

Stop plastic pollution and restore our world

Faith communities call on UNEA 5.2 to agree to negotiate an ambitious, legally binding Treaty to tackle plastic pollution

‘Our faiths and spiritualities teach a duty to care for the human family and for the environment in which we live. We are deeply interdependent with each other and with the natural world. We are not limitless masters of our planet and its resources. Multiple crises facing humanity are ultimately linked to a crisis of values, ethics and spirituality. We are caretakers of the natural environment with the vocation to care for it for future generations and the moral obligation to cooperate in the healing of the planet.’¹

The world is facing a triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. While the latter can take many forms, plastic pollution has been of particular concern as a pervasive and escalating phenomenon. Plastic pollution is devastating our earth and threatening our livelihoods; polluting our marine and freshwater ecosystems, soil health and air quality. It is also creating a growing public health emergency for people in poverty as it blocks waterways and drains causing flooding, attracts disease spreading insects and vermin and is openly burnt releasing toxic fumes. Microplastics are largely present around us and enter our body through the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat², posing a serious health risk. Soil contamination with microplastics can potentially reduce crop yield and compromise food security³. Beyond being a facet of the pollution crisis, plastic is also exacerbating the other two planetary crises, as some 9-14 million tons of plastic waste enter aquatic ecosystems every year and cause lethal and sub-lethal effects in several species⁴. Annual greenhouse gas emissions from the plastic lifecycle contribute significantly to climate change with more than 850 million tons of CO_{2-eq} globally⁵.

And yet, production of virgin plastic is on an upward curve and unless urgent action is taken by governments, faith leaders, and civil society at large, the problem will become unimaginably worse. Only 14 percent of plastics are currently recycled annually⁶ and the volume of plastic waste dumped into aquatic ecosystems is projected to nearly triple by 2040 without meaningful action⁴.

¹ Joint appeal signed by faith leaders during the meeting “Faith and Science: Towards COP26” on October 4th, 2021. <https://unfccc.int/news/world-religious-leaders-and-scientists-make-pre-cop26-appeal>

² WHO – World Health Organization (2019), *Microplastics in drinking-water*. Geneva. <http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/326499/9789241516198-eng.pdf>

³ FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2021), *Assessment of agricultural plastics and their sustainability: a call for action*. Rome. <http://doi.org/10.4060/cb7856en>

⁴ UNEP – United Nations Environment Program (2021), *From Pollution to Solution – A global assessment of marine litter and plastic pollution*. Nairobi. <http://www.unep.org/resources/pollution-solution-global-assessment-marine-litter-and-plastic-pollution>

⁵ CIEL – Center for International Environmental Law (2019), *Plastic & Climate: The Hidden Costs of a Plastic Planet*. <http://www.ciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Plastic-and-Climate-FINAL-2019.pdf>

⁶ World Economic Forum, Ellen MacArthur Foundation and McKinsey & Company (2016), *The new plastics economy – Rethinking the future of plastics*, <http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications>

Access to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a human right⁷ and a moral obligation and must be respected by everyone. We urgently need to transform our economies from being predicated on wasteful, disposable models to restorative patterns of consumption and production.

Across all faith and spiritual traditions, we believe that humanity has a special moral and ethical responsibility as stewards of the Earth to ensure the flourishing of all life on earth and to seek justice particularly for those most vulnerable.

We call on member states to urgently take all necessary steps to reach a legally binding global agreement to address plastic pollution including all necessary measures along the full life-cycle of plastic as soon as possible, with negotiations completed by the 6th UN Environment Assembly. Recognising that as faith communities we are aware of the devastation caused by the plastic pollution crisis and therefore ask governments to act and agree to negotiate and adopt an ambitious new agreement, with specific and measurable timelines towards legally-binding implementation mechanisms to create a safe and just circular economy which:

- substantially reduces the use and production of virgin plastic by eliminating unnecessary plastic use and moving towards refillable and reusable delivery systems
- ends the open burning and dumping of plastic pollution through scaling up solid waste management and implementing extended producer responsibility schemes
- creates decent work through incentivising safe systems for recycling plastic waste and integrating the informal waste sector fairly into waste management and collection services recognising and protecting their human rights
- implements financial and technical assistance to least developed countries.

We call on all stakeholders including governments, industry/business, NGOs, civil society and local communities to adopt a multistakeholder and unified approach to achieve the ambitious, innovative commitments and actions to tackle the pollution and waste crises and call for an international treaty to combat plastic pollution.

As faith based organizations and leaders we commit to:

- Hold governments accountable for the unequal effects that plastic has on marginalized and vulnerable societies through inadequate legislations,
- Advocate for policies towards plastic reduction / circular economy
- Be advocates for the marginalized and vulnerable members in our communities,
- Use our platforms to raise awareness and encourage environmental action within our communities and in collaboration with faith communities at all levels,
- Reduce/ban the use of single-use plastics and promote recycling within our homes and faith communities.

[Endorse this Statement](#)

⁷ Resolution 48/13 A/HRC/48/L.23/Rev.1 of 5 October 2021. <https://undocs.org/a/hrc/48/l.23/rev.1>

Endorsed by

A Rocha Ghana

Africa Global Development For Positive Change Initiative (ADlAfrica)

Anglican Communion Environmental Network

Archbishop Julio Murray, Anglican Primate of Central America

Centre for Ecumenical Studies, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture

David Otieno, Priest, Anglican Church of Kenya

Dennis Nthenge, Green Anglican Champion, Anglican Church of Kenya

Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Vatican

Eco Brixs, Uganda

Ellen Wintermuth, Episcopal Church, Florida, USA

Empower India

Hissah Alsaffar, Saudi Green Building Forum

Hope Cathedral Norway

Human Environmental Association for Development-HEAD, Lebanon

Iglesia Anglicana de México

Interfaith Oceans, USA

Jos Green Centre, Nigeria

Malawi Creation Care Network

Mary Frances Sebastian, Office Director, Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)

Franciscans Africa, Kenya

Mwangaza Light, Kenya

New Life Association

Nigel Harris, Chief Executive, Tearfund

Norwegian Interfaith Climate Network

Repair the Sea / *Tikkun HaYam*

Rozalia Mwashaga, Green Anglican Champion, Anglican Church

Santuário Cristo Redentor, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Spark Church, USA

UNEP MGCY, Environment and Faith Steering Committee

UNEP Faith for Earth

University of Tehran, Dept. of Sustainable Agriculture and Environment

Zambia Youth Environmental Network (ZYEN)