**G20 Interfaith Forum, October 16, 2020**

**Ecological challenges: rainforest protection and purposeful action to protect the environment (PD10)**

**Moderator**: **Prof. Lara Hanna-Wakim,** Vice-Director of the Higher Center for Research, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, Lebanon

**Speakers:**

* **Dr. Iyad Abumoghli,** Director of the Faith for Earth Initiative and Principial Policy Advisor at United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
* **Prof. Pablo Canziani,** Professor of Environmental Science at the National Technological University, Regional College Buenos Aires, Argentina, and member of the Commission “Justice and Peace” of the Catholic Church in Argentina
* **Rt. Rev. Yoshinobu Miyake,** Chair of the Board at the International Shinto Studies Association
* **Ms. Marylita Poma,** Communications Officer at Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in Peru
* **Dr. Hayu Prabowo,** Director of Siaga Bumi; Chair of the Council of Ulama’s environment and natural resources body; representative of Religions for Peace
* **Mr. Elias Szczytnicki,** Secretary General and Regional Director of Religions for Peace, Latin American and the Caribbean
* **Sri Swami Svatmananda,** Director of Sacred Divine Wisdom; KAICIID Fellow

This two-hour panel focused on religious involvement in global initiatives to address challenges to the environment and particularly protecting the world’s major rainforests. It drew on the speakers’ experience, from various vantage points, with global initiatives to protect rainforests, notably the Faith for Earth Initiative and the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative. Both are grounded in the vital roles of rainforests as “lungs of the earth” and in the understanding that faith leaders and communities offer a powerful force to spread awareness of the critical importance of rainforest. The initiatives link the focus on rainforests to recognizing and supporting the role of indigenous communities in their care, and in measures for concrete action.

The panel highlighted the existence of important environmental governance mechanisms while lamenting their erosion in recent years. The significant scientific evidence supporting the rationales for the focus on rainforests and disturbing trends revealed by global monitoring was presented. Panelists linked rainforest degradation to natural disasters more broadly and to loss of biodiversity, with the potential for ecological collapse. Leadership, political will, multilateral cooperation, and better coordination are all needed.

The panel broadened understandings of spiritual and religious traditions from a common focus on Abrahamic traditions to other traditions, notably Shinto and Hinduism. An account of centuries old traditions in Japan highlighted active practices to protect forests building on ancient traditions. Leadership has responsibilities for protection of and harmonious living with nature were traced from ancient Hindu teachings.

The vital roles of young activists were highlighted in the specific recommendations presented by representatives of the KAICIID Interfaith Youth Forum in mid-October. The most common and resounding theme from the panel was the compelling need to see environmental challenges as ethical, moral, and spiritual imperatives and to engage religious communities actively in seeking practical solutions. We cannot afford to be complacent. Coalition building and creative initiatives are vital for the future.

**Moderator**: **Prof. Lara Hanna-Wakim** (Vice-Director of the Higher Center for Research, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, Lebanon), as moderator, introduced the panel, highlighting the vital importance of rainforests, including threats to indigenous peoples and contributing to the spread of infectious diseases. Religious leaders, including Pope Francis, have directed attention to the need for action.

**Dr. Iyad Abumoghli,** Director of the Faith for Earth Initiative and Principal Policy Advisor at United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

* UNEP is the lead UN agency for environmental matters. Unsustainable human actions degrade vast areas of the planet in ways that, if not addressed, could lead to widespread ecosystem collapse. The climate crisis is the greatest existential threat to humanity, and aggravates poverty, food insecurity, natural disaster resilience, and threats to peace. 100 companies are responsible for 71% of global emissions.
* The poor and other vulnerable groups contribute least to climate change and suffer most.
* Understanding the interconnected nature of the world is a critical step
* Environmental governance system today can regulate the systems. Reflect both successes and failures since the global environmental movement started in the early 1970s. Environmental negotiations faced major setbacks in 2019, linked to rising nationalism and weakening multilateralism. The UN Climate Action Summit was disappointing. We cannot afford to be complacent
* Transitioning to a more sustainable future requires new approaches to governance and innovative actions including ethical and behavioral change. Keep emphasizing need for coherence, coordination. Collective responses are needed including support for SDGs. How to rebuild environmental governance.
* Worth considering how ethics affects systems and behaviors, social attitudes. Return to basic ethics especially for many inspired largely by their faith. A new environmental ethic is required and it can link to spiritual themes. Moral duty to protect environment. Humans must learn to live in harmony with nature and one another. The young are learning to do so.
* Last week Faith for Nature conference. Sacred commitment statement, to be presented to the UN. First declaration incorporating spiritual values. Nature based solutions.
* Every sector in the world have a responsibility including religious institutions. Issue is how to scale up action and reduce harmful practices. Divest from harmful investments and support beneficial investments. Need new economic model that puts planet at the center, including stimulus packages responding to COVID.

**Prof. Pablo Canziani,** Professor of Environmental Science at the National Technological University, Regional College Buenos Aires, Argentina, and member of the Commission “Justice and Peace” of the Catholic Church in Argentina

* Over 30 years, human actions have affected the environment in many ways
* Success of Montreal Protocol
* Pope in Laudato Si’, not two crises, but one.

(technical problems, resumed later in panel)

**Rt. Rev. Yoshinobu Miyake,** Chair of the Board at the International Shinto Studies Association

* Shinto priest from Japan. Shinto perspective, relation to forest. Involved in the issue from beginning, many decades of experience.
* Much understanding and discourse is based on Abrahamic approaches and values but there are many others.
* Image of Japan of island country with long history, industrialized, dense population. But the relation of forest to land is 68%, thus among the world’s highest. The Japanese have continued to practice great care of the forests for many centuries. There is a mythology that a deity descending from heaven was welcomed by the people in the forests in the mountains.
* Shinto is a type of animism, the spiritual power within every being, with 8 million deities. The most sacred shrine sits in the deep forest. All temples are rebuilt every 20 years, with a 4000 year history. Same strategy as DNA. Linked to Emperor.
* Japanese people have a strong tradition of planting trees.
* All parts of creation have an equal spirituality. In Shinto there is no view that humans have special role in creation. Natural resources must be used sustainability. This helps to explain Japan’s long record of success.

**Ms. Marylita Poma,** Communications Officer at Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in Peru

* G20 Interfaith Fellows and Youth Forum that met last week. What can we do to protect the rainforest?
* Interfaith youth are united in commitment on environment and protecting rainforests more specifically. We are all interconnected, and share concerns, blessing of interreligious.
* Need to raise the voices of affected populations. Indigenous populations are the most affected by threats of the forests. They must speak for themselves and generate their own solutions.
* Need to develop environmental literacy. People of faith are called ethically and morally to protect the environment.
* We need to change economic situations. Promote welfare of society, not accumulation of wealth, which is not worthy as a goal for any person. Friendly and healthy economic system.
* On rainforest, align actions with needs. Use practical examples of how to live sustainability, ways that are religiously and ethically correct
* Actively engage religious and community leaders. Equip with tools.
* Empower all young activists for climate justice. We need to create spaces to allow youth latitude in shaping policy.

**Dr. Hayu Prabowo,** Director of Siaga Bumi; Chair of the Council of Ulama’s environment and natural resources body; representative of Religions for Peace (Indonesia)

* Faith-based mobilization for forest protection in Indonesia.
* Interfaith Rainforest Initiative was mobilized in 2013, six major religious traditions and indigenous peoples. Religions for Peace and Greenfaith. Interfaith Rainforest Initiative. Platform for all religious and faith traditions to work together with all sectors. Works globally to bring international voice to rainforest protection.
* Importance of rainforests, protect millions of people. Vital for addressing climate change. Source of emissions. Major source of protection.
* People see nature as resource to be exploited.
* Faith can play role through religious guidance.
* Indonesia action inspired Paris Agreement, 2018 declared interfaith rainforest protection, new initiative in 2020 January, so people understand importance of rainforest protection. Education network and moral leadership. Policy advocacy. Raising awareness among religious communities.
* Across continents and communities. For sustainable development. Use religious assets.

**Mr. Elias Szczytnicki,** Secretary General and Regional Director of Religions for Peace, Latin American and the Caribbean

* Happy to be together with activists. Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is revolutionary. It is a partnership with UN agencies on a concrete action. It is also a partnership between faith communities and indigenous communities. The concern is for care of creation and looking to a sustainable earth for future generations. Indigenous peoples have been guardians from ancient times, but they have been dispossessed of their lands and knowledge. IRR is an interreligious coalition, from all around the world.
* In RfP discussions, rainforest protection was a leading issue. The environment agreements signed by governments need to be brought to global attention.
* Need to develop productive activities, to generate income for indigenous people, and security needs protection both for indigenous people and their defenders.
* Need moratorium of five years, still more important during the pandemic. Need reforestation with native trees, arrest soil degradation.
* Global community needs to address forest product protection and tracking.
* Fires are a tragedy. Research for new productive activities is needed. Disseminate indigenous and scientific knowledge.
* Recommendations of Latin America working group.

**Sri Swami Svatmananda,** Director of Sacred Divine Wisdom; KAICIID Fellow

* 2020 will go down in history with many apocalyptic events: floods, earthquakes, fires, hurricanes. Many disaster related events. Willingly and knowingly continue to sow seeds of our destruction
* Not lack of will. It is the lack of clear, viable, sustainable solutions. Many efforts to resolve global problems are half-based. COVID-19 a systematic failure.
* Other advanced civilizations seem to have dealt better with disasters. 2200 years ago. Solutions center on bringing balance between man and earth. Health and wellbeing inextricably dependent on health of planet. When leaders fail to lead unethical manner, things disintegrate.
* Need to think outside box. Limiting human activity is not the solution. Can find wisdom in traditions.
* Need research funds to gather evidence from traditions. Scientific data. Literacy program tailored to global leaders. Literacy programs for different communities.

**Prof. Pablo Canziani,** Professor of Environmental Science at the National Technological University, Regional College Buenos Aires, Argentina, and member of the Commission “Justice and Peace” of the Catholic Church in Argentina

(presentation resumed)

* Crisis links all Rio conventions. Forest importance in biodiversity, biological cycles. Crucial in sustaining huge river basins. Politics and economics have looked the other way. Deforestation is advancing rapidly. Fires show worsening trends
* Forests have shaped planet.
* Whole more important than sum of parts but parts are critical to whole (Pope Francis?)
* More focus on solving problems than publishing scientific papers.

**Lara:** linkages with science are crucial.

**Fatima Abu Srir, KAICIID fellow.** Presents KAICIID fellows’ discussions and recommendations:

Promote gatherings to highlight spiritual values, teachers, specific recommendations disseminated thorugh educational channels

Share with media, all platforms

Attention towards younger generations to develop knowledge

Fund research linking theology and ecology.

**Discussion:**

*How can G20 support efforts by UNEP?*

**Iyad**. Importance of working and speaking together, moral and spiritual responsibility**.** Our sacred commitment by faith leaders, Faith for Earth Coalition. Linkages science and theology. Part of pillars of Faith for Earth coalitions. Coalitions scientists and faith leaders. Focus on cultural diversity, involve everyone. Every individual. Need to link beliefs and practices to environmental protection. Encourage inter and intra religious cooperation. How we are connected to common goal. Can form a fund to build these relationships, empower faith community to be leaders at global and local level.

*How successful have faith science dialogues been?*

**Professor Pablo**: Can work this at very different levels, parish. Interfaith events around Latin America. Laudato Si’, Patriarch Bartholomew, Religions for Peace.

*Climate and global climate changes are facts, with clear impact. Forest health important. Destruction is now caused by climate change. How to keep the forest health?*

**Professor Pablo**. Forest weakened so far it accentuates threats.

*Which text is Swami referring to?*

**Swami:** Charikis Hita?

*How can youth get involved?*

**Ms. Marylita Poma**: Join existing groups. Religions for Peace, KAICIID. Commit with local religious leaders. Education to understand problem and engage in policy-making activities, including voting.

*Question on debates between faith and reason. Link Shinto and Abrahamic traditiosn*

**Description:** *Environmental degradation, corrupt practices, encroachment on indigenous lands and rainforests, and other human rights violations present grave challenges around the globe. Most faith and indigenous communities embrace an ethical and spiritual responsibility to protect the environment rainforests. Their advocacy and promotion of sustainable management should be heard and heeded. Faith and indigenous communities drive urgent actions in many places that promise to restore degraded forests and increase afforestation and reforestation. Their commitments point to sustainable solutions in line with international standards and local development priorities in the effected environments. The panel discussion will build on the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative launched in June 2017 at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo, Norway and on other faith-initiated efforts along similar lines.*

**Guiding questions:**

* How can religious actors involved in dialogue, negotiations, and civil activism show a constructive path forward to protect our environment?
* How can faith leaders and policy makers better collaborate to protect rainforests and address the common shortfalls of its sustainable management?
* What approaches can be taken to ensure that appropriate reforming subsidies and policies are invested to halt deforestation and/or support primary forest countries’ efforts to meet their\_environment sustainability goals?