

## **Introduction to the Canadian Interfaith Call to Action on Climate Justice**

A few words about both the purpose of this text and the drafting process may help to understand the thoughts that went into its conceptualization.

Following on the G8 2010 Interfaith Partnership and the Religious Leaders' Summit in Winnipeg, then the Interfaith Forum on Faith and Poverty in Ottawa in March 2011, leading participants proposed continued action on the 2010 Interfaith Statement topic of climate, especially in the light of the upcoming COP 17 meetings.

The purpose of what became the proposed text emerged initially from a conference call between about a dozen members of the interfaith partnership, convened by Peter Noteboom. On this phone call it was agreed that the text would emphasize the moral and ethical aspects of climate change, with a focus on the spiritual dimensions of its causes and the solutions. There was a desire to distinguish it from a more secular contribution to the climate change discussions by broadening the basis of the discussion and re-framing some of the issues involved. There was a particular interest in the issue of 'transformation' or 'conversion' as part of the solution to climate change. It was suggested that the proposed text would aim to be a platform for constructive dialogue on policy issues rather than a lobbying tool, per se. At the conclusion of the first phone call, a small drafting team was struck, composed of Peter Noteboom, Joy Kennedy, Victor Goldbloom, and Geoffrey Cameron.

Conceiving the first draft of the text began with a wide review of previous faith and interfaith statements on the environment and climate change, with particular attention to common concepts used to explore the moral and spiritual dimensions of climate change. These concepts include: shared moral responsibility, human solidarity, transforming cultures of consumerism, protecting the poor, restoring balance/equilibrium, seeking the common good over national interest, redefining human nature, cooperation versus competition, and overcoming greed and self-interest. An effort was made in the declaration to build a moral framework around the issue of climate change, rather than emphasize specific targets or more technical details.

The drafting team discussed the first draft of the text over a conference call in late August. There was agreement with the approach to the declaration, and a desire to bring out more of the practical implications of the approach. The issue of climate justice in particular was emphasized. Other questions considered included: what are the most relevant spiritual principles that can be brought to bear on climate change? What are examples of these principles in action? What implications do these principles have for individual action and government policy? What actions do governments need to be called upon to take? What must religious leadership do to inspire in their membership the will to make the necessary sacrifices?

During this phone call, the audiences for the text were also discussed. It was proposed that the document should speak to Canadian political leaders, our religious communities, and the broader public. While it could be difficult to measure the impact of the statement, it was suggested that if we view it as a contribution to public dialogue then we could look to media mentions and the adoption of similar language by those audiences we are targeting.

The second draft maintained the same approach as the first, but continued to refine and refocus the document on its practical implications. This version was circulated to all those present on the first conference call. Feedback on the second draft was minor, with the exception of the recommendations

for government policy measures. There appear to be two approaches to this issue and it is one that the group meeting on September 15 discussed:

1. The first approach (reflected in the text below) views the text as a contribution to a broader policy discourse on climate change with the aim of introducing new concepts and approaches to the discussion. This implies a certain amount of engagement with policy measures, but does not seek to advocate for specific ones.
2. The second approach views the text as a prelude and justification for a number of policy measures that have been adopted as lobbying positions by some social justice and environmental groups. While the strength of this approach is consistency between like-minded groups and clarity as to demands on government, it also has several weaknesses:
  - The first is that such policy measures are not adequately justified by the text and they may appear undefended by the analysis above.
  - The second is that adopting rigid policy positions risks undermining with some groups the broader message of the statement, which is that climate change is a collective problem and solutions need to draw from the spiritual resources of the world's religions. If the aim of the document is to serve as a platform for discussion, this aim may not be served by an overly prescriptive approach.
  - Finally, there is the question of the role of the interfaith partnership in this discussion and the value of our perspective. Many other groups will be making demands that are consistent with the conceptual framework of our analysis, but it may not be our position to insist on policies that at best remain partial solutions to the problem. There can be value in positioning ourselves outside of the "problem/solution" paradigm of environmental advocacy in order to advance broader understanding of the issues involved – issues that ultimately concern human relationships with the natural world.

As a result of the September 15 meeting of participants interested in continuing to work together in a collaborative interfaith effort in Canada, the draft text was approved for further review and vetting by participating religious communities and related faith-based organizations. Leaders of Religious Communities are invited to sign on and endorse the call. Directors of Faith-Based organizations are also invited to sign on and endorse the call. Both categories of signatories will be noted separately in the document.

During the two-week vetting process, additional edits, suggestions and comments are welcome to improve the effectiveness of the Call and to permit broad participation in endorsing the call. This vetting process will be managed by Peter Noteboom, serving as support staff for the Commission on Justice and Peace at The Canadian Council of Churches who is currently serving as a host for the ongoing collaborative effort. We are aiming for completion of the vetting process by October 7. Consequently, the document should be finalized and ready for use in communications efforts in both French and English by October 14.

*Prepared by Geoffrey Cameron and Peter Noteboom*