



LEAVES, A Newsletter of the INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM  
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Article Deadline next issue: December 10

Christine Muller, General Secretary  
Arthur Lyon Dahl Ph.D.

**From the Editor, Request for information for upcoming newsletters**

This newsletter is an opportunity for IEF members to share their experiences, activities, and initiatives that are taking place at the community level on environment, climate change, and sustainability. All members are welcome to contribute information about related activities, upcoming conferences, news from like-minded organizations, recommended websites, book reviews, etc. Please send information to [newsletter@ief.org](mailto:newsletter@ief.org)

Please share the Leaves newsletter and IEF membership information with family, friends, and associates and encourage interested persons to consider becoming a member of the IEF.

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**25th Annual Conference of the International Environment Forum  
Action on Climate Change: Multiple Paths to a Better Future**

In association with COP26  
United Nations Climate Change Conference  
Glasgow, Scotland, and online  
**1-5 November 2021**

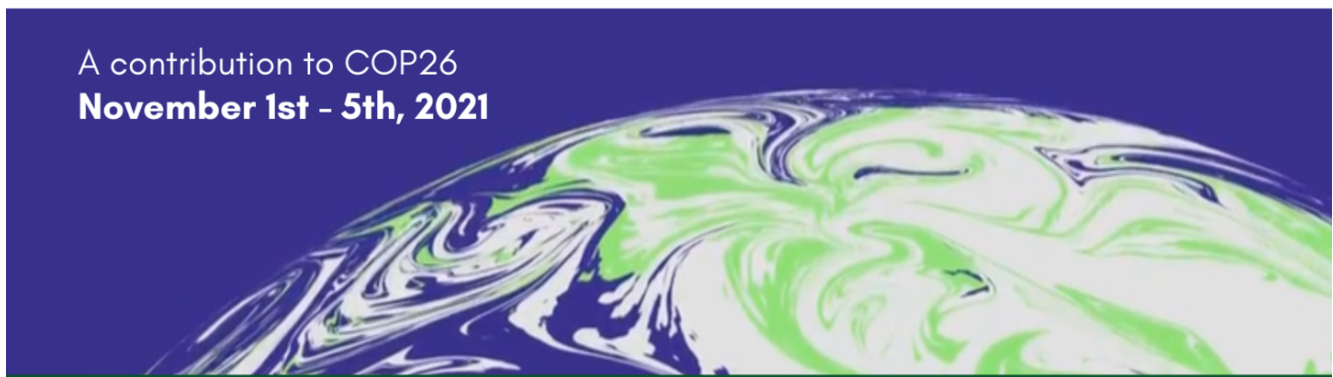
The [25th Annual Conference of the International Environment Forum](#) was held in association with the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP26 on 1-5 November 2021 and in partnership with the [Adora Foundation](#). It was co-sponsored by the [Bahá'í International Community \(BIC\)](#), [ebbf - Ethical Business Building the Future](#), the [Stimson Center](#), the [Global Governance Forum \(GGF\)](#), the [Coalition for the UN We Need \(C4-UN\)](#), the [Global Peace and Prosperity Forum](#), [Interfaith Scotland](#) and the [Glasgow Baha'is](#).

It included one hybrid event both online and in Glasgow, Scotland, and five events entirely online, reaching both participants at COP26 and those around the world interested in climate change, its impacts and possible responses.

The video recordings of the events are available on our COP26 playlist:  
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLnjZMm5SfeQjhja9g0KNqjwFgiFxFzCfZe>

You can also read a written report about each event on the IEF website: <https://iefworld.org/conf25>

The conference planning team consisted of IEF members Khela Baskett, Ineke Gijssberg, Ismael Velasco, Rafael Shayani, IEF President Arthur Dahl, IEF Secretary Christine Muller, and Anisha Prabhu. Ismael Velasco and the [Adora Foundation](#) created the conference events page and publicity materials, provided the Zoom platform, managed all the registrations, technically hosted all the events, and were supportive in many other ways! The IEF deeply appreciated the partnership of the Adora Foundation and all of Ismael's efforts!



Here is an overview of the program with direct links to the video recordings of each event:

### Health Equity and Climate Change

Monday 1 November

Video Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VigiAJLwupY>

*The relationship between climate change, health and equity is tightly linked and one cannot talk about climate change without mentioning the other two. In this panel we discussed how many of the factors that lead to climate change are often the same that impact health inequities.*

### Strengthening Global Climate Governance

Tuesday 2 November 2021, a hybrid event, both online and in Glasgow

Video Recording: <https://youtu.be/DJWsgW2DC1M>

*While the 2015 Paris Agreement set important targets for climate change mitigation and adaptation, commitments are voluntary, and implementation has fallen far short. Strengthened mechanisms of global climate governance are necessary to avoid or at least mitigate a climate catastrophe.*

### Biodiversity: Imagining a Positive Future for Nature and Culture

Thursday 4 November

Video Recording: [youtube.com/watch?v=9gpgMyYpbSU](https://youtube.com/watch?v=9gpgMyYpbSU)

*Climate change and the biodiversity crisis are intimately linked, and both must be addressed together. In protecting fragile environments from the poles to the tropics, we can learn much from both indigenous peoples who have long lived in harmony with their environment, and from nature itself and its requirements for resilience.*

### Engineering and Climate Change: Remaking the Future

Thursday, 4 November

Video Recording: <https://youtu.be/SXzKvNUKpxg>

*Technology is inseparable from climate change: it either accelerates it, or is indispensable to mitigating it. The difference lies in great measure in the choices engineers make. How do we ensure we make the right ones?*

### Strategies for Climate Resilient Communities

Friday 5 November 7:30-9:00 pm (starting 3:30pm EST, 20:30 CET)

Video Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ls0Dsfc69A>

*Communities worldwide will need to transform in a wide variety of ways in order to meet the demands of climate change. In this panel we explored strategies concerning disaster preparedness and transportation systems.*

## Other COP26 Associated Events



### Interfaith Scotland Events on Sunday 31st October

In the afternoon of 31 October, Interfaith Scotland invited people of all faiths to gather in George Square, Glasgow, reaching the limit of 500, as well as online, for a **COP26 Interfaith Prayer and Meditation Vigil** for the success of the climate conference, at the opening of Scottish Interfaith Week. Maureen Sier, chair of Interfaith Scotland, after remembering the spiritual values of indigenous peoples, emphasised the need to act with one soul, one voice, and one

message that we have only one planet. Pilgrims from afar were welcomed, and a young Ginko tree, of a very ancient species and a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, had been carried by pilgrims for planting in a Glasgow park. The Glasgow Multifaith Declaration for COP26 was read, and then prayers from nine religions were shared.

The video can be viewed here: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvkkXqdLYRRsF\\_fh6NkCw1Q](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvkkXqdLYRRsF_fh6NkCw1Q)

This was followed by the **Talanoa Dialogue Towards COP26** which was hosted by the International Interfaith Liaison Committee to the UNFCCC and was supported by Interfaith Scotland, held in a beautiful 19th century synagogue and online.

## Earth Reflections

On Wednesday evening 3 November, the last of a series of monthly online Earth Reflections organised by Glasgow Bahá'í Community was held with participants in Glasgow and from around the world. These events leading up to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow aimed to help individuals and communities to prepare for this momentous meeting and served as a reminder of the importance of our planet. It provided an opportunity to listen and to share reflections, hopes, poems, prayers from different traditions and tributes to the planet we call home. There was music, a Hindu prayer, poets from the Shetlands and Uganda, reflections about the beauty of nature, quotations from the Quran, a Bahá'í prayer in Hawaiian, reflections on the prayer and meditation vigil before COP26, and Sami chanting.

For a detailed report about the IEF conference and other events, go here: <https://iefworld.org/conf25>

## Members Corner

### International Environment Forum 25th General Assembly, 30 October 2021

The 25th General Assembly of the International Environment Forum was held over the Internet on the Zoom platform on 30 October 2021 with 19 members attending.

The IEF Governing Board elected for the coming year consists of Arthur Dahl (Switzerland), Christine Muller (USA), Halldor Thorgeirsson (Iceland), Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen (Netherlands), Wendi Momen (UK), Laurent Mesbah (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Victoria Thoresen (Norway).

For a full report of the General Assembly, go here: <https://iefworld.org/genass25>

### IEF Webinars

The next IEF webinar will take place on **Saturday December 18th**, 1pm EST/7pm CET on the topic **Environmental Education for Children Inspired by Spiritual Teachings** with Sabine Schlenkermann.

This will be a bi-lingual webinar (English and German).

To register, go here: [https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAofumspz4qG92nSL-S57IAZk36YE\\_X5B30](https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAofumspz4qG92nSL-S57IAZk36YE_X5B30)

## COP26: BIC delegation offers principles and proposals for climate action



Representatives of the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) at COP26. Left to right: Peter Aburi from Kenya, Daniel Parrell from the New York Office of the BIC, Maja Groff from the Netherlands, and Serik Tobolov from Kazakhstan. (Credit: Yvonne Word)



Bahá'í World News Service, November 12, 2021

<https://news.bahai.org/story/1548/>



GLASGOW, United Kingdom — Over the last two weeks, representatives of the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) have been participating in discussions at the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference, known as COP26, highlighting the need for rethinking the relationship between society and the natural world.

“Humanity is at a pivotal moment when it must recognize its essential oneness—that we all share the same atmosphere and that cooperation among all nations is needed in order to address the pressing, existential questions that we will face in the coming decades,” says Daniel Perell, a representative from the New York Office of the BIC at the conference.

Mr. Perell was joined in the BIC delegation to the conference by Serik Tokbolat from Kazakhstan, Peter Aburi from Kenya, and Maja Groff from the Netherlands.

In their contributions to discussions, the BIC representatives offered a number of concrete proposals. “There is a need for a mechanism to coordinate aspects of humanity’s relationship with the natural world,” said Mr. Perell.

“Such a mechanism could, for example, serve to mobilize financial resources around environmental goals, and oversee their distribution. It could support national governments in transitioning away from environmentally harmful policies to establishing more sustainable alternatives.”

Mr. Perell continued, explaining that while this is just one possible way of organizing efforts, the important thing is to ensure that consensus is followed through to implementation and that any approach or mechanism to address climate change is viewed holistically. He stated: “Ultimately, disparate environmental governing bodies and treaties, if brought together under one umbrella, would ensure greater coherence in governance systems that oversee climate change.”

The twelve-day conference concludes on Friday and has brought together more than 120 world leaders, as well as numerous civil society organizations, journalists and media outlets, businesses, and climate activists in Glasgow, Scotland, to examine global efforts addressing climate change.

In their contributions to discussions, the BIC representatives explored moral questions related to consumption and excessive materialism that are associated with the exploitation and degradation of the environment.

“Development is often measured in terms of expanding the ability to acquire material goods. Notions of what constitutes progress must be urgently re-examined before climate change leads to irreversible consequences,” said Dr. Tokbolat.

Mr. Aburi expanded further, stating: “Movement in this direction will require economic arrangements to be disciplined according to lofty ideals and the common good.”

Other themes highlighted by the BIC delegates at different forums included the role of international structures in addressing environmental challenges, which the BIC has explored in its [statement](#) “A Governance Befitting: Humanity and the Path Toward a Just Global Order.”

At a [discussion](#) held by the International Environment Forum, a Bahá'í-inspired organization, Ms. Groff explained how greater collaboration and the sharing of knowledge among countries can significantly contribute to climate action. “We have a suggestion for a global climate policy clearinghouse so that states can share experiences, learn from best practices, and really accelerate the implementation of climate policies,” she said.

The BIC representatives also noted the important role that individuals can play in addressing climate change.

“The pandemic has shown us the power of local action by individuals. We have seen a real galvanizing force toward the common good among families, friends, and neighbors,” said Mr. Perell at a [discussion](#) held by the World Wildlife Fund.

He added: “This is a source of hope from which we can draw lessons and apply them to discussions in these forums as we collectively confront the multiple challenges that humanity is facing.”

## Reflections on our IEF 25th Annual Conference

A systems perspective on accounting solutions to our present predicament

Arthur Lyon Dahl

The stimulating presentations from our IEF annual conference and other events I followed at COP26 have triggered some reflections on the root causes of disintegration in our world and some of the challenges of the urgent transition facing us. There is probably nothing unique in these ideas, but I have not had a chance to explore all the relevant literature, so take this only as a starting point for further discussion.

Since indicators are important in telling us where we are and suggesting where we want to go, I started by abstracting some basic accounting principles and relevant indicators. Capital is a measure of the standing stock of a resource that can either be static, like a mineral in the ground or a gold bar, or dynamic like a forest or investment in a factory, able to maintain itself, grow and provide beneficial services. Interest is extracting wealth from capital, either diminishing static capital (unsustainable) or harvesting part of the increase in wealth (sustainable). Debt is when we borrow capital with a promise to reimburse it at some future time, generally with interest. The assumption is that the direct investment of the capital, or some other source of income, will allow reimbursement. We usually think of all this in terms of financial wealth, but capital and its services or benefits can be of many kinds, contributing to the functioning and wellbeing of the biosphere and human society. Considering wealth or benefit only in narrow financial terms is a materialistic approach and the cause of many of our problems.

The fundamental fault in the present financial system is that it favours profit or interest in monetary units (dollars, etc.) over all other benefits. The stock market links capital value to return on investment as dividends or interest,

regardless of the purpose of the company. Profit is the basic role of the banking system and corporations, and is seen as an end in itself. Money is borrowed through loans with interest determined by risk, and invested in what are expected to be productive activities generating further wealth. There is no inherent link to any other measures of wellbeing or of services provided. With risks increasing and interest rates down, central banks have pumped great quantities of money into the system to prevent its collapse, inflating government debt while the stock market hits record highs. Since wealth generates wealth in this system, the rich get ever richer and nothing filters down to the middle classes, not to mention the poor. A giant debt bubble has built up between government debt, corporate debt and consumer debt, with no imaginable possibility of reimbursement, only postponement of a reckoning to some indefinite future as debts are rolled over with further borrowing.

Development aid, in terms of capital transfer to poor countries, is largely as loans, but this seldom goes into activities generating adequate financial returns in weak and perhaps corrupt economies, and increased risk means higher interest, which accumulates in a vicious circle of debt. Apart from the exploitation of a neocolonial economic system that removes more wealth than it creates, developing country governments must spend much of their available income on debt servicing, and are unable to invest in infrastructure or to meet basic human needs like health care and education. This even impacts development at the local level. One COP26 event I watched on small island developing states said that money was

available but projects aiming for a measurable economic return were lacking.

Moreover, donor criteria requiring financial return on investment or reimbursement of loans for projects will also extract wealth from the local economy and ignore all the other non-cash benefits that may be more important to a local community.

Looking at the climate change crisis, the main proposal is to put a price on carbon to create a motivation to economise on its release. This is subject to the same flaw as the financial system, thinking in terms of money. What is needed is a whole accounting system with carbon as the currency. The planet became suitable for animal life when plants removed enough carbon from the atmosphere and stored it in the ground to bring down the planetary temperature to be suitable for life. The global carbon budget has since been in balance until recently, with animals releasing CO<sub>2</sub> and plants absorbing it. Extraction of fossil fuels has upset this balance, raising the carbon concentration in the atmosphere to dangerous levels. A proper carbon accounting system would consider the biomass of the planet and stored organic carbon as the carbon capital stock. Plant-dominated ecosystems maintain that capital and provide ecosystem services as well. Excess carbon in the atmosphere is carbon debt, and all releases of carbon dioxide and methane increase that carbon debt. We are living beyond our means in terms of carbon accounting. In this framework, countries with biological resources have the most capital and should be valued accordingly, with incentives for environmental regeneration to increase stored carbon stock. All activities that destroy biological resources or release fossil carbon are increasing carbon debt and should be penalized accordingly.

Note how differently this would rate industrialized and developing countries, with corresponding incentives. The challenge will be to link this carbon accounting system to general measures of “development” and well-being that are not just the financial system, to make the positive and negative incentives for a stable carbon market meaningful.

Similarly, one could imagine a biodiversity budget and accounting system, with natural ecosystems the capital, and every reduction in biodiversity increasing debt. Species extinctions would be bankruptcies and should be penalized accordingly.

A pollution budget system would consider a clean environment as capital to be maintained. All releases of pollution would increase debt. The environment has some capacity to clean itself of some pollutants, as a kind of wealth generation, but persistent pollutants are becoming an enormous debt burden on the future that is not presently accounted for.

A health budget would treat human health and productivity as capital, and all activities that damage health would increase debt. This is only presently measured as increasing financial costs of the health care system, not as a loss of human well-being. Tobacco use and narcotic drugs presently generate financial profits, because the human health impact is not integrated into the accounting system with rewards and punishments. Pollution also impacts the health budget, as do all the impacts of climate change on health.

Similarly, one could imagine an employment accounting system, with full employment, broadly defined as using the productive potential of every human being to render services to others, as the ideal capital stock. Unemployment reduces this capital and its capacity to generate further wealth, as does marginalizing part of the population because of gender, ethnicity, handicap or other biases.

The world has already gone a long way towards defining the necessary components of global common interest, for which accounting systems are needed, in the structures already created for elements of global governance in the United Nations system and other international agreements. The UNFCCC could evolve into a global central bank for carbon accounts. The CBD and other conservation conventions would be responsible for biodiversity accounting. UNEP and related conventions would become a global environment agency to manage the pollution accounts and other aspects of global biosphere accounting that would link to carbon

and biodiversity accounts for management of the overall health of the planet's natural systems and life support services. The WHO would be charged with ensuring the health capital of all humanity, and that global risks like the pandemic threatening that capital were addressed in the common interest. The ILO would have oversight of the human capacity to generate wealth and well-being through work and employment globally, ensuring that systems were in place everywhere to give everyone some useful skill and the means to use it to earn her or his living through some meaningful service. The FAO would be responsible for food accounting to ensure that the planet produced adequate food for everyone through sustainable methods and that it was properly distributed to ensure that no one went hungry.

The development organizations like UNDP and the World Bank could be reoriented to redress the present imbalance in global wealth and to devise mechanisms to guarantee a universal basic income and eliminate poverty. UNESCO and related institutions would manage the accounting of the global capital of science, culture and knowledge to ensure its increase, preservation and transmission through education. This list is not exhaustive, and there are certainly other dimensions of social and environmental health and well-being that should be included in the accounting system of an ever-advancing civilization. Obviously, such institutions would not manage everything, applying principles of national autonomy and subsidiarity to encompass the wonderful diversity and creativity of human institutions at multiple levels from global to local. They would be responsible for accounting for the global common interest in their area of concern, and of signalling and motivating the maintenance and increase in all these kinds of global capital and wealth.

Together, all these forms of capital would become the basis for a new global currency, no longer subject to manipulation in the national interest of states, and founded on standards of human and natural well-being. We already see attempts to create alternative cryptocurrencies, but not related to any human benefit, only speculation. The relative weighting of the forms of capital in the currency could be adjusted to

the priorities of the moment. Carbon accounts would clearly weigh more in our present climate emergency. A pandemic would raise the weighting and priority of the health accounts. These decisions would be the responsibility of institutions of global governance, in the same way that national central banks take decisions to ensure national economic well-being under the oversight of national governments. Seen in this light, the proposals here are not so utopian, and could easily evolve from what we have already built and available capacities. We need to abandon the present economic system and its exclusively financial accounting exemplified by GDP as soon as possible, by constructing a better system in its place.

### Organizing the transition

Another reflection on our present predicament concerns the problem of the necessary transition from our present materialistic system dominated by a financial economy to a more human-centred, just and sustainable future. This is the challenge even the best-intentioned leaders face today. Climate science says that we must turn the corner within a decade. But what do we do with those millions of people whose jobs and lives depend on the fossil fuel industry, the consumer society, the military-industrial complex, and all the other parts of the economy that depend on unsustainable activities or are not contributing to human betterment? The system is extremely powerful and fights to maintain itself. The transition will inevitably be catastrophic one way or another.

One simple example from Bonner's presentation at the IEF conference is the car industry. Increasing traffic reduces connectivity and social relationships in a neighbourhood, and an enormous part of urban space is now devoted to personal vehicles. Changing to electric cars will only postpone the transition to net-zero, since it will take 20 years to replace existing cars, and because it does nothing to reduce the space occupied, which is needed to improve the more sustainable alternatives of walking, biking and public transport. Yet with the recent pandemic-induced shortages, car makers have raised their prices and increased their profit margins. The incentives are all wrong, and too often defend the present



economic system and the infrastructure we have invested in to support it. Consumers resist change, but experiments show that, once they have experienced the alternative, they prefer not to go back.

Another example from a COP26 event was of projects allowing local village fishermen to collect data on their catch and their impact on the fishery resource, giving them the indicators

to directly manage their own fishery for sustainable use, a kind of crowd-sourced resource accounting for local use. This is very close to the way indigenous knowledge systems functioned over many generations. Empowering local people can naturally create a more efficient multidimensional accounting system at the local level.

## COP26 – a Brief Summary

Source: [COP26: Together for our planet](#)

### Compromise and contradictions

“The outcome of COP26 is a compromise. It reflects the interests, the contradictions and the state of political will in the world today. It is an important step, but it is not enough,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres said at the conclusion of the conference.

The Glasgow Climate Pact, adopted by almost 200 countries after two intense weeks of negotiations, will not radically alter the global landscape on climate change. It does provide important advances, however. For starters, it recognizes the global climate emergency, citing recent IPCC findings. It expresses “alarm and utmost concern that human activities have caused around 1.1°C of global warming to date and that impacts are already being felt in every region.” Parties also recognize that the impacts of climate change will be much lower at a 1.5°C rise compared with 2°C, and resolved to pursue efforts to keep to 1.5°C.

The Pact significantly ramps up the call for greater action and financing for adaptation. It urges developed countries to at least double their collective climate finance for adaptation in developing countries from 2019 levels by 2025, to ensure a balance between adaptation and mitigation. It calls on multilateral development banks, other financial institutions and the private sector to enhance finance mobilization to deliver the scale of resources needed to achieve climate plans.

COP26 also reached agreement on key provisions of the “Paris Agreement Rulebook”, a source of contentious negotiations over the last six years. The agreement covers issues around market mechanisms and transparency.

### Multilateralism in action

Hours of wrangling before the adoption of the COP26 decision required carefully addressing the views and interests of close to 200 parties. There were countries focused on limiting global warming to 1.5°C. There were developing countries intent on securing firm pledges on climate finance. And there were vulnerable countries demanding compensation for those suffering the impacts of climate change. Agreement in one area affects agreements in others – it’s a give and take.

### Grudging acceptance

The adoption of the Glasgow Climate Pact did not come easily. A much-contested clause to phase out coal and end fossil fuel subsidies was changed at the last moment, at the insistence of India. It offered a new formulation on the “phase-down” of coal. Other Parties accepted this, but grudgingly, at best. Switzerland called the new language “watered down” and said, “This will not bring us closer to 1.5, but it may make it more difficult to reach it.” The Marshall Islands and others said they would accept the change “with the greatest reluctance”.

That was not the only issue that did not please many parties. “By no means perfect,” said China. “Least-worst agreement,” said New Zealand. “We still have issues and deep concerns,” said Bolivia. “Text on the table makes us uncomfortable,” said Grenada. India felt that the agreement was unfairly calling for developing countries to take actions that could threaten their development. But almost every country affirmed that while the outcome was far from perfect, the alternative – walking away with no agreement – would be worse.

### **COP27 starts now**

While COP26 didn’t deliver the full range of ambition needed to address climate change, it did provide many of the building blocks for future action. “I know we can get there,” the Secretary-General said. “We are in the fight of our lives. Never give up. Never retreat. Keep pushing forward. I will be with you all the way. COP27 starts now.”

## **COP26 – Some Initial IEF Reflections**

COP26 has brought some progress, but not nearly enough to respond to the science or the urgency of climate change.

### **First, what was the progress?**

The speeches of the delegates and their final agreement reflected a heightened awareness of the urgency of rapid climate action and emphasized its ethical imperative. The language has become more inclusive and much stronger in terms of climate justice. Here is a brief excerpt from the Preamble of [the Agreement](#):

*“Also acknowledging* that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity,

*“Noting* the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including in forests, the ocean and the cryosphere, and the protection of biodiversity, recognized by some cultures as Mother Earth, and *also noting* the importance for some of the concept of ‘climate justice’, when taking action to address climate change,

*“Recognizing* the important role of indigenous peoples, local communities and civil society, including youth and children, in addressing and responding to climate change, and *highlighting* the urgent need for multilevel and cooperative action, ...”

Moreover, the urgency for stronger mitigation is much more clearly expressed than in the past, although without a binding mechanism, for example in these paragraphs:

*“Emphasizes* the urgent need for Parties to increase their efforts to collectively reduce emissions through accelerated action and implementation of domestic mitigation measures ...”

*“... requests* Parties to ... strengthen the 2030 targets in their nationally determined contributions as necessary to align with the Paris Agreement temperature goal by the end of 2022, taking into account different national circumstances.”

### **What are the problems with the agreement?**

The wording of “phasing out” coal was watered down at the last minute to “phasing down”.

The Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by the countries are not strong enough to keep the warming well below 2°C, and far from the important threshold of 1.5°C. If they are faithfully

implemented, the Earth would still become 2.4°C warmer by the end of the century compared to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. This demonstrates again that achieving universal consensus in a voluntary system founded on national sovereignty is insufficient to avoid catastrophic climate change.

Funding for the loss and damage experienced by vulnerable countries did not make it into the agreement, and the goal for financing adaptation, although doubled, is not sufficient.

### **Moving forward requires spiritual maturity**

The outcome demonstrates again that achieving universal consensus in a voluntary system founded on national sovereignty is insufficient to avoid a climate catastrophe. It also shows the fundamental need for humanity to progress spiritually, which means to become deeply conscious of our interconnectedness with each other and with nature, and that we can only survive as a species if the well-being of all of humankind is at the forefront of all our actions and decisions.

Baha'u'llah said at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution: *"O ye the elected representatives of the people in every land! Take ye counsel together, and let your concern be only for that which profiteth mankind and bettereth the condition thereof."*

## **Parliament of the World's Religions**

17-18 October 2021

The 2021 Parliament of the World's Religions was held online on 17-18 October 2021 with many spiritual leaders participating, as well as four plenary sessions, over 500 presentations and panels in breakout groups, and other possibilities for networking. At least 15 Baha'is made presentations, including IEF members Janet Cundall on nature and building community in Uganda, Dan Perell on the Climate Working Group of Religious Organizations at the UN, Ian Hamilton on a new development paradigm, and Arthur Dahl on "Coral Reefs as a Model for Humanity", which attracted 42 participants. His presentation can be viewed or downloaded [here as a pdf](#) (34 MB).

The visual statement from the Parliament, "The Turning Point", can be seen and signed [here](#).

## **Reporting to G20 Interfaith Forum on COP26**

IEF members are participating in the G20 Interfaith Forum working group on Religion and Environment. As part of this, we have contributed two viewpoints to the G20 Interfaith Forum website blog, building on the experience of the IEF 25th Annual Conference at COP26. The first was on the [Interfaith start to COP26](#). The second was on [Interfaith Action in COP26 Week One](#).

## **Announcement of IEF Conference by BahaiTeachings.org**

On 31 October, BahaiTeachings.org published an article on the theme of the IEF conference *Action on Climate Change: Multiple Paths to a Better Future*. The article announcing the IEF conference was translated into Spanish.

Link to English original: <https://bahaiteachings.org/action-on-climate-change-multiple-paths-to-a-better-future/>

Link to Spanish translation: [La acción sobre el cambio climático: múltiples caminos hacia un futuro mejor](#)

# Towards a Global Environment Agency Effective Governance for Shared Ecological Risks

by Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen and Arthur Dahl

Two IEF members, Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen and Arthur Dahl, are the authors of a new Climate Governance Commission Report, *Towards a Global Environment Agency: Effective Governance for Shared Ecological Risks* just published in November 2021 by the Global Challenges Foundation in Stockholm. The following is the Executive Summary.

The increasingly grave set of global environmental problems are interrelated and also entwined with economic and social issues in a complex, dynamic system. A brief analysis of the present challenging state of the planet from a systems perspective, including its root causes, shows: natural systems as complex global public goods; currently insufficient global governance founded on a too-narrow conception of national sovereignty where international laws cannot be enforced; and an unregulated and unbalanced global economy, plagued by widespread corruption and presumptions of wasteful or unlimited natural resource use.

Resource exploitation and environmental degradation have reached, if not exceeded, planetary boundaries and the current system of global governance is in no position to respond adequately.

A review of the many global environmental governance institutions, multilateral environmental agreements and reform proposals provides the basis for our proposals to move towards effective governance of the challenges facing the world today. This paper argues that a way to tackle the crises could be a system of polycentric governance with responsibilities

allocated across governance levels (from local to global) based on the principle of subsidiarity – with a global level institution – a Global Environment Agency (GEA) or equivalent – that has binding, supranational authority in certain essential areas.

## Functions

We identify five central functions that are suggested to be incorporated into a Global Environment Agency – or a similar effective governance process or institution at the global

level:

-- The knowledge provision function would enable the Global Environment Agency to generate knowledge through monitoring and research, collect and assess available knowledge for risk identification and assessment, disseminate knowledge with modern information technologies, make knowledge accessible to decision-makers, and provide evidence-based advice through appropriate science-policy interfaces.

-- The deliberative and legislative function corresponds to the role a parliament has at the national level to adopt necessary legislation, supported by deliberation on values and priorities among its members and in the public domain and media. Such deliberation should be inclusive and in the form of authentic dialogue responsive to the needs of all those affected, as well as effective through the introduction of some form of majority voting for the most essential issues.

-- The enabling and implementing function should be strong enough, in terms of mandate and financial resources, so that it can adequately support countries to strengthen the implementation of international environmental laws and orchestrate the work of the many other international institutions on cross-cutting issues.

-- The trust and justice building function deals with accountability, mediation and dispute settlement, with the ultimate purpose to create trust and build justice among states and with humanity at large. States need frameworks in which they can trust each other to collaborate and create stronger international laws and organisational functions.



-- The learning and reflexivity function is a cross cutting function, needed to address the complexity and uncertainty of the future. A viable global environmental governance system needs the ability to reflect on and reconfigure itself to improve its performance, learning from environmental changes and past experience, and adapting to the same.

### Establishing a Global Environment Agency

The creation of a Global Environment Agency could build on the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), but would involve neither simple reform within its present mandate nor upgrading it to a specialised agency. The role of such an Agency would be more than a simple catalytic or coordination function, but could rather establish a central authority gradually acquiring the mandate to take decisions based on majority voting for the tasks that lower levels of governance (e.g., at the national level) are not able or willing to perform, in line with the principle of subsidiarity. The Agency is proposed to have the authority to adopt the global rules, norms and values to ensure the safeguarding of the planetary environment for the common good, as well as the right to a clean, safe, productive human environment, and should be endowed with adequate supervision authority to ensure necessary rules are followed.

The GEA's position within the UN system will depend on whether there are wider UN reforms giving, for example, legislative authority to the General Assembly or binding judicial capacity to the International Court of Justice. In their absence, granting such authority more

narrowly to the GEA to act on the planetary environmental crises may be more politically acceptable. Within a reformed UN, the GEA could be one of several policy-setting and implementing agencies.

There can be both a long-term strategy and some short-term steps forward towards building this global institution. We make a set of specific, near-term proposals to strengthen global climate governance to, for example, adopt rules of procedure for the UNFCCC to enable majority decision-making; set up an independent global scientific advisory council to support country reflections on their ethical responsibility and highest possible ambition; and support actors to use existing accountability mechanisms (courts, parliaments, audit agencies) for states' climate obligations.

Such measures could serve as a first pilot strategy for breaking new global governance ground, due to the urgency of the climate challenge and the need for rapid action. It is an issue with widespread support from states and the broader public with a relatively strong legal foundation in the Paris Agreement. However, while climate change is perhaps the most pressing global environmental crisis, climate governance needs to overlap with many other problems and ultimately, they could be tackled together by a Global Environment Agency evolving out of UNEP.

The report is available on the [Global Challenges Foundation website](https://www.globalchallenges.org/).

## Faith Plans for people and planet launched

After months of discussions and planning, the Faith Plans for People and Planet programme was launched publicly on Monday October 4. FaithInvest CEO Martin Palmer and Dr Rajwant Singh were both interviewed by BBC World TV, which is broadcast to over 200 countries worldwide, reaching 450 million households. And there was huge engagement on Twitter and Facebook.

The Faith plan initiative is supported by nearly 30 of the world's key faith networks and leading global environmental organisations. The Faith Plans will be announced in June 2022.

For more information, go here: <https://www.faithplans.org/>

## Nature et spiritualité

The Bahá'í community of France has just posted online a short paper on Nature and Spirituality (in French), prepared by Arthur Dahl. It can be viewed at <https://www.bahai.fr/nature-et-spiritualite/>.

## Civic Responsibility and Community Engagement for Climate Resilience, Sustainable Environment, and Commonwealth

By Reba Carruth

On Sunday, November 7, 2021, a Town Hall-Public Forum was held on Civic Responsibility and Community Engagement for Climate Resilience, Sustainable Environment, and Commonwealth. The purpose of this virtual meeting in Montgomery County, Maryland, was to discuss the central role of civic responsibility and community engagement for climate resilience, sustainable environment, and commonwealth in conjunction with the local government, a public water utility company, and interfaith community cooperation. During the program, which was sponsored by the Baha'i Faith Community in Bethesda, Maryland, the spiritual principles of unity of peoples and of the earth as one country and all of humanity as global citizens were highlighted as a framework for climate resilience (mitigation and adaptation), for a sustainable environment, and for an equitable commonwealth in America. The speakers were Stan Edwards, Chief of Division for Energy, Climate, and Environmental Compliance in Montgomery County, Maryland's Department of Environmental Protection; Joseph F. Beach, Vice General Manager of Administration for WSSC Water; Jodi Rose, Executive Director, Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake; and Ian Hamilton, Advisor in Climate and Environment, for the US Baha'i Office of Public Affairs.

In the meeting, the central leadership roles of local/municipal governments, public water utility companies, and interfaith community cooperation were discussed as the first line of protection for society and the economy in the United States of America. The guest speakers agreed that protection of sustainable natural environments and commonwealth requires rapid climate mitigation and adaptation cooperation by American municipal, local, and state governments; public utility companies; and communities. To achieve the common good, the following measures and actions are required: clean renewable energy transition, energy efficiency, clean water, and forest protection through conservation and restoration of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. For both WSSC Water (the local public water utility company for Montgomery County and Prince George County, Maryland) and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, multi-jurisdictional and multi-state cooperation are required to protect and provide clean water for citizens, communities, businesses, and industry.

During the program, Stan Edwards discussed the extensive targeted climate plans of Montgomery County, Maryland. The yearly plans target climate mitigation to accelerate greenhouse gas reductions as well as to transition to clean renewable energy for electric cars and public transportation systems. The use of local government policies, of science based regulations, of Energy Star products for energy efficiency in homes and buildings, and of tree planting were also cited for protection of the natural environment with citizens, communities, and businesses all needing to do their part. For WSSC Water, climate mitigation and adaptation are now part of the business model for clean drinking water and sanitation. To achieve climate resilience and sustainable environments for commonwealth, and for the provision of clean drinking water to household and business customers, WSSC Water's operations and business model has been modified to include renewable energy, energy efficiency, water conservation, and reuse of solid water waste for biofuel production. Jodi Rose, Executive Director of Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake Bay, also stressed the importance of faith community mobilization for civic and community engagement in local and multi-state watershed restoration programs. The climate resilience and sustainable environment programs include native plant and tree planting, stream and waterway clean up, and planting of pollinator gardens to support

wildlife eco-systems across the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Ultimately, the common good and commonwealth of local communities, states, businesses, and industries benefit from the climate resilience and environmental protection of the Chesapeake Bay watershed – the largest in the United States.

The meeting closed with Ian Hamilton's presentation on the need for more civic and community engagement and corporate social responsibility for climate resilience, sustainable environment, and commonwealth in America. In his role as the Climate and Environment Advisor for the U.S. Baha'i Office of Public Affairs, Ian cited the growing discourses and discussions of business and industry roles in climate resilience, sustainable environment, and more equitable commonwealth. In his presentation, the growing trend in local, state, regional, and national government consensus and pressure for stronger business and industry cooperation and accountability for climate mitigation and adaptation was stressed. Dr. Reba Carruth, the program moderator and chair ended the meeting with a call for stronger focus on the Baha'i principles of unity, international cooperation, and multi-level civic responsibilities for global citizenship and commonwealth by Americans - in the context of the Spiritual Destiny of America Framework.

## **UN recognizes the human right to a healthy environment**

*On Friday 8 October, the UN Human Rights Council adopted two landmark resolutions at its 48th session. The first resolution finally recognized the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, rooted in the 1972 Stockholm Declaration adopted almost five decades ago. The second established the mandate of Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change. Here is the United Nations report:*

GENEVA (8 October 2021) – The Human Rights Council's recognition today of the human right to a healthy environment is a historic breakthrough that has the potential to improve the life of everyone on the planet, says David Boyd, UN special rapporteur on human rights and environment.

"The world's future looks a little bit brighter today," Boyd said. "The United Nations, in an historical development, has for the first time recognised that everyone, everywhere, has a human right to live in a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

"This has life-changing potential in a world where the global environmental crisis causes more than nine million premature deaths every year," he said. "It will spark constitutional changes and stronger environmental laws, with positive implications for air quality, clean water, healthy soil, sustainably produced food, green energy, climate change, biodiversity and the use of toxic substances."

Boyd thanked five Council members – Costa Rica, the Maldives, Morocco, Slovenia and Switzerland – for bringing the resolution to adoption after civil society and communities, including environmental, human rights, youth, women's and indigenous peoples, had fought for it for 30 years.

Recognition of this right had also been endorsed by UN Secretary General António Guterres, High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet and 15 UN agencies, and was supported by young activists, business groups and more than 1,300 civil society organisations from around the world.

"This resolution is especially important for all of the environmental human rights defenders working, often at great personal risk, to safeguard the land, air, water and ecosystems that we all depend on," Boyd said. "It is also vital for the people and communities who suffer disproportionate impacts of environmental degradation, including women, children, indigenous and other potentially vulnerable and marginalized populations."

Boyd urged governments to incorporate the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment in their constitutions and legislation. He urged leaders who will meet at the UN Climate

Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, UK starting at the end of the month, and at the UN conference on biodiversity (COP 15) starting in Kunming, China, next week, to put human rights at the centre of their actions.

“In a world that too often emphasizes the differences between people, the right to a healthy environment reflects a fundamental truth that should unite us all,” Boyd said.

“Everyone’s health and quality of life depends on clean air, safe water, sustainably produced food, a stable climate, and healthy biodiversity and ecosystems. We are all extraordinarily fortunate to live on this miraculous planet, and we must use the right to a healthy environment to ensure governments, businesses and people do a better job of taking care of the home that we all share.”

Source: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27633&LangID=E>

## UN Biodiversity Conference begins

11-15 October 2021



## Convention on Biological Diversity

On 11 October, world leaders gathered in Kunming, China, and virtually for the first phase of the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP-15) to agree on a new set of goals for nature over the next decade. The second phase will be held in April-May 2022 due to the pandemic.

Nature and biodiversity loss are accelerating the triple planetary crisis we face, along with climate change and pollution and waste. United Nations Environment Programme’s (UNEP’s) *Making Peace with Nature* report shows that humans now impact three-quarters of the land and two-thirds of the oceans. One million of the world’s estimated 8 million species of plants and animals are threatened with extinction, and many of the ecosystem services essential for human wellbeing are eroding.

The Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, explained the post-2020 framework under discussion at COP-15 and what can be done to help make peace with nature.

What needs to happen first and foremost at the UN Biodiversity Conference is the adoption of a robust, ambitious and all-inclusive Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework - a 10-year strategy to engage the entire world in the task of protecting nature and building a future of life in harmony with nature. This framework is meant to guide whole-of-society and whole-of-government work to protect and restore biodiversity in an ambitious and effective way.

This means effectively protecting more of the world’s land and oceans. It means ensuring sustainable consumption and production. It means ensuring that all actors are engaged in protecting nature.

Part One of COP-15 opened in Kunming, China, on 11 October 2021. Due to the pandemic situation, this first phase of the conference was held mostly virtually, with limited onsite participation in



Kunming. Adoption of the framework is expected to take place at Part Two of the conference in April/May of 2022.

Part one saw the Government of China assume its role as president of the Conference of the Parties (COP). The High-Level Segment on 12 and 13 October saw the adoption of the Kunming Declaration. This important political declaration will serve as a tool to create political momentum for phase two of COP-15 and assist the negotiation, adoption and implementation of an effective post-2020 framework.

There was also a Leaders Summit, where the UN Secretary-General and Heads of State and Government from all the UN regions announced their support and commitments to the biodiversity agenda, joined by over 100 Ministers of Environment.

The Official draft of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, released in July, proposes four goals to be achieved by 2050, so that humanity will be “living in harmony with nature,” a vision adopted by CBD’s 196 member Parties in 2010. The framework has 21 associated “action targets” for 2030, which help achieve the main goals: reducing threats to biodiversity, meeting people’s needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing, and tools and solutions for implementation and mainstreaming.

These 21 targets call for, among other things:

- At least 30 per cent of land and sea areas globally are conserved through effective, equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas
- 50 per cent greater reduction in the rate of introduction of invasive alien species, and controls or eradication of such species to eliminate or reduce their impacts
- Reducing nutrients lost to the environment by at least half, and pesticides by at least two thirds, and eliminating the discharge of plastic waste
- Nature-based contributions to global climate change mitigation efforts of least 10 GtCO<sub>2</sub>e per year, and that all mitigation and adaptation efforts avoid negative impacts on biodiversity
- Redirecting, repurposing, reforming or eliminating incentives harmful for biodiversity in a just and equitable way, reducing them by at least US\$500 billion per year
- A US\$200 billion increase in international financial flows from all sources

The framework is still under negotiation. Meetings are planned in January in Geneva to finalise the text before it goes to Part Two of COP-15 for adoption. It is important to stress that for the post-2020 framework to be successful, we need everyone committed, which the framework embodies through its whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach. This requires buy-in not only from environment ministers but across government departments.

The framework needs to be all-inclusive, beyond the usual suspects. Indigenous peoples and local communities, businesses, and the financial sector play a key part in transforming to a nature-positive future.

There are many signs that the world is focused on protecting, restoring and developing a sustainable relationship with nature. A month ago, representatives of three political coalitions – the *Leaders Pledge for Nature*, *High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People* and *Global Ocean Alliance* - endorsed by 116 countries joined forces at the CBD High-Level Segment pre-COP hosted by the Government of Colombia. They reaffirmed the urgency of reversing biodiversity loss by 2030 to address the interdependent crises of biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation and climate change and achieve sustainable development.

It is now for governments to ensure that the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework negotiations produce an outcome that matches this ambition. The government of China is working hard to make this happen. Hosting the UN Biodiversity Conference under challenging commitments is a clear demonstration of the Government of China’s global leadership on biodiversity.

Source: based on [What You Need to Know about the UN Biodiversity Conference](#)