



THE
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“CREATION IS A GIFT, NOT A COMMODITY”

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**FAITH FOR NATURE:
MULTI-FAITH ACTION CONFERENCE**

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Respected moderator, respected representatives from the Icelandic government, from the UNEP, leaders of the Faith for Earth Coalition, co-panellists, dear friends:

What a joy to take part in this panel today! I am deeply grateful for this event to promote the work of Faith for Earth and its coalition. This initiative is timely, it is needed and it is welcomed.

We are living in a time of emergency. Scientists keep telling us that we are running out of time. They have identified the benchmarks, the point of no return, at which negative developments would not only become irreversible, but increase their acceleration with no restraint. These benchmarks are all around the corner.

Yet, the resolute response to these developments is slow. It is not because people do not understand what needs to be done. It is because the change ahead is demanding.

The American poet J.C. Williams expressed this daunting task 70 years ago:

“Man has survived hitherto because he was too ignorant to know how to realise his wishes. Now that he can realise them, he must either change them, or perish.”

For centuries, humankind has ensured its survival by holding fast, if not grabbing. Today, however, our survival will depend on the opposite: on how we might open our hands. How we might seek fulfilment in life in gifts and resources that *are not for sale*. Realizing that we are deeply interwoven into a fabric of life and of relationships. *Created creatures in a created world*. This is how faith speaks of this world, of nature and of us human beings.

Understanding our human nature anew. Recalibrating our wish-list. Redefining what matters in life. Learning to say enough. We have quite a journey ahead of us. Understandably, there is anxiety.

Faith has so much to offer to get that conversation going. Faith knows how to address existential questions and challenges. Faith knows to draw horizons of hope and have communities witnessing to that hope.

Accordingly, there is already much being done to address the ecological challenges we are facing. There is awareness. Mobilization. Action. There is hope.

Let me share four signs of hope I have witnessed lately:

- Last year I joined an Archbishop of a Lutheran church in Africa, who always concludes visits by planting trees. He does this with the help of children and youth. “Tomorrow they will give you shade,” he says. “Keep them, care for them. Because God wants us to be good stewards of creation.”

Friends, we do not need to “construct” a link between faith and ecology. The link is there. To me, the formative potential of faith communities conveying consistently the basic message of the world being a gift, not a commodity, cannot be overrated.

- Youth, however, is not just at the receiving end, learning about ecological justice. Youth is leading. This is why since 2011 we in the Lutheran World Federation have entrusted our representation at the COP (Conference of the Parties) meetings exclusively to youth. They know what they are talking about. They care. They hold us accountable.

I celebrate the move to include a Youth Council in the Faith for Earth Coalition. I tell you: with them, this is going to move.

- In Central America, a partnership with academia and faith-based actors of which we are part of focuses on building the capacity of community-based organizations, including FBO’s, to implement concrete advocacy actions. The affected local communities actively address climate impacts and hold their governments accountable.

Yes, indeed: the FBO’s local presence and their global structures are an asset, which on issues around climate justice is of pivotal importance.

- I visited a project in Indonesia. It offers public interfaith hearings about what faith teaches us about the Earth as a gift, about who human beings are, about relationships with the ecological system.

Interfaith cooperation adds value. I see the Faith for Earth Coalition as a needed extension of the many concrete experiences of cooperation at a local level, precisely to link up local and global action. The FBO’s rootedness on the ground needs now traction at the global policy discussion.

The concept paper for the Faith for Earth Coalition has a strong anchor in the principles of Agenda 2030 and its SDG’s, including its strong vision to “leave no one behind”.

This vision resounds strongly to us Christians. It calls to mind a teaching of Jesus, in which he explains how every single human being matters to the eyes of God (Matthew 18:12- 14). There was a shepherd, who noticed that of his 100 sheep one was lost in the field. He immediately left the 99 behind to go back to the field and look for the lost one. After much searching, he eventually found it and celebrated.

The message of the parable of the good shepherd is clear: God does not want anyone to be lost or left behind. As it relates to the SDGs and more particularly to the ecological challenges of our time: any paradigm that calls itself “development” must promote social and biological diversity and be based on inclusion. If only one bird is missing, one plant, one animal, if only one person is missing, or entire groups are missing, we are not complete. Creation is wounded. We are wounded.

Christians believe that God is love, liberation and life. As such, we claim the ethical freedom to love our co-creatures as ourselves, and advocate in the face of injustice. Our commitments to gender justice, inclusive, participatory societies, the common good in political and economic sectors, climate justice, adaptation and mitigation are strands of one *green*, or holistic ecology of justice and peace.

Here, many of our Christian traditions are doing their homework. Because much of our traditional theological discourse is centred around the human being, and often seen in isolation from the created world. We need to widen our perspective and work with an eco-centric framework. More preaching, teaching, and action on ecological issues is needed from our end as FBO's. Good steps have been taken. More shall follow.

Let me speak for a minute as a Christian leader in the Lutheran tradition. The tradition I belong to was born in an age of profound transformation in the sixteenth century. Lutherans advocated for the secular spheres of politics and the natural sciences, not because they believed these are conflicting spheres to be firewalled from the religious one. No, the aim was to liberate truth from abuses of power, and thus to safeguard critical dialogue between the church, state, and the emerging natural sciences.

Today we continue to affirm this constructive dialogue between the sciences: natural, social, political, and theological. The task of discerning morally sound political, economic, and technological pathways to sustain life within planetary limits, requires that we learn to see theology and the natural sciences, faith, and reason, as belonging to one ecology of human Wisdom.

The Faith For Earth Coalition supports the possibility of such an exchange. I strongly endorse this approach.

Speaking on behalf of The Lutheran World Federation let me state that we come to this table eager to learn and to grow, and willing to share and to offer. We look forward to discuss how we can learn with others, which resources we may share, and what action we may be able to offer – jointly, wherever possible.

Creation is a gift, not a commodity. Creation is not for sale. Re-calibrating our wish list. Defining what makes life to be full. Faith has something to offer. There is a vast field in front of us, inviting us to join hands as we seek to stem the tide of loss of biodiversity, climate change and ecological degradation.

Once more, congratulations for this conference and for the Faith for Earth Coalition. It is timely, needed and welcomed.
