

PRINCE PHILIP TO HOST CELEBRATION OF FAITHS AND THE ENVIRONMENT RELIGION

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By Lorraine Connolly, Community Newswire

Leaders from the world's nine major faiths - Baha'ism, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism and Sikhism - will gather in Windsor on Monday to commit to long-term practical action to save the environment.

Attended by His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh and the Secretary-General of the UN, His Excellency Mr Ban Ki-moon, the Celebration of Faiths and the Environment event, from November 2 to 4, is billed as "the biggest civil society movement on climate change in history".

Prince Philip, founder of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), said in a letter to be published in the guidebook to commitments, which is being launched at the event: "The fact that the majority of the world's faiths ascribe the creation of the world to an all-powerful deity implies that the leaders and followers of each faith have a moral responsibility for the continued wellbeing of our planet, and particularly for its natural environment."

Dr Mahmoud Akef, of Earthmates UK, who organised the Muslim Seven Year Plan to Protect the Living Planet, said: "This Muslim long term plan will let Muslims engage in an active way with this pressing world problem.

"And for Muslims as individuals it will help them have a better life, if they solve this problem and at the same time create a harmonious attitude between people instead of always thinking of the differences between religions and races.

"This is about us, working together to help ourselves. We have to think about the environment. If we spoil this earth, there is no other place to live."

Martin Palmer, secretary general of the ARC, added: "It is about drawing on your wisdom of the past two to three thousand years and asking whether, within the next seven to eight years, we can begin to make a real difference. A difference that will last for the next two to three thousand years. No other group but you can do this."

The event will be used to announce a huge range of practical initiatives, from faith-based eco-labelling standards for Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism to the planting of 8.5 million trees in Tanzania; from sourcing sustainable fuel for India's Sikh gurdwaras - which feed 30 million people every day - to the greening of religious buildings and introducing eco-tourism policies for pilgrimages. It will be attended by nearly 200 faith and secular leaders and comes in the run up to December's Copenhagen Climate Change Summit.

It claims to be the first major, internationally co-ordinated, commitment by the religions to the environment and aims to shape the behaviour and attitudes of the faithful for generations to come. It is supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and major secular bodies, including the World Bank, Conservation International, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Fairtrade, WWF, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and the Soil Association. They will be at the celebration to commit to working with the faiths on the environment.

ARC is a secular body that helps the major religions of the world to develop their own environmental programmes, based on their own core teachings, beliefs and practices. UNDP, in partnership with ARC, launched its programme to work with the world's major faiths to tackle climate change and environmental issues in December 2007. The faiths were asked to consider how they could develop Long Term Commitments for a Living Planet which would shape the behaviour and outlook of the faithful for generations to come. They've come up with a huge number of initiatives, based on their own beliefs and practice, which will be rolled out in the shape of five, seven, eight and nine year plans. For more information go to www.arcworld.org. end