts and generously supported the transition in the Global South, economic growth and social justice might go hand in hand. But in the absence of that generosity,

is there a social justice case to be made for the transitional use of fossil fuels?

Judaism

Many US-based Jewish communities and organizations have been outspoken in insisting on a global green transition that addresses social justice concerns. The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism has called for a "a just transition away from fossil fuels" and advocated environmental justice for "those who have been disproportionately impacted by climate change."

In 2024, the Union for Reform Judaism, which represents about a third of American Jews, strongly advocated for fossil fuels divestment. Dayenu, a leading Jewish NGO, has also pressed to "move billions in Jewish communal assets away from fossil fuels toward clean energy." In an acknowledgement of the challenges facing the Global South, Dayenu – like the other groups – has insisted that "developing countries receive the resources they need to bring their populations

out of poverty without increasing emissions." Conservative Jewish groups have echoed these overall positions -- while generally eschewing calls for divestment. Orthodox Jewish groups

have been less outspoken on environmental questions.

At the international level, the Global Jewry Declaration to COP30, backed by a wide coalition of environmental organizations, called for “rapid, science-based goals” and “ambitious and equitable” climate finance for countries bearing the greatest burdens. But it did not suggest that a more “equitable” regime give poor countries more freedom to use fossil fuels. World Jewish Relief also made similar points, emphasizing the unfair burden facing low- and middle-income countries. But its mitigation language is still about “replacing carbon-intensive fossil fuels” with renewables, noting that the challenge is doing this “in an efficient and cost-effective way” – not elaborating on social justice concerns. While some prominent Jewish figures signed the Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship, with its clear support for fossil-fuel access for the world’s poorest, no established Jewish organizations have taken that position.

The Interfaith Constellation

The major interfaith statements on climate change have echoed the dominant political logic of the Paris Agreement – a recognition of its “differential” application to poor countries with a reluctance to recognize any positive role for fossil fuels as part of an extended green transition. The 2014 Interfaith Summit on Climate Change (hosted by the World Council of Churches and Religions for Peace) called for “fairness and equity” and for the wealthy to support “the poor and the vulnerable,” especially in low-income countries. It simultaneously advocated “de-carbonization and the complete phase-out of fossil fuels by mid-century” – a high hurdle for the developing world without sufficient international support. More recently the COP29 Interfaith Call to Action noted that climate plans should reflect each country’s “fair share” and “historic responsibility,” and advocated generous climate finance for developing countries. But it also insisted that “all countries must prioritise the urgent phase-out of fossil fuels.” The COP30 Interfaith Call to Action also noted “common but differentiated responsibilities” but also did not recognize any positive transitional role for fossil fuels in low- and middle income countries.

These core issues were recently addressed at the First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels in Santa Marta, Colombia, in April 2026, where religious organizations from around the world called on governments to endorse a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty. “Many governments, fossil fuel corporations and a consortium of related industries, sustained by vast financial interests, continue to expand coal, oil, and gas extraction even though they have known for decades the devastation this unleashes,” the participants emphasized in a multi-faith call. “Their inaction has disrupted the balance. It breaks covenant with future generations. It places profit above life.” The signatories noted that the way forward “must account for global inequality.” But they rejected any rationale for new extraction or continued reliance on fossil fuels in the developing world during an extended green transition. “To invest in new extraction while claiming climate leadership is to hide behind illusion.”

The proposed fossil-fuel non-proliferation treaty would leave little flexibility for low- and middle income countries wedded to non-renewables. “End the development of new coal, oil, and gas production, immediately,” the proposed text insisted. “Phase out existing fossil fuel production rapidly and equitably.” The reference to equity appeared to allow some flexibility, “ensuring that impacted workers and communities supported with dignity.” But in the absence of the hoped for finance guarantees from more wealthy nations, it was not clear how such a path might be forged.

The drafters recognized that this way forward represented a challenge, but insisted that it was realistic. “Renewable energy is increasingly affordable and abundant. It is a matter of economic fairness that its benefits flow first to those long burdened by pollution, poverty, and exclusion.”

Explaining the Principled Positions of Religious and Interfaith Organizations

There are analytical, ethical, political, and sociological reasons for the principled position of most major Abrahamic religious and global interfaith on the green transition – including a

reluctance to endorse the long-term goal while blessing the use of fossil fuels in low and middle income countries, given their importance for economic growth, in the meantime. At an analytical level, one can argue that the speed and impact of climate change makes any effort to slow the green transition untenable and that renewables represent a cost-efficient alternative. At an ethical level, there is the claim that any willful further damage to the environment – God's creation given to us to nurture – is morally unlawful, and cannot be countenanced. At a political level, it can be argued that any compromise on decarbonization plays into the hands of those who deny climate change and embrace a pro-market, abundance agenda. And at a sociological level, strong pro-green transition statements are often drafted mainly by activists and scholars based in wealthier countries, where potential tradeoffs between growth and decarbonization is not as acute as in large parts of the Global South.

Draft Recommendations for Religious and Interfaith Communities

The following draft recommendations seek to position religious and interfaith communities as promoters of constructive dialogue across both sides of the abundance/sustainability divide.

More Fully Address the Continued Role of Fossil Fuels in Global Development. The faith sector has rightly highlighted the obligation of wealthy nations to support a green transition in low- and middle income countries. But religious communities should also acknowledge that such support has not been forthcoming at the necessary scale, leaving some countries with no practical alternative but to rely on fossil fuels to support their development. There may be thoughtful ways to insist on a green transition while blessing "short-term solutions" – a formulation adopted by Pope Francis in Laudato si', but not repeated since.

Insist on Social Justice and Sustainable Criteria for New Fossil Fuel Projects. Faith communities

committed to a rapid green transition will likely continue to oppose new fossil fuel projects in the

Global South. Where those projects are nevertheless going ahead, there may be opportunities to

bring in social justice and sustainability as criteria for evaluation – for example, through

insistence that such projects expand energy access for the poor and not only enrich business and

government elites; and that countries (and their international partners) simultaneously support

the build out of renewables and pursue a green transition as a medium-term or long-term goal.

Be Open to Engaging Advocates of an Abundance Energy Agenda. The lack of constructive

dialogue between pro-market, energy abundance advocates and supporters of a green transition

has not advanced the interests of the world's poorest communities. Religious and interfaith

communities, because they cut across national and political boundaries, can help to advance that

dialogue in practice. For them to engage with the Trump administration and its allies is not akin

to endorsing climate denial or abandoning green transitions as a goal. It is to acknowledge the

reality of continued reliance on fossil fuels in the developing world and to nevertheless insist on

social justice and sustainability as guiding values.

Draft Recommendations for G20 Governments

The following recommendations seek to encourage the United States and other supporters of an

abundance agenda within the G20 to engage in constructive dialogue with religious and interfaith

leaders who favor both social justice and sustainability.

Welcome Faith Communities as Trusted Partners. As more than three-quarters of the world's

population identifies with a religious community and the faith sector generally has credibility

within poor and marginalized communities with inadequate energy access, governments have an

opportunity to engage religious and interfaith communities as partners in planning and outreach,

not simply as a source of political support or moral legitimation. Bringing faith communities

deliberately into G20 consultations will help to advance discussions on how best to advance

development and poverty reduction, on the one hand, and a sustainable global energy future, on

the other.

Acknowledge Energy Access and Sustainability as Compatible Goals. Developing countries

should not have to decide between an abundance agenda that ignores climate change and a green

transition agenda that demands immediate fossil fuel phase-out. Faith communities with

adherents on both sides of the issues are well positioned to promote dialogue and policy about

how best to combine and balance energy access, social justice, and sustainability in practice.

Accelerate Climate Finance Transfers to the Global South. The international community is far

from meeting its $300 billion annual climate finance pledge to low- and middle income

countries. Growing those transfers – with a focus on short-term commitments, not long term

promises – will bring us closer to a sustainable future and obviate the current reality on fossil

fuels as a key part of the energy mix in the Global South. The faith sector is a powerful advocacy

and implementation partner for G20 governments eager to move in this direction.