

TEMPLE OF UNDERSTANDING POSITION PAPER ON SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT/CLIMATE CHANGE

In 1975 the Temple of Understanding held its fifth Spiritual Summit hosting Phillip Deere, elder of the Muskogee-creek people and a central figure of the American Native American Movement. Speaking of the earth as our mother, he introduced a new ecological consciousness to the interfaith movement that some of our religions were lacking.

At the sixth Spiritual Summit in 1984 Phillip Deere, together with eco-theologian, Father Thomas Berry, deepened our understanding of the earth as a living being; just as trees and plants have consciousness, so has the earth. A new way of looking at the relationship between faith traditions and ecology was growing. "For Thomas Berry matter is not simply dead or inert, but is a numinous reality consisting of a physical and spiritual dimensions." Humans then, with self reflective consciousness, have a special responsibility to care for the earth. He saw a "New Story" developing that will revive our human values and our sense of the sacred.

Further understanding came at the Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders where environmental degradation was high on the agenda. Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper of the Turtle Clan, Onondaga Nation and Thomas Banyacya, Hopi Prophecy Spokesperson, delivered a moving plea for a new era of care for the earth.

Following 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, hopes were high that a new spirit of cooperation would turn the tide of ecological devastation. Sixteen years later, the Temple is working on a New Partnership of Faiths for the Environment. As we network with other NGOs to work together towards a remedy for the pending disaster of Climate Change we recognize the need for dedicated action from all sectors of society.

It is important to acknowledge that climate disasters are the product of a consumer society and that it is not a problem that networks alone, no matter how powerful, can solve. Political will, sustainable policy and collective awareness are indispensable components of adaptation and mitigation. This is an economic crisis but above all, it is a moral and ethical crisis and religions must speak out on behalf of the life of the planet. This is a role that religions and interfaith organizations like the Temple of Understanding are committed to address.

We recognize that climate change threatens the viability and productivity of the earth and its human, animal and plant inhabitants. Our collective responsibility for climate change weighs upon us and calls us forth to political action. Consumerism is insatiable overusing forests, ground water, land and forests. We are facing here the need for transformation. Religions, while not the whole solution, must reintroduce the idea of the sacred to the way we live our lives. Our indigenous brothers and sisters can teach us the way.

Financiers like Blankfein of Goldman Sachs, political leaders like Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the EU, will calculate the percentage of change and the dollars needed to reduce emissions. Scientists have recommended the reductions needed to live on a low carbon economy similar to that of the pre-industrial age. Individual nations are called upon to make treaty agreements to achieve the necessary

reduction of carbon emissions. And all of this is essential – but without the understanding and commitment of the consuming populace we will never achieve the reduction goals. Religions must reach out to constituents to inspire the needed transformation. In a globalized world it is impossible to identify the provenance of pollution and carbon waste. We cannot limit behavioral reform to one region, to the European Union or the United States for instance, because globalized consumption affects all corners of the world. Therefore the United Nations speaks with the global voice for adaptation and mitigation and religions have the possibility of communicating the urgency of the problem.

In collaboration with the United Nations UNDP, UNEP and FAO, and religious NGOs, the Temple of Understanding will attend the negotiations through Copenhagen and will design a program to take us into the future.

We commit ourselves to deepen our awareness of the interconnectedness of all things, that dangerous emissions of greenhouse gases destabilize earth's climate, acidify the oceans, and threaten the living systems on which all life depends. We acknowledge our collective responsibility for the suffering of the most marginalized among us, those in extreme poverty in coastal communities and on small islands, the woman and children and people of color disproportionately affected. We commit to educate ourselves and others to this attitudinal shift.

But attitudinal change is insufficient in this crisis:

We stand united with all Religious NGOs in their call to care for the earth. We pledge to teach and guide our constituents.

We commit to action: to changing our habits of consumption; to learning, teaching our families, our friends, to conserve the limited resources of our mother, planet Earth and to reduce our carbon footprint, continually working to develop practices of sustainable development.

We will call on governments to adopt binding, equitable and verifiable commitments at COP15 (Copenhagen) and future meetings, to reduce fossil fuel emissions to appropriately safe levels, with substantial penalties for excessive emissions.

We foresee that our attention will focus on the efforts of China, India and the United States to bring change. And we will concentrate on mitigation and adaptation efforts in the areas on water and forests.