

Integrating faith/religion-based actors with G20s campaign of combating global threats: Climate change

A Policy brief to be offered to the Saudi T20 process, as a recommendation to the G20 in 2020 Global solution initiative

By

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1. Introduction

The problems with which the world is faced today are many and varied and have complicated aspects ranging from social, health, economic, environmental, and international and other spheres. Among these problems, *climate change is probably the biggest common challenge ever faced by humanity*. The scientific evidence is overwhelming as climate change will affect our whole way of life. Global temperatures are increasing. It causes food, water, and productive land shortages. It increases poverty. It triggers forced displacements, heightening the risk of violent conflict, extreme droughts, and floods, the collapse of ice sheets leading to sea-level rises which threaten coastal cities. Climate change is responsible for a steady rise in the death toll, especially among the world's poorest. Because a great bulk of the world's poorest and most vulnerable

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citizens live in disaster-prone countries and their number keeps increasing. Those groups are disproportionately affected by shocks and stresses. As temperatures rise, the likelihood and severity of climate-related disasters increase affecting lives and livelihoods, hampering the development efforts and reversing gains made in poverty reduction. Those who are suffering from climate catastrophes have something important to teach us about climate justice and about life's fragility and resilience.

Human actions are contributing to climate change and environmental degradation and it is our responsibility to act. Everywhere in the world, we are creating climate change derived by *unlimited growth and selfish consumerism* that lead to overuse of natural resource cutting down trees, overusing chemical and plastic products, urbanization, digging wells, poor waste management, depleting the Ozone layer. Wastage of rainwater; irresponsible energy consumption; unnecessary air travel and driving are also major contributors.

The unimaginable level of income inequality and massive inefficiencies like food waste which has become a serious public conversation and scholarly inquiry is an indication of *unlimited growth and selfish consumerism behavior*. This massive income gap can be considered as the risk that is most likely to cause serious damage to the global economy in the coming decade. Oxfam, the international organization that addresses issues of hunger, poverty and economic justice around the world, in its report said that the world's richest 85 people control the same amount of wealth as half the world's population, over 3.5 billion people. In other words, each of the wealthiest 85 has access to the same resources as do about 42 million people. These are incredible numbers. The dictatorships of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose, human beings are reduced to one of their needs alone, he says, and that is "consumption."

The rise of super-rich increasingly controls the political and economic processes that leave everyone else out is already a serious global problem. Many of the rules and laws are driven by big corporate interests; this will tilt the playing field in favor of the super-rich for a long time to come. I believe that this is caused by greed, which is both in its individual and structural

manifestations is a spiritual problem. While many religions tried to address greed, it is important to recognize that today's structural greed is almost unprecedented. A new robust and self-critical reflection that pertains to today's realities, by all religious authorities, that can be recommended, is therefore urgent. Greed as a spiritual problem requires spiritual interventions because they have significant wisdom to offer. Structural greed requires core-to-core engagement among several religions of the world.

What the current COVID-19 pandemic is teaching us about responding to a global threat, and how we could apply that learning to fight climate change? Climate change and COVID-19 are two very different challenges, but they do have some key things in common. Both are global - they do not respect national boundaries - and both require countries to work together to find solutions. During the recent COVID-19 crisis, we have seen how connected we all are, and, importantly, how it is possible to work together and mobilize resources when needed. We have the opportunity now to work together as a global community to rebuild our economy and our lives to be more sustainable and resilient. The lessons to be learned from the pandemic that could put us in a better position to tackle climate change in the future.

As people around the world work together to find a solution for COVID-19, the outside roles we play in Earth's natural system have become clear as never before. Billions of humans can now see how they are interconnected, working together to slow the spread of a lethal virus through their individual actions. Within this experience, if we are successful, lies the potential lesson we need not just to stop the worst projections for COVID-19, but to address other pressing global challenges, including climate change. We now have the opportunity to see how our collective actions have a wider impact. Along with that human impact on the disease, pollution has receded and our impact on nature has markedly diminished as well. For instance, in Venice, the canals cleared. In New York, carbon monoxide levels shrank to half their usual March levels. In China, the initial lockdown drove pollution levels down by 25%. Let us not forget: Individual actions that stop pollution yield collective impact - and quickly. However, when the factories come back to life airplanes start flying again and other transportation continues, emissions will inevitably pick back up. But within our hands, we will have the choice to learn from COVID-19 to live

better in our own ecosystems and within the greater natural system of Earth. We can start now by being mindful of the energy sources we depend upon and the resources we use.

The biggest challenges the world is facing that we have mentioned before, including the climate change crisis, can only be dealt with efficiently through international cooperation. We cannot only act individually; the benefits of our actions are multiplied if integrated into a global strategy. These problems may be approached from various directions and may be discussed in different planes. It will be agreed that one of the most important approaches that can be made to these problems is on the basis of religion. This is because human actions are contributing to climate change and environmental degradation, and it is our responsibility to act. On this effort, religions offer a critique of unlimited growth and selfish consumerism religion-related actors have a tremendous capacity for doing well, with most religious groups being known for their programs to care for the poor. Faith communities simply feel called by something greater than themselves to steward the earth. Therefore, after reviewing several findings and facts, in the next sections, I will try to forward my views and policy recommendations on how G20 integrates faith-based actors on the G20 effort to tackle climate change.

2. The need of understanding of the role of faith and faith-based actors in tackling climate change.

It is a known fact that global warming is one of the biggest threats facing humanity today. The very existence of life that religious people are called to protect is jeopardized by our continued dependency on fossil fuels for energy. Every major religion has the mandate to care for Creation. We were given natural resources to sustain us, but we were also given the responsibility to act as good stewards and preserve life for future generations.

We are considering religion/faith here to address global challenges because it requires not only innovations in policy and practice, but also a commitment to certain values that make the needed policy, economic and social changes sustainable. The complementary and unique roles of religion in addressing climate change stem primarily from religion's functions in society, ethical

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teachings, reach and influence, and the ability to inspire adherents to action. In particular, due to these factors, religious involvement helps support the critical ground of ethics concerning climate change that is often missing from science, economic, technology, and policy discussions. Indeed, faith including the religious institutions and beliefs that sustain faith offer a deep spring of values that provide a moral and ethical basis for long-term commitments and actions in support of addressing the challenges. Faith leaders drew global interest and acclamation for its connection of values to practical action for the protection and stewardship of our planet. The speeches faith leaders can easily capture the eyes of all at this world body look to him for moral leadership on this critical global challenge. Second, faith and faith communities can be part of the solution to each global challenge as well as provide a helpful perspective on the issues

Besides, religious adherence is on the rise, as is clearly seen in recent research on religious demographics that 84% of the world's people are affiliated with one faith or another. Research carried out on the role of faith found that not only are religious populations outgrowing non-religious populations, but the world is becoming more religiously diverse with economic consequences. These factors ensure that faith will remain an important factor that shapes values and markets in this generation and the next. Therefore, if 84% of the world believes in something greater than itself (a core principle of almost all religion), it stands to reason that the faith factor will influence and impact global systemic challenges this indicates vital for global collaboration. Research also shows that interfaith and intercultural understanding accompanies the rise of faith; the peaceful conditions necessary for inclusive growth are often strengthened.

Climate change is fundamentally a question of global justice. In religious traditions, the concern for justice tends to be central. Often it comes with an emphasis on the duty to hear the voice of the vulnerable and marginalized and to care for their needs. *The Abrahamic monotheisms* have tended to be *anthropocentric* in their approach to justice; *the Dharmic* traditions of Asia and many indigenous religions complement this with a more holistic vision of the connectedness of all things. On this issue, there is an inspiring saying by *Prophet Mohammed* (peace and blessing be upon him) "*If it is the last day of life and you have a small plant, make sure you plant it*". Together they can work with secular traditions to develop visions of planetary justice. Finally,

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this challenge can invoke anxiety as well as paralysis. There is a need to frame narratives of hope and possibilities. Religious traditions have ample experience of combining short-term perspectives with a long-term perspective and compelling narratives.

With regard to contemporary issues and climate change, several more specific and unique functions of religion come to mind. The continuity and long view of religion is one of its special contributions to the climate issue. Grim (2006, p. 1) expands upon this saying that while policy solutions are appropriately aimed at short term strategies, ‘long term ethical and spiritual perspectives are also required to address issues of human motivation to make needed changes. Religions bring long term perspectives not only through their ancient historical scriptures and oral narratives, but also in their contemplative, devotional, and ritual commitments to shaping abiding values in communal life. Johnstone (2004, p. 12) asserts that religion is unique in claiming a ‘higher’ source or basis for its morality and, on such basis, religions provide ethical guidance both to steer humans towards beneficial living and away from what is harmful to the individual or society.

Religions also provide guidance for how to regard the Earth and its creatures, with most religions explicitly enjoining responsibilities for ‘creation care’ or Earth stewardship (Tucker & Grim 2001a, Millais 2006). Relationships and responsibilities to humans, other beings, and the Earth are central to climate change debates, as at a practical level, actions in one part of the world can have disproportionate negative impacts on humans life, and the farthest-flung reaches of the Earth, the poles, tropical glaciers, and low-lying and small island states and on future generations of Earth’s inhabitants.

Statements have been issued on climate change’s ethical and religious dimensions from uniting force, stressing commonality rather than otherness and difference. This is evident in joint statements, expressions of solidarity, and strong widespread and numerous interfaith efforts related to climate change and its ethical dimensions. It fills functions that science, technology, economics, and policy cannot fulfill alone or as effectively. Religious groups are articulating

compelling moral and ethical reasons for tackling climate change. They can draw linkages with spiritual principles and modern challenges that illuminate human responsibilities and highlight what priorities are needed. Religions can motivate their members to action and using their numbers and influence to pressure world leaders into taking stronger stands and more ambitious measures (Yale, 2007)

The relationship with the Supreme Power is central in another way; it is the allegiance establishing personal responsibility and accountability for the other relationships. Most religions define an ideal relationship between the individual and supreme being that involves worship and love. As well, one of the most fundamental teachings common to every major religion is the ethic of reciprocity for human interactions see some of the examples below:

Religious Tolerance (2007) indicated Golden rules or ethic of reciprocity in the world religions/faith as follows:

Bahá'í Faith

- *Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself. And if thine eyes be turned towards justice, choose thou for thy neighbor that which thou choosest for thyself. Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh 6.71 and 6.64*
- *Wish not for others what you wish not for yourselves. Bahá'u'lláh Kitab-i-Aqdas 148.73*

Buddhism

- *...a state that is not pleasing or delightful to me, how could I inflict that upon another? Samyutta Nikaya v.353*
- *Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. Udana-Varga 5:18*

Christianity

- *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. Matthew 7:12, King James Version*
- *And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. Luke 6:31, King James Version*

Confucianism

- *Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you. Analects 15:23*

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- *Tse-Kung asked, 'Is there one word that can serve as a principle of conduct for life?' Confucius replied, 'It is the word 'Shu'—reciprocity. Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.'* *The doctrine of the Mean 13.3*
- *Try your best to treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself, and you will find that this is the shortest way to benevolence. Mencius VII.A.4*

Hinduism

- *This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you. Mahabharata 5:1517*

Humanism

- (5) *Humanists acknowledge human interdependence, the need for mutual respect and the kinship of all humanity.*
- (11) *Humanists affirm that individual and social problems can only be resolved by means of human reason, intelligent effort, critical thinking joined with compassion and a spirit of empathy for all living beings.*

Islam

- *None of you [truly] believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself. Number 13 of Imam Al-Nawawi's Forty Hadiths*

Judaism

- *...thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Leviticus 19:18*
- *What is hateful to you; do not to your fellow man. This is the law: all the rest is commentary. Talmud, Shabbat 31a*

Native American Spirituality

- *Respect for all life is the foundation. The Great Law of Peace*
- *All things are our relatives; what we do to everything, we do to ourselves. All is really One. Black Elk*
- *Do not wrong or hate your neighbor. For it is not he who you wrong, but yourself. Pima proverb*

Taoism

- *Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss. T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien*

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• *The sage has no interest of his own, but takes the interests of the people as his own. He is kind to the kind; he is also kind to the unkind: for Virtue is kind. He is faithful to the faithful; he is also faithful to the unfaithful: for Virtue is faithful. Tao Teh Ching, Chapter 49*

Zoroastrianism

- *That nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good for itself. Dadistan-i-dinik 94:5*
- *Whatever is disagreeable to yourself do not do unto others. Shayast na-Shayast 13:29*

2.1. Islamic perspective climate change solution

Here we will see the faith factor in combating global climate change. Faith/religion is for billions a powerful source and cornerstone for their sense of history and identity and community, which informs their overall way of life. The question is how Islam and other major faiths contribute to solutions to sustainability and mitigate climate change risks?

This piece aims to help get the discussion started by offering a look at Islam while recognizing that other religions can also play an important role in protecting our environment. We shall touch here briefly upon the values sought to be established by Islam in these spheres that we have mentioned. As we believe Guidance is needed with respect to all these and is supplied by Islam. We invite specialists in other faith traditions to join the discussion and forward recommendations. Our aim is aspires to see a new Islamic discourse that emphasizes and links faith, reason, and empathy to ensure an ecological insight. We will emphasize a rethinking educational system that neglected the beauty and majesty of nature and the cosmos. Therefore we will see how Islam as a worldview and a way of life can provide a fresh outlook to human-environmental in a globalized market economy

Global ecological trends show that we face the risk of tipping points and irreversible changes in the environment and in its capacity to support and sustain human life in all its dimensions. This state of imbalance and pollution is referred to as “*fassad*” in Islam which is attributed to human-

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made actions. Transforming society and the world's economy to a sustainable basis presents the most significant challenge to the 21st century.

The international campaign provides resources for congregations that are interested and includes faith statements from the Islamic perspective. As stewards of the earth, Muslims have a responsibility to respect the earth and to ensure a livelihood for future generations. There are multiple references in the Quran that condone tampering with the balance of nature ([Quran 55:8](#)) and causing mischief upon the earth ([Quran 28:77](#)). Disrupting the carbon balance by clearing forests faster than they can regenerate and our increasing reliance on fossil fuels as a primary energy source are two examples of how we are contributing to global warming. We also bear in mind the words of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) *the world is sweet and verdant, and verily Allah has made you stewards in it, and He sees how you acquit yourselves. (Hadīth related by Muslim from Abū Saʿīd Al-Khudrī)*

After reviewing the holy book Quran and the statements of Prophet Mohammed (peace and blessings be upon him), scholars argue that Islamic worldview represents a unique model for a transition to sustainable development by focusing on justice, de-growth and harmony between humans and nature. These scholars commented that Islam views the environmental challenges as an indicator of a moral and ethical crisis. Looking at the creation of human, Earth, and cosmos as signs of the Creator is a key in Islamic values. For instance, Al-Jayyousi (2012) elaborated that Islamic worldview defines a good life, living lightly on Earth and caring for both people and nature. Islamic discourse offers a sense of hope and optimism about the possibility of attaining harmony between human and nature. Earth will find a balance if humans rethink their lifestyles and mindsets as stated in the Quran:

Corruption has appeared in both land and sea Because of what people's own hands have brought So that they may taste something of what they have done, So that hopefully they will turn back Qur'an 30: 41

Al-Jayyousi calls to revive the holistic view of Islam which is founded on the notion of harmony and “natural state “and in respecting balance and proportion in the systems of the universe. These notions provide an ethical dimension and a mandate for all humans to respect nature and all forms of life. Hence, the overcoming environmental crisis and mitigating the impact of climate change, from an Islamic perspective is underpinned by defining the role of humans as trustees and stewards. This balance has been disturbed because of human choices which result in overconsumption, overexploitation, and overuse of resources.

Islamic values call to save integrity and to protect the diversity of all forms of life. Al-Jayyousi (2012) commented that the ecological crisis is linked to human ethics and values. Human actions are responsible for the global ecological crisis. “Reflecting on the main environmental problems, such as the destruction of natural habitats, loss of biodiversity, climate change, and erosion of soil, we see that all are triggered by human greed and ignorance. Human responsibility is to save and protect livelihood and ecosystem services to ensure a sustainable civilization learning from and reflecting on the fate of past civilizations”, said Al-Jayyousi. In supporting this argument he cited a verse from the Holy Book, Quran that says *every living thing is in a state of worship*. He commented that *when one hurts a bird or a plant, he/she is silencing a community of worshippers*. He warns saying “The extinction of species around us which are simply communities like us may extend to humankind unless we change our worldviews and development models”. To celebrate the symphony of life, all humans need to celebrate and protect biological and cultural diversity.

As stated above Islamic worldview calls to make a transition to a sustainable society and economy by adopting responsible development and respecting sustainability principles. This change requires a shift in norms and practices. Religion can become a powerful part of the solution if humans embody a holistic spiritual view towards mankind, earth, and cosmos.

The global network of diverse religious communities, which transcend both national and cultural boundaries, should be seen as both potential partners and the monitors of unethical practice at a local and regional level to tackle climate change. The hopes and aspirations of the role of religious cooperation can only be realized when the political, business and religious leaders and

communities come to acknowledge that our values are indeed our interests and that we need to work in partnership, if we are to provide a real and sustainable global prosperity that excludes no one. In doing so religious cooperation should be formed comprising the world's foremost experts to provide thought leadership that furthers the faith agenda within the G20 member worked to raise awareness about socio-cultural, cross-faith and religious engagement efforts for the purposes societal addressing climate change and sustainability. The membership should concern on the transformation of perspectives on faith in government and the private sector, specifically in nations experiencing dramatic change.

3. How to integrate the role of faith and faith-based actors with G20 in tackling global challenge like climate change?

After reviewing and understanding the role of religion on combating global threats such as climate change, we will see here how to integrate faith/religious-based actors with G20s international campaign against climate change. Meaningful international task force that comprises faith-based actors should be formed with clear mission and objectives.

3.1. Mission Statement

Strengthen G20, towards the shared objective of learned and sustained engagement with key partners in the faith-based world, to enhance respective and collective efforts to address international climate change and sustainability through adopting green activism, green innovation, and a green lifestyle.

3.2. Objectives

- Provide a knowledge exchange on the intersections of religion and religious actors with the G20 system's mandate on climate change and sustainability.
- Provide an internal resource pool on experiences of and lessons from partnerships with faith-based actors within the G20, as well as with other governmental counterparts
- Strengthen the integration of reliable faith based partnerships within the G20 systems' broader civil society outreach and provide informed policy guidance upon request.

3.3. **Activities:** To achieve the stated objective, international task force members shall put its effort to:

- Serve as a conveyor of multilateral experience and expertise around engagement with religious actors, within the G20 and with international intergovernmental counterparts, on the intersections of G20 mandated areas with issues of religion and faith, based on diverse G20 experiences, evidence, and analysis
- Host policy dialogues with faith-based partners and specialists on religion, development and humanitarian assistance
- Share tools, guidelines, information and other capacity building resources including strategies of engagement, around ongoing outreach and engagement between diverse G20 members and faith-based NGOs, religious leaders as well as diverse religious institutions
- Provide a quarterly forum for the G20 system members, to internally reflect on and critically analyze experiences, lessons, challenges and best practices gleaned through diverse initiatives with religion and faith-based actors at country, regional and global levels
- Support and advise G20 system members in developing and/or ensuring clarity and consistency in outreach to/with faith-based partners, to systematize and strategically inform the modalities of engagement around different around climate change resilience and adaptation endeavors
- Seek to catalyze regular G20 system-wide activities and initiatives with a view to engaging faith actors in a learned and strategic manner around shared global objectives.

3.4. G20 task force criteria of engagement with faith-based actors

The following criteria will be expected from the record of respective G20 own engagements and outreach with faith actors for any event, initiative, programming, and project-based deliverable, and are required to guide the outreach to faith actors across the G20 system around efforts taking place at the global level.

The following general criteria should be taken into account while forming the task force

1. Representation of all faiths: This references religious representation per number of global adherents; inclusive of all faith traditions, including diversity within the largest faith traditions and also inclusive of traditional and indigenous faiths.
2. Regional representation: All geographic regions of the world, in addition to a balance between those who work at global, regional, and national levels.
3. Gender representation: Genders present at the meetings and initiatives, as well as sensitivity to the specific gendered needs and expertise of the beneficiaries of the intended project.
4. All aspects of the thematic areas entailed and cross-cutting concerns covered: inclusiveness as regards the range of thematic expertise brought to the specific agenda.
5. Non-governmental religious actors should be legally registered in at least one Member State of the G20.
6. Preference can be given to organizations actively working to provide the services and/or advocacy and/or capacity under discussion (i.e. to complement the representation of religious or faith leaders).
7. No objection has been raised by relevant G20 country offices regarding a possible criminal case against the organization or individual where active.
8. Actors should have a track record of acting in conformity with G20 values and principles.

4. *Good opportunity for global cooperation*

That being said, faith/religion is an important driver for engaging in the campaign to combat the most significant problems our world is facing and the online environment is where this is playing out on a massive scale. Our world is undergoing massive transformations thanks to developments in internet and communication technologies. Technology is affecting our lives and reshaping our economic, social, cultural, and human environments. Many people now live their lives online, constantly negotiating a wired world. Faith, religion, and spirituality are becoming important mechanisms for assimilating these transformations in a positive way and for guiding online activities. What has become evident in the online world is the variety of ways people can use new media to enact their faith for real-world change. For some people, going online after a natural disaster or tragedy and donating to an NGO is an example of a crisis ritual and their way of caring and sharing. For others, using social media to raise awareness of human rights abuses is

their way of telling members of their social network that what they are seeing in the world needs to change. Therefore from this we can understand that, they are not the only forces at play that are trying to humanize our advancing society, but they are significant ones. Although many people may now consider themselves atheist or non-believers, most people on this planet look towards their faith as a compass to guide them through turbulent times.

Despite the enormous cultural and societal transformations associated with the technological developments, faith, and religious practices continue to be important components of our wired world. Although it may come as a surprise, when Time Warner did a study of websites on the early World Wide Web, he found there were three times as many sites related to religion and spirituality than there were about sex. Within the current DMOZ (Google's Open Directory Project of Websites), religion and spirituality is by far the largest category within the society section. Surprisingly, there are almost as many websites concerning religion and spirituality as the entire science category combined. Religious leaders are now can communicate far beyond their traditional channel to present values and concerns to a global audience. Meanwhile, the linguistic opportunity to cross boundaries is increasingly available for the most underrepresented minority language groups in the world. Further Social media has become a powerful tool for mobilizing positive faith-based values as a response to destructive events and activities. For instance, For example, social media has been one of the most effective tools for countering negative stereotypes and uniting popular opinion against extremism. Raising awareness, sharing news and information, providing counter-narratives, and uniting diverse groups of people based upon their concern for the well-being of others has enormous influence. When a grassroots movement goes viral due to a short video the impact can be overwhelming, long-lasting, and positive.

Finally, I conclude my recommendation by quoting the statement of *Prophet* Mohammed (peace and blessing be upon him) "***If it is the last day of life and you have a small plant, make sure you plant it***".

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