

## Joint Appeal by Religion and Science for the Environment

### "DECLARATION OF THE 'MISSION TO WASHINGTON'"

*Despite many philosophical differences, the 150 religious heads and scientists who gathered for the Mission to Washington in May of 1992 reached out to one another across historic antagonisms. Together they issued a declaration dedicating themselves to undertake bold action to cherish and protect the environment and affirmed a deep sense of common purpose.*

We are people of faith and of science who, for centuries, often have traveled different roads. In a time of environmental crisis, we find these roads converging. As this meeting symbolizes, our two ancient, sometimes antagonistic, traditions now reach out to one another in a common endeavor to preserve the home we share.

We humans are endowed with self-awareness, intelligence and compassion. At our best, we cherish and seek to protect all life and the treasures of the natural world. But we are now tampering with the climate. We are thinning the ozone layer and creating holes in it. We are poisoning the air, the land and the water. We are destroying the forests, grasslands and other ecosystems. We are causing the extinction of species at a pace not seen since the end of the age of the dinosaurs. As a result, many scientific projections suggest a legacy for our children and grandchildren of compromised immune systems, increased infectious disease and cancer

rates, destroyed plants and consequent disruption of the food chain, agriculture damaged from drought and ultraviolet light, accelerated destruction of forests and species and vastly increased numbers of environmental refugees. Many perils may be still undiscovered. The burdens, as usual, will fall most cruelly upon the shoulders of the poorest among us, especially upon children. But no one will be unaffected. At the same time, the human community grows by a quarter of a million people every day, mostly in the poorest nations and communities. That this crisis was brought about in part through inadvertence does not excuse us. Many nations work together. We must now join forces to that end.

Our own country is the leading polluter on Earth, generating more greenhouse gases, especially CO<sub>2</sub>, than any other country. Not a word alone but by binding action, our nation has an inescapable moral duty to lead the way to genuinely effective solutions. We signers of this declaration-leaders in religion and science-call upon our government to change national policy so that the United States will begin to ease, not continue to increase, the burdens on our biosphere and their effect upon the planet's people.

We believe that science and religion, working together, have an essential contribution to make toward any significant mitigation and resolution of the world environmental crisis. What good are the most fervent moral imperatives if we do not understand the dangers and how to avoid them? What good is all the data in the world without a steadfast moral compass? Many of the consequences of our present assault on the environment, even if halted today, will take decades and centuries to play themselves out. How will our children and grandchildren judge our stewardship of the Earth? What will they think of us? Do we not have a solemn obligation to leave them a better world and to ensure the integrity of nature itself? Insofar as our peril arises from a neglect of moral values, human pride, arrogance, inattention, greed, improvidence, and a penchant for the short-term over the long, religion has an essential role to play. Insofar as our peril arises from our ignorance of the intricate interconnectedness of nature, science has an essential role to play.

Differences of perspective remain among us. We do not have to agree on how the natural world was made to be willing to work together to preserve it. On that paramount objective we affirm a deep sense of common cause.

Commitment to environmental integrity and justice, across a broad spectrum and at the highest level of leadership, continues to grow in the United States religious community as an issue of utmost priority-significantly as a result of fruitful conversations with the scientific community. We believe that the dimensions of this crisis are still not sufficiently taken to heart by our leaders, institutions and industries. We accept our responsibility to help make known to the millions we serve and teach the nature and consequences of the environmental crisis, and what is required to overcome it. We believe that our current economic behavior and policies emphasize short-term individual material goals at the expense of the common good and of future generations. When we consider the long-term as well as the short-term costs, it seems clear that addressing this problem now rather than later makes economic as well as moral sense. We impoverish our own children and grandchildren by insisting that they deal with dangers that we could have averted at far less cost in resources and human suffering.

We reaffirm here, in the strongest possible terms, the indivisibility of social justice and the preservation of the environment. We also affirm and support the indigenous peoples in the protection and integrity of their cultures and lands. We believe the wealthy nations of the North, which have historically exploited the natural and human resources of the Southern nations, have a moral obligation to make available additional financial resources and appropriate technology to strengthen their capacity for their own development. We believe the poor and vulnerable workers in our own land should not be asked to bear disproportionate burdens. And we must end the dumping of toxic waste materials disproportionately in communities of low income and of people of color. We recognize that there is a vital connection between peacemaking and protecting our environment. Collectively, the nations of the world spend one trillion dollars a year on military programs. If even a modest portion of this money were spent on environmental programs and sustainable economic development, we could take a major step toward environmental security.

We commit ourselves to work together for a United States that will lead the world in the efficient use of fossil fuels, in devising and utilizing renewable sources of energy, in phasing out all significant ozone-depleting chemicals, in halting deforestation and slowing the decline in species diversity, in planting forests and restoring other habitats and in realizing worldwide social justice. We believe there is a need for concerted efforts to stabilize world population by humane, responsible and voluntary means consistent with our differing values. For these, and other reasons, we believe that special attention must be paid to education and to enhancing the roles and the status of women.

Despite the seriousness of this crisis, we are hopeful. We humans, in spite of our faults, can be intelligent, resourceful, compassionate, prudent and imaginative. We have access to great reservoirs of moral and spiritual courage. Deep within us stirs a commitment to the health, safety and future of our children. Understanding that the world does not belong to any one nation or generation, and sharing a spirit of utmost urgency, we dedicate ourselves to undertake bold action to cherish and protect the environment of our planetary home.

Washington, D.C. May 12, 1992