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Jane Little: 15 million Korans published each year to be printed on environmentally friendly paper, 26, 000 Daoist temples in China to become solar powered, 8.5 million trees to be planted in Tanzania. These are some of the commitments made by religious leaders at a big meeting in Windsor Castle this week. It was co hosted by the UN and the UK based Alliance of Religions and Conservation, and the three day event which ended on Wednesday, was billed as a historic celebration of what faith communities can do to combat climate change. I went along...

It's not every day that you see an army of black, white, red and orange robes processing up the cobbled hill to Windsor Castle. But these religious men, and some women, are on their way to lunch with Prince Philip and the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, both of whom have thrown their weight behind religious plans to tackle climate change.

[Clip of Mr Ban Ki-moon's speech]

JL: That's why the UN is helping to fund an array of plans developed within nine world religions, from Baha'ism to Sikhism. The organizers here at Windsor like to point out that the religions here between them claim more than 85% of the world's population. That's convinced long term secular prophets of the environmental movement that they are vital allies. Patrick Holden is the director of the Soil Association...

Patrick Holden: I thought it was an historic event this afternoon when all the faith communities made those pledges. I think the power of four billion people should not be underestimated.

JL: The meeting marked a significant evolution in the relationship between many religious traditions and environmentalism. Martin Palmer is the head of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, and the conference organiser.

Martin Palmer: I think the real problem for Christianity and to some extent Judaism and Islam as well was fear of paganism. They saw respect for nature as being tantamount to worship of nature, and all sorts of deep buried theological traps kind of went bing bing bing when the environmental movement came into being.

JL: But the presence here at Windsor of many evangelicals, including a choir from the Baltimore New Psalmist Baptist Church, reflects a significant conversion.

[Singing]

JL: Perhaps the most ambitious initiative announced at the conference, was the Muslim Seven Year Action Plan. Sheikh Ali Gomaa, the influential Grand Mufti of Egypt, spoke of protecting the earth as a religious duty. The Plan calls for the construction of so called green Mosques, and even cities, as well as a television channel for Islam and the

Environment. Sheikh Gomaa also announced the greening of pilgrimage cities including Medina in Saudi Arabia.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa: First they will increase the green area, second they will work really hard to create a natural balance for the carbon. Third, replace everything that's been wasted...

JL: Meanwhile Jews from America and Israel pledged to cut meat consumption among their communities in half by 2015. The Church of England will cut its carbon emissions 42% by then, and Shintos in Japan and Daoists in China will convert thousands of temples to green energy.

[Music]

JL: That's why this was billed as a celebration. Religious leaders were presented with certificates for their promised efforts, followed by songs, dance and recitals in the Castle's Waterloo Chamber. The stern portraits of royals and popes looking on. Some might say it's too early to celebrate such ambitious agendas. But, says Martin Palmer, they are achievable, perhaps more so than what political leaders are attempting at the UN's climate summit in Copenhagen next month.

MP: I've been asked a number of times; do you think the governments of the world will take this seriously? And my answer has been the same every time; I really don't care, because the religions are going to do this anyway. And if Copenhagen is a disaster, or a muddled, befuddled mess, we'll still be doing what we're going to do. If the nation states can't keep up with the religions, then the religions should just go on ahead, and hope that at some point the nation states will catch us up.

JL: But whilst they may represent billions of people, cooperation and coordination among religions is a challenge. Take the lunch in Windsor's grand St. George's Hall. It was vegan to cater for the varying dietary requirements. But still there were some problems, not least for the Jews who were given their own kosher food.

Michael Kagan: My name is Rev Dr. Michael Kagan from Jerusalem

JL: I noticed that they've catered for everybody's needs here. You have a specially packed meal.

MK: Indeed it seems so, unfortunately it's wrapped in nylon and plastic, which is not very kosher in my eyes, as far as eco-kosher, which is a new standard that we're trying to create, which is not just the content of your food, but where it came from, how it's packaged. So I'm rather upset that it's all packaged like this, but I understand, and believe it'll take time for people to become educated in that.

JL: Michael added rather plaintively that everyone else's rather tasty roasted pear salad and stuffed Portobello mushrooms with locally sourced seasonal veg would have suited

his own kosher needs. And then there were complaints about onions. A Hindu at my table said they, like garlic, interfered with concentration, and therefore his meditation practice, he ate his, but the Daoists from China at dinner didn't. They were a little reticent in explaining why, but Martin Palmer wasn't.

MP: There really is no polite way of putting this. In English culture, to belch and fart is social death. In Daoism, it's actual death, because you're expelling the breath which you could live with for many more years. So they do not eat onions, and they do not eat garlic, for fear of belching and farting.

JL: But there was red onion in the main course today.

MP: There was, but they put it to one side. I mean, there are limits Jane!

[Laughter]

JL: Martin Palmer there, on one consequence of our food consumption.

JL: Well, it is 30 days until the UN climate change summit in Copenhagen, and in the world of politics many diplomats and officials have been making less than celebratory noises. Optimism that the meeting of world leaders will result in a legally binding treaty is draining away daily. So is there anything to be hopeful about? And will these religious initiatives announced with much fanfare at Windsor not merely prove to be an inconsequential drop in the ocean, if the politicians don't come through? I'm joined now by Olav Kjørven, Assistant Secretary General and Director of the UN Development Programmes, by Paula Clifford of Christian Aid, who's written a book on the Church and global warming, and by Tony Juniper, long time environmental campaigner.

JL: Tony Juniper, were you as impressed as Patrick Holden there, who said it was historic?

Tony Juniper: Very much so. I thought it was a hugely inspiring gathering with some really concrete ideas and proposals being put forward by the faith leaders in terms of how they're going to respond to the climate change and other environmental challenges, and I think this is so significant given where we've reached now with the environmental agenda... If you look back over the last 30 years and the good things we've done in terms of phasing out ozone depleting chemicals and combating acid rain, you can see that a lot of what we did was through the use of technology and regulating different industrial sectors. But we've now reached a point where the simple weight of human demand and our increasingly consumerous culture has to be where we seek change, in terms of human behaviour. We're only going to do that if people's values change, and if they can reconnect in a spiritual sense with the world around them. And I think that's why faith communities coming together is so crucial in terms of how we move forward in tackling some of these big issues. I do think that the politicians going to Copenhagen and to meetings beyond will need a public mandate to be able to deal with this, because the

changes we need to make are not simple; they're not purely about technology, and so people need to buy into it. If the faiths can buy into it, I think we're on a big step forward.

JL: But Olav Kjørven, this is the first time the UN has really thrown its weight and money behind religious initiatives to this extent. Why bet on religious groups when their records on environmental action have been a little patchy to say the least?

OK: Well, you know, that depends on how far back in history you go. The religions have been around for a very long time, and they have in fact a fantastic history of taking care of creation, and a really deep respect for nature. Some of them might have in the last decades forgotten a little bit about this, but the significance of Windsor is that it's coming back in full force, and when you have religions that together represent to a greater or lesser extent, many billions of people on this planet, making these kind of commitments, it is truly significant, and it should matter when politicians again will try to make a deal in Copenhagen, and continue the efforts to strike a political deal.

JL: Paula Clifford, you've been critical of the churches on climate action. Do you think the Windsor commitments reflect a real shift?

PC: I'm not sure that I do to be honest. Obviously the commitments they're making are very commendable, and the lifestyle changes they're advocating are very appealing, but, what I find very troubling is the lack of any sense of urgency, the lack of any explicit desire to expose the social injustice that's resulting from climate change and indeed that has brought some of the problems about in the first place.

JL: The Church of England put together a Seven Year Plan, what more would you have liked to have seen from it for instance?

PC: I'd have liked to have seen them commit to really engaging with the developing countries, who are after all part of the Anglican communion. If we pretend that we believe in the world wide body of Christ, then we need to address the suffering of the major part of that body.

JL: But they have committed to more fair trade for instance, as well as carbon cuts.

PC: I'm not sure that fair trade is going to solve the problem of global warming. Ban Ki-moon has talked about the lack of political will and what I'd really like to see is the churches and the faith leaders putting their formidable power behind lobbying, behind advocacy, to ensure that the political will is there to bring about effective change.

JL: Tony Juniper, what do you make of that, that Paula says there has been a real lack of urgency?

TJ: Well, I think on the last point [about] the faith communities turning up at international summits and doing the lobbying, yes, they possibly could make a small difference there, but bear in mind that there are a lot of people doing that already, but it

isn't... changing the underlying politics. The underlying politics is about the weight of popular interests in different countries, and the fact that most people still don't wish to make the quite big changes that are needed in order to bring down carbon emissions by 40% in the next ten years, and then by 80% by about 2050. This is a huge job, and the public still are not yet engaged to the point where politicians are feeling real pressure. And so I think the faith communities, rather than lobbying the politicians, I think the thing that they can do is inspire their followers to see the need to be taking urgent steps of the scale that is now required by the science. And I think if we can get people engaged with this agenda, in the sense of the faith communities, and the spiritual connections with the earth, I think we can make a much bigger difference than we can simply by urging the politicians to do more, which everybody's doing already. And unfortunately it isn't working.

JL: Did any of the commitments made at Windsor particularly impress you Olav Kjørven?

OK: Oh yes, there were so many commitments that I think are extremely important, and I have to disagree here with what was said [by Paula Clifford], because I think the urgency is well understood by the faiths. In fact, the faiths are believing the science, and they are acting on it. I wish there was more of that sense of urgency in the political negotiations. And faiths have acted when it comes to social justice, for a very long time. But what has been missing has been precisely the concrete commitments coming forth... when dealing with the tough issue of how to reduce emissions, how to safeguard the future, to avoid a climate catastrophe. And the fact that the faiths are coming out and really communicating concrete commitments before hammering politicians on the head in terms of what they have to do, I think is extremely important as well. I'm very impressed with the petition by the Lutherans in Tanzania to plant 8.5 million trees around Mount Kilimanjaro. I'm deeply impressed with the Muslim commitments, and as well now, for several faiths to establish a network of pilgrimage cities, with the aim of turning the, if you wish, the pilgrimage business, for want of a better term, green; establishing common standards across the different faiths when it comes to pilgrimages. I'm deeply impressed.

JL: Olav mentioned there the science, but Paula Clifford, the debate, the language, does seem to have shifted now to one more of morality, of values. Is that not a good thing? Are you pleased with that at least?

PC: I hope it is. I spent a lot of time talking to faith based groups at every level, from bishops down to parish level. There's always a considerable proportion of the audience who will say 'no, I don't believe this is happening'. If we're getting away from that then great, because what the faiths can really offer is their theology alongside what I still believe to be their power of advocacy. At the heart of the Christian religion, our understanding of God is of a God of justice, and so that impels us to make a just response both to creation, but crucially, to our fellow human beings. Now if this is the way the debate is going then I welcome that.

JL: Tony Juniper, you're going to Copenhagen. The indications point to a failure to agree on a legally binding treaty. Won't this Windsor conference have essentially been pointless if world leaders can't come through on the big stuff?

TJ: No. I don't think we can say that the Windsor conference is pointless if the Copenhagen summit doesn't deliver. This is a long process, and Copenhagen is but one meeting in already seventeen summits that have taken place since the framework treaty on climate change was agreed back in 1992, and there will be many more. Even if the world doesn't agree on a legally binding treaty that reflects the science in Copenhagen this December, they will have to come back next year, and they will have to agree it in 2010. And so, this is not going to go away. Even if the Copenhagen summit doesn't do all that it needs to do, and a lot of us will be pressing of course to get it to do as much as possible because the urgency now cannot be overstated in terms of how much we have to reduce emissions, by how quickly, in order to avoid going above critical thresholds of global warming. And so this now is something that the world needs to unite around. And if the world can't unite enough next month, it's going to have to come back in 2010 and do it then.

JL: Uniting Olav Kjørven, we're talking about uniting, but it really rests with the US doesn't it? If it fails to agree on targets as it doesn't seem likely to happen this year, it all rides on the US, doesn't it?

OK: Well, of course the United States has a responsibility, there's no doubt about it. But it's unfortunately almost far more complicated than that. And... as the recent G20 meeting of ministers of finance in Scotland has shown, this is a very difficult issue for politicians to come to grips with and to find the courage to find shared solutions. And by the way I do think that Windsor will prove to have been far more historic than this G20 meeting that also took place.

JL: Do you think Copenhagen is the final chance Paula Clifford?

PC: It's not the final chance, but we're getting very close to the final chance...

TJ: ...This is more than the United States; this is about the adaptation funds that will be available for poor countries, some of which will literally disappear under rising sea levels. And it's also about the provision of resources, to enable countries that need to combat poverty to be able to develop in a way where they can do it with very low emissions. And the world has to do more than make commitments about reduction targets. There's a much bigger challenge here about adaptation, development, poverty alleviation. And I do think that it is much more than simply technology. It's about how we think, how we cooperate as a species, and that in turn is about our fundamental beliefs, and I think that in turn is about how faiths are communicating these issues. I think we're hopefully at the beginning of something quite important.

JL: We'll have to leave it there. Thank you very much.