



'FAITHS FOR FORESTS' DECLARATION, CAMPAIGN AND GLOBAL ACTION AGENDA

Context and rationale

The environmental, climate, and economic case for protecting tropical forests is clear, and a growing coalition of governments, NGOs, indigenous peoples and businesses is working to end tropical deforestation. But more action is urgently needed. One perspective that has largely been missing from the discussion is the strong moral and ethical imperative for ending deforestation. Religious leaders are uniquely positioned to inspire action for the protection of tropical rainforests. Their influence and inspirational power could provide the turning point that the world's forests urgently need.

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative was founded to nurture a worldwide movement for the protection of tropical forests, grounded in the values, ethics and moral guidance of faith communities. It is an international, multi-faith alliance that provides a platform for religious leaders to work hand-in-hand with indigenous peoples, governments, civil society and businesses on actions that protect rainforests and safeguard the indigenous peoples that serve as their guardians.

An overview of the contribution

We are proposing a global declaration, campaign and action agenda called 'Faiths for Forests' which would be endorsed at the Religions for Peace World Assembly (August 2019) by over 1,000 of the world's most senior and influential religious leaders, officially launched as a contribution to the UN Climate Action Summit, and culminate at a high-level 'Faiths for Forests' summit in conjunction with the UN Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15) in China.

The campaign and action agenda will include the following elements:

1. A high-level interfaith declaration – endorsed by the world's most prominent spiritual leaders and faith-based organizations – calling for the protection of tropical forests as a critical part of the climate solution;
2. A major interfaith commitment event at the Vatican, which will include the participation of His Holiness Pope Francis) and mobilize commitments from major Catholic, Evangelical, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish and Hindu spiritual leaders;
3. A 'Faiths for Forests' digital communications campaign around forest protection that will prompt faith-based actions on education, mobilization and advocacy on the forests agenda and be built around an online interfaith petition that will have a target of several million signatures;
4. National 'Faiths for Forests' conferences in Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia and Peru that will deepen cross-sectoral collaboration action for forest protection in the five countries that collectively contain more than 70% of the world's remaining rainforests
5. A global 'Faiths for Forests' summit that will mark the culmination of the global campaign and bring religious leaders, indigenous peoples, NGOs and scientists from around the world together for joint planning on how to expand the movement to other major rainforest countries

The declaration, campaign and global action agenda could be officially announced in before or at the UN Climate Action Summit by a high-level representative of the Vatican (e.g. Cardinal Turkson, Head of the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development); the Executive Director of UN Environment, Inger Andersen; and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Vicky Tauli-Corpuz.

How the contribution leverages living natural systems as a solution to avert climate change?

Forests are a natural climate solution that is affordable, scalable and available right now. They can deliver 30% of the climate solution needed by 2030 but receive less than 3% of all climate funding. Forests are the most promising nature-based solution to climate change and need to feature more prominently and centrally in national and global climate and development plans. 'Faiths for Forests' will unite the highest profile and most influential religious leaders and faith communities in the world around a powerful program of work to raise the profile of forest protection as a priority solution in averting climate change.

How might the contribution support both climate, mitigation and adaptation as well as other important co-benefits and social, economic and environmental outcomes in coming years.

Agriculture, forestry and other land uses account for about 12 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions each year – only the energy sector emits more. There is no viable solution to climate change without improving the way we use forests. They are a critical piece of the puzzle, along with efforts in the energy, industry and transport sectors. Forests are also crucial to the achievement of the SDGs, including but also beyond SDG 15 – SDG 1 and SDG 2 (as important sources of income, food security and livelihoods and by making massive but largely underappreciated contributions to agricultural production), SDG 3 (as the primary source of medicine for many of the world's poorest), SDG 6 (by absorbing, cleaning and recycling freshwater), SDG 11 by providing a protective green infrastructure, and, of course, SDG 13 by reducing emissions from tropical deforestation and forest degradation.

Which countries and organisations are involved in the contribution?

IRI currently works in five rainforest countries (Brazil, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia and Peru) as well as at the global level, with an aim of expanding to all major rainforest countries around the world. The initiative is implemented by UN Environment, with support from Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI), and in partnership with Religions for Peace, GreenFaith, World Council of Churches, Parliament of the World's Religions, Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology and Rainforest Foundation Norway. The 'Faiths for Forests' declaration, campaign and action agenda would be brought as a commitment to the UN Climate Action Summit not just by these partners, but also endorsed by over 1,000 senior religious leaders and many of the world's largest and most influential faith-based organizations.

How have stakeholders (for example local communities, youth and indigenous peoples, where applicable) been consulted in developing the contribution?

'Faiths for Forests' will build on the extensive mobilization and consultation IRI has undertaken in major rainforest countries to connect religious leaders to the coalition of partners already working on the protection, restoration and sustainable management of forests, including indigenous peoples, NGOs, scientists, businesses and governments. The campaign has been created and will be rolled out with the full participation of indigenous peoples and forest communities, globally and in priority countries. The campaign is multi-faith and will work across religious lines, and the national 'Faiths for Forests' conferences and the global 'Faiths for Forests' summit will be executed as multi-stakeholder and cross-sector efforts.

Where can the contribution be put into action?

'Faiths for Forests' is a global campaign that will find national and grassroots expression. IRI will continue to nurture faith-based programs in Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia and Peru, which will link global 'Faiths for Forests' commitments with concrete action at the national, sub-national and local levels. The intention of the campaign is to scale-out IRI and faith-based action to end tropical deforestation to other major rainforest countries.

How the contribution will be delivered? How will different stakeholders be engaged in its implementation? What are the potential transformational impacts?

With 84% of the world's population identifying as followers of an organized faith, the mobilization of religious leaders as outspoken advocates for tropical forests and the climate has the potential to be truly transformational. Religious leaders have an undeniable moral authority but also political and economic influence. 'Faiths for Forests' is being designed to enlist the leadership, influence and mobilizing power of religious leaders, faith-based organizations and faith communities as part of the fight to protect the planet's forests. Both IRI and the campaign are placing an emphasis on collaboration, coordination and shared purpose across religious leaders, the science community and indigenous peoples. The intention is to bring new voices and needed momentum to the cause of protecting tropical forests. With this campaign, the world's religions will engage in the forests space with a unified, global, interfaith voice for the first time. Their voices carry strong moral weight and bring with them extensive networks of followers ready to amplify and activate their message.

Is this initiative contributing to other Climate Action Summit workstreams (industry transition; energy transition; climate finance and carbon pricing; infrastructure, cities and local action; resilience and adaptation; youth and citizen mobilization; social and political drivers; mitigation strategy)?

'Faiths for Forests' is contributing to several of the workstreams, most notably youth and citizen mobilization, social and political drivers and mitigation strategy.

How does this contribution build upon examples of experience to date? How does the contribution link with different ongoing initiatives?

The contribution will build upon the work already underway by IRI to build faith-based movements for forests and climate action in Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia and Peru. These country programs ensure there is a mechanism in place for the commitments made during the 'Faiths for Forests' campaign to be activated on the ground. The campaign will also link with the mobilizing power of the world's leading interfaith organizations, including Religions for Peace and the World Council of Churches.

What are the mechanisms for funding (with specific emphasis on potential for partnerships)?

'Faiths for Forests' will be undertaken with initial funding from the Government of Norway and the partners to IRI, but with high potential for other partnerships.

What are the means of stewardship, metrics for monitoring?

The commitments by different religions around education, mobilization and advocacy made at the major interfaith commitment event at the Vatican will be documented and tracked. The 'Faiths for Forests' digital communications campaign will center around an online petition as well as a menu of options for how people of faith can take action in their lives to join the movement, which will also have metrics to track engagement from individuals, organizations and religious institutions.

What is the communication strategy?

Official announcement of 'Faiths for Forests' declaration, campaign and global action agenda can take place within the official program of the UN Climate Action Summit or, alternatively, could be announced at a separate launch event immediately before the summit and publicized as one of the UN Climate Action Summit deliverables, taking advantage of – and contributing to - the widespread media coverage the summit will garner. The cross-sectoral focus of the 'Faiths for Forests' campaign offers the compelling story of a new and unusual partnership between religious leaders, scientists and indigenous peoples. The entire 'Faiths for Forests' effort, and in particular the digital communications campaign, will be supported by leading communications and social marketing firms, as well as the communications networks of the world's leading interfaith organizations.

What are the details of proponents (indicating the degree of commitment among the countries and organizations that are named).

Space is being created at the Religions for Peace World Assembly to bring 1,000 of the world's most influential religious leaders together to individually and institutionally endorse the 'Faiths for Forests' declaration, campaign and global action agenda. Plans are being developed with the Vatican for the high-level interfaith commitment event, and IRI country programs have been launched in Colombia and Peru, with work underway to launch the programs in Brazil, DRC and Indonesia before the summit.