

Celebration of Faiths and the Environment, Windsor, November 2-4

Transcript of the speech delivered by United Nations Secretary-General, His Excellence Mr Ban Ki-moon Windsor Castle, November 3

Thank you very much, Your Royal Highness Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh, honourable religious leaders of major faiths, excellencies, distinguished guests, and ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for your warm welcome. It is a great privilege and honour for me to address such a distinguished group of religious leaders in this magnificent historical and very impressive setting Windsor Castle. Just standing here together with so many wise religious leaders in this historical setting, I hope I will be inspired, and everybody will be inspired by your wisdom.

I'm grateful that Prince Philip has brought us together to contemplate our commitment to this Earth, our one and only one, our only home. We are all familiar with Prince Philip's longstanding efforts on our natural environment. He has served the Worldwide Fund for Nature as a patron and president emeritus for many years. He has helped to raise awareness among people and governments of the immense value of our environmental resources. For too long we have taken these resources for granted and we are still a long way from acknowledging their true value. This forum can help in some way help to redress the balance.

Distinguished religious leaders, Mr Martin Palmer, Secretary General of ARC, Mr Olav Kjørven UNDP, I thank you very much for organising this very meaningful, very important gathering. I congratulate distinguished leaders of world faiths who have been recognised by this citation for their long standing commitment to work together with the United Nations to save our home, this only one home, this our planet Earth.

You speak to the heart of humanity's deepest needs, our concerns and hopes for the world, you remind us of what unites us as a human family. Together we must unite to face a momentous global challenge – minimising dangerous climate change and making peace with the planet.

We have only one planet, but seeing what we have been doing, mostly in the developed countries, it seems that we have not one planet – we may have to have nine more planets if you continue to emit greenhouse gas emissions and CO₂ like you have been doing.

I am very grateful for your strong commitment to preserve our environment to preserve our home, only home. We have only one common home. I have long believed that when government, civil society and, particularly, religious communities work towards a common goal, transformational change can take place. Faiths and religions are a central part of that equation. Indeed the world's faith communities occupy a unique position in discussions on the fate of our planet and accelerating impacts of climate change.

As a secular organisation the United Nations does not have any common language or common religion, but like all the major faiths we do work on behalf of the disadvantaged and the vulnerable people. We share the same ethical standards and belief in the inherent dignity of all individuals and all human beings.

This is why we work in partnership with governments, civil societies, business communities, NGOs and religious communities. That is why we support the Alliance of Civilisations, which is

fighting extremism and working to improve understanding and cooperation among religions and peoples. That is why we work with organisations like the Alliance of Religions and Conservation which is co-hosting this event, together with the UNDP.

We are united by the belief that what unite us as human beings is stronger than what divides us. We believe that through discussions, cooperation and common efforts we can build a more prosperous, more peaceful world – the peace that comes from knowing where our next meal, where our next bread comes; knowing your families are safe from violence and disease; knowing that your children can go to school without any fear of danger. The peace that comes from preserving the riches of this planet for coming generations.

That is why we are here today. Your conference comes together under the banner of Many Heavens, but One Earth. We are all part of a larger web of life. Together let us work to protect and respect our planet, our only home. Let us have peace with our planet.

Many of you have experienced firsthand the impact of climate change which we face. You know that climate change affects us all but unfortunately not evenly, not equally. Look, for example, at all typhoons that have been battering South East Asia recently. They have cost many lives, tens of thousand people have lost homes and means of making a living. These events remind us again that those most likely to suffer first and foremost from the effects of climate change are the poor people.

The poor are also the least responsible for the emissions currently in our atmosphere. Isn't it unfair, an irony, that those poor countries who have least contributed to this current global warming phenomenon are being hit hardest and most? Because they do not have any capacity while [the] industrialised countries most responsible have the capacity to finance technologies.

Therefore protecting the poor and respecting our planet and the resources it provides is an ethical and scientific imperative. It is consistent with the teachings of many religions; increasingly it is also a matter of survival.

Next month the world leaders will gather in Copenhagen to agree on a global deal which will be comprehensive, equitable, balanced and binding. For the future of this planet Earth, for the future of this humanity, we must reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We must assist the poorest, the most vulnerable, to adapt to [the] climate change impact already locked in the atmosphere.

It is a pivotal moment for our world. Copenhagen provides a unique opportunity. If we tackle climate change properly we can advance many other of our goals as well. Green growth can make inroads against global poverty. We can lay a foundation for peace and security for generations to come. We can define a more sustainable relationship with our planet.

It is an inter-generational issue and it is a moral issue. That is why the voices and deeds and the teachings of you, the world's faith groups, are so vitally important. In the coming weeks I urge each and every one of you, distinguished religious leaders, to do all you can in your power, in your teaching, through your wisdom, to your followers.

We must prevent further damage to our common home. We need a global climate deal that is again comprehensive and binding, equitable and balanced, and most important, ambitious. Particularly developed countries must come up with ambitious written targets as science tells us.

[We must have] a deal that involves all countries working together towards a long term goal

to limit global temperature rise within two degrees centigrade. That may not be enough as many small islands [and] developing countries argue – they insist – that this global temperature rise should be contained within 1.5 degrees, because if we do not properly address this issue there exists potential threat, their very existence will be threatened.

I have called on the industrialised countries to take the first steps. Equity and historical responsibility requires no less. It is not a game of who waits for whom. Industrial countries should take their first step, lead this campaign, but all the countries must do more, and everyone, each and every country, and each and every household, families and each and every one of you has a role to play.

Political leaders must understand that the public expects action – action now. Faith communities can help communicate this message. We need to reduce our impact on this planet. We need to live in the most sustainable manner. We must leave this planet Earth to our succeeding generations in a more hospitable and more environmentally sustainable way. This is your moral and political responsibility. Humans caused the climate change.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, the world's faith communities are among the oldest and most enduring of institutions. We are here today to listen, to share and to celebrate your long term plans to tackle climate change. The word celebrate is important to highlight. Through your commitments, we see how the world's faith groups and religious communities are responding to the need for urgent climate action.

Three things strike me as I look around this room. First, the scale of your reach as stakeholders in climate change. You are the leaders who can have the longest reach, the widest, and the deepest reach. Together the major faith groups have established, run or contributed to over half of all schools worldwide.

You are the third largest category of investors in the world. You produce more weekly magazines and newspapers than all the secular press in the European Union. Your potential impact is enormous.

You can establish green religious buildings, invest ethically in sustainable products, purchase only environmentally friendly goods. You can set an example for the lifestyles of billions of people. Your actions can encourage political leaders to act more boldly in protecting our planet Earth.

Second, you are among the most powerful educators in the world. Your youth organisations reach hundreds of millions of young people around the world. Nearly all your long term plans include training young people on how to protect their planet.

Third, this celebration at Windsor Castle reflects the creative talents you bring to bear on this issue. You can, and do, inspire people to change. As we take the final steps on our journey to Copenhagen in December, that inspiration is critical.

I ask each of your faith and religious to pray for a fair, balanced, and effective way forward. Your practical commitments can encourage political leaders to act more courageously in protecting people and the planet.

Why do I mention political leaders? [Political] leadership is important at this time. We have the technology, we have the science. Science has made it quite clear – plainly clear – that this

climate change is happening, and accelerating much much faster than one realises. We have know-how, we have resources, but only largely lacking is political will.

You can inspire, you can provoke, you can challenge your political leaders, through your wisdom, through your power, through your followers. Together let us walk a more sustainable path, one that respects our planet, and provides a safer, healthier, more equitable future for all of us. Thank you very much for your commitment and your leadership.